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Mr Jonathan Coppel
Presiding Commissioner
Major Project Development Assessment Processes
Productivity Commission
major.projects@pc.gov.au

Dear Mr Coppel

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Issues Paper on the Productivity Commission's study on Major Project Development Assessment Processes. I apologise for the delay in forwarding this submission to you.

Major project development assessment and approval processes have been the subject of a number of national and state reviews over recent years. Given the significant contribution that major projects make to the economy, it is important to ensure that regulatory arrangements facilitate efficient and effective assessment and approval processes for them.

In Tasmania, a comprehensive suite of legislation is available to deal with development proposals under the Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS). In addition to the individual approval processes within this suite of legislation, certain major developments are dealt with under the RMPS through a more integrated assessment and approvals process. Further to our meeting with officials from the Productivity Commission regarding the Tasmanian system, please find at Attachment 1 some background information on the RMPS and integrated assessment processes that have been established in Tasmania, as well as current reforms and initiatives, aimed at improving processes relevant to the assessment and approval of major projects.

In Tasmania, the most appropriate process for assessing and approving specific major project developments – whether that is an integrated process or separate applications under the relevant legislation – is determined on a case-by-case basis. In recent years, a number of major projects have been undertaken in Tasmania, which have used State-based integrated assessment processes and/or legislation under the RMPS, and demonstrate how these processes work in practice. Details of these projects are provided in Attachment 2.

Efficient and effective processes for assessing and approving major project developments is critical to facilitating good development that achieves important social, economic and environmental outcomes for the community. Based on Tasmanian experience, a number of common themes for successful assessment processes are evident.

An integrated and balanced approach to assessments at both the level of State Government, and at the level of interaction between State and Commonwealth Government approvals, is important, particularly in ensuring that any conditions attached to a project approval are commensurate to the proposed activity, and balance social, economic and environmental impacts.

Having the right skills and capabilities in government agencies is an important factor in facilitating effective and efficient processes. Drawing on staff with a good understanding of and expertise in the local context can help ensure that any conditions set are commensurate to the proposed development. At the same time, ensuring that agencies have a good understanding of the relevant regulatory regimes can ensure that proponents can be assisted to navigate the system in an efficient way.

Major projects are inherently complex, and the time and approach taken to assess them can have significant implications for successful progression of the project to approval and implementation. Flexible assessment processes can ensure that projects can be accommodated within existing processes. Ministerial 'call in' powers, for example, can assist in providing a 'circuit breaker' where complex development proposals of State or Commonwealth interest are experiencing significant delays. Flexibility in land use planning permits and other legislative approvals, particularly the tenure of planning approvals, can also help to ensure that the complexity of major projects and the long lead in time often required to progress from the feasibility to the design to the construction stage is taken into account.

Providing open and transparent processes for decision making can help support an integrated and balanced approach to assessments that is flexible, and can build the skills and capability within and external to government to navigate the system. This can assist in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of decision making, and also protect the integrity of the process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into the study on Major Project Development Assessment Processes. If you have any further queries regarding this submission, please contact Ms Zoë Laskey, Policy Analyst, Policy Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet. Ms Laskey can be contacted by email at zoe.laskey@dpac.tas.gov.au or by telephone on (03) 6232 7181.

Yours sincerely



Rhys Edwards
Secretary

Attachments

- 1 Background Information on Tasmanian Major Development Assessment and Approvals Processes
- 2 Major Projects in Tasmania