3 Project classification

Environmental processes are broadly similar across all projects irrespective of their nature and scale. The sensitivity and scale of the project will however determine the desired or required level of detail for the assessment and management of the project.

Projects affecting sensitive areas or involving high risk activities will require a far greater level of detail of environmental assessment and management than a low risk project. Therefore, in order to streamline and simplify the assessment process, this manual describes the process for performing a range of simple to complex environmental project work to suit the project scale and required level of detail.

3.1 Project classification

There are two major project classifications relevant to this manual:

- Overall (OnQ) Project Classification – assigned to the overall project (Refer Section 3.1.1)
- Environmental Project Classification – assigned to the specific environmental component project (Refer Section 3.1.2)

3.1.1 Overall (OnQ) project classification

The OnQ Project Management framework categorises departmental projects as:

Type I Projects — Complex/ high risk transport infrastructure projects, requiring high levels of investigation, rigor and control.

Type II Projects — Straightforward/ medium risk transport infrastructure projects, requiring moderate levels of investigation, rigor and control.

Type III Projects — Simple/ low risk transport infrastructure projects, requiring low levels of investigation, rigor and control.

The classification of projects as Type I, Type II or Type III is currently based on the OnQ website under templates, Project Types.

A project classification occurs based on information current at the Project Proposal, and the project classification is listed in the department's QTRIP.

This project classification occurs during the Concept phase through preparation of the Project Proposal. The project classification decision is agreed by the Project Sponsor, Project Customer, and Project Manager.

3.1.2 Environmental project classification

This manual establishes a separate classification for the environmental component project. The environmental project classification divides environmental project work into three streams reflecting the scale of required environmental response:

High Level

Medium Level

Low Level

Figure 1.7 depicts the work management stages and environmental processes required for each of these divisions.

The classification of an environmental component project into High, Medium and Low Level categories must always be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Environmental project classification occurs in the Scoping process of the project cycle and is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.6. The project classification is based upon the findings of the Environmental Risk Assessment of the Environmental Scoping Report (ESR) template, located in the departmental EMS.

During the project life the environmental project classification level may need to be adjusted with the emergence or development of project information (for example, project scope changes).

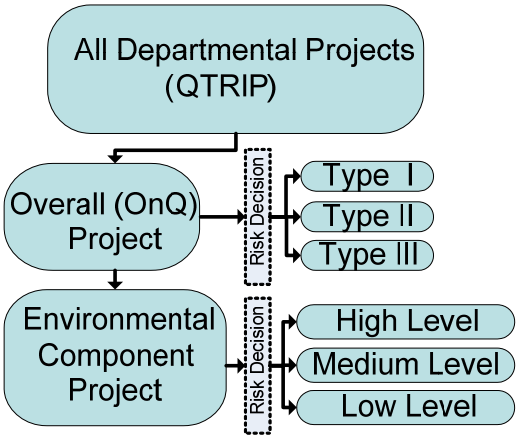
For the majority of projects, the OnQ classification of a Type category is likely to correspond to the required level of environmental assessment. This is particularly the case when environmental advice has been sought in the project Link Study or Concept Phase and inputted to the Project Proposal.

Whilst environmental considerations are amongst the risk considerations which define the overall (OnQ) project classification, instances may occur where the determined overall project risk does not correspond with the environmental risk (for example, a Type 3 category project may occur in an area of environmental significance and require a detailed environmental response).

In instances where the project classification determines a varied level of environmental assessment is appropriate, this manual provides a process that can accommodate a level of assessment commensurate to the projects' environmental requirements.

If it is absolutely clear that a project presents a low risk of causing environmental harm, then a Low Level assessment is appropriate. Alternatively, the project will undergo a minimum assessment of a Medium Level project.

Figure 3.1.2 - Project classification



3.1.3 Nil or negligible environmental risk

In some instances an environmental project classification is not required for a project. This occurs where the CM(E) can use the scope of work to determine there is nil likelihood or negligible environmental risk associated with the project (Section 3.2.1). In this instance the CM(E) will decide if any environmental assessment and management is required.

The CM(E) must record in writing and on file a decision that the project may proceed without any further environmental assessment or management input.

3.2 Risk

The extent of risk involved in a project determines the level of environmental assessment required for a project.

Project risks will vary due to:

- duration (cost)
- variability in type
- scale
- sensitivity of receiving environment
- complexity
- number and type of activities.

The risk of causing environmental harm tends to increase with the increasing complexity, sensitivity and scale of a project.

3.2.1 Risk management

The department has adopted the AS/NZS 4360:2000 standard on risk management as the basis of its department wide Risk Management Methodology.

The department has developed risk management guidelines to support project level risk management. Instruction to staff in risk management is provided in the Project Manager's Risk Management Guidelines.

The assessment of risk to determine the environmental project classification is discussed in Section 5.2.5 of this manual.

3.3 High level project classification

The process for carrying out environmental assessment is fundamentally the same for High Level and Medium Level projects, however the required detail of each type of assessment necessitates that distinct processes are defined for both High Level and Medium Level projects.

High Level projects are typically characterised by:

- being works on new infrastructure
- having longer lead time
- having numerous options
- having multi-faceted elements
- having sensitive or complex receiving environment
- having numerous or complex legislative requirements
- having detailed strategic (Link Study) evaluation.

The department typically categorises High Level projects as "Major Infrastructure Projects" and outsources the environmental assessment component rather than performing them 'in-house'. There is a greater level of detail required for High Level projects, as there is typically input from multiple disciplines requiring comprehensive risk management. Therefore the nature of these works typically requires a greater level of autonomy and flexibility of assessment than Medium Level projects.

Therefore to prepare a work brief for an external expert service provider (refer 2.2.2), a defined process and a minimum content proforma for High Level projects is typically more effective than providing a fixed and rigid template for internal application. This enables consistent key outputs to be established whilst enabling flexibility in content.

In some instances, risk to the project delivery may be reduced by performing the environmental assessment component 'in-house' and outsourcing factor specific technical components as required.

The process for High Level environmental assessment and management of projects is described in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of this manual.

3.3.1 Significant project environmental impact assessment

The State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 (SDPWOA) provides the Coordinator-General with the power to declare a project to be a significant project for which an environment impact statement is required. [1]

If the department engages in a significant project as declared by the Coordinator General, the project automatically receives High Level project classification.

This manual does not seek to replicate or summarise guidance on the process of the Coordinator General declaring a significant project.

3.4 Medium level project classification

A Medium Level project does not require as detailed an assessment as a High Level project due to reduced risk of environmental impacts and / or legislative requirements, however a comprehensive assessment is required at this level.

Medium Level projects are typically characterised by:

- being works on existing infrastructure
- having disturbed or uncomplicated receiving environment
- having few or uncomplicated legislative requirements
- being generally managed and / or performed in-house by department staff
- having some project tasks outsourced where necessary.

Medium level projects often:

- have variable lead time
- have varied response detail requirements
- may not have strategic (Link Study) level evaluation.

The process for Medium Level environmental assessment and management of projects is described in Chapters 5,6,7 and 8 of this manual.

3.5 Low level project classification (including emergency response works)

For the purposes of environmental assessment and management, this manual defines Low Level projects as projects with minimal environmental risks and impacts. Thus low level projects have minimal legislative and procedural requirements allowing the environmental assessment and management process to be streamlined and fast-tracked.

Low level projects typically include Type III projects, minor works[2], and programmed maintenance.

[1] (Section 3.3.1 Information source: Department of Local Government and Planning website)

The Low Level project assessment methodology is also typically used for programs of (emergency) infrastructure repair and maintenance carried out under programs such as the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangement (NDRRA). This is discussed in more detail in Section 8.5.4.

It is important to note that using the Low Level project assessment method for programs of (emergency) infrastructure works is due to the necessity to produce rapid and streamlined environmental assessment and management work procedures, and does not necessarily denote the nature or risk associated with the works.

The principle behind a Low Level environmental assessment is that environmental factors are identified and managed through a streamlined administrative process.

It is important to recognise that a Low Level environmental assessment is not simply a short form version of environmental assessment.

Determining when to use a Low Level environmental assessment largely depends on the extent of risk in the project. Project risk is discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2 of this manual.

Low Level projects are typically characterised by:

- being works on existing infrastructure
- having very little lead time
- requiring rapid response
- having low level detail requirements
- being unlikely to have strategic level (Link Study) evaluation (unless project resultant from program of works)
- having some project tasks outsourced where necessary.

If it is absolutely clear that a project presents a low risk of causing environmental harm, then a Low Level assessment is appropriate. Alternatively, the project will undergo a minimum assessment of Medium Level project.

Whilst the Standard Contract Provisions Roads, Volume 3, Minor Works Contract System (MW) also uses a project cost estimate as a guide for assessing when to use a Minor Works contract, this is not the only consideration appropriate for environmental assessment.

Instead of using project cost to determine a project classification level, this manual provides the classification decision mechanisms listed in Section 3.1.2.

The Standard Contract Provisions Roads, Volume 3, Minor Works Contract System (MW) provides some typical examples of low risk project types and low risk works. These examples are, however, not necessarily applicable to environmental scenarios, and this manual adopts the below list of low risk projects or works where a Low Level environmental assessment may be applied.

Examples of low risk projects or works include, but are not limited to:

- Minor intersection works including traffic signal installations
- Installation of noise amelioration devices
- Installation of guardrail
- Roadside landscaping

[2] Minor works are defined in the departmental manual Standard Contract Provisions Roads, Volume 3, Minor Works Contract System (MW).

- Pavement reseal (excluding where stockpiling required on site)
- Sealing of existing road shoulder
- Supply and lay hot mix asphalt overlay
- Bitumen spraying