State Planning Policy for Great Barrier Reef Catchment Wetlands

A Guide to Development Assessment Triggers

Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009

Amendments to the Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009 (SPR) have established assessable development triggers in relation to development involving high impact earthworks in Great Barrier Reef wetland protection areas (GBR WPA). The amendments have also established a concurrence role for the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) in relation to these triggers.

Definition of high impact earthworks

High impact earthworks are defined as operational works that divert water to or from a wetland by changing the form of the land or building a structure. Examples include draining or channelling, levees or dams, filling or levelling, and constructing other infrastructure such as a road, culvert or causeway.

High impact earthworks refer to operational work that involves changing the form of land, or placing a structure on land, in a way that diverts water to or from a wetland. High impact earthworks can include drainage or channeling, levees or dams, filling or levelling.

These activities and restricting flows, such as dams or other barriers, are the most threatening activities to the integrity of wetlands in Queensland.

The impacts of earthworks

High impact earthworks in or around a wetland can severely damage that wetland in several ways, often irrevocably.

High impact earthworks damage wetlands and the habitats around them by:

- reducing water flow and/or removing water altogether
- lowering water levels or running water through a wetland too fast
- directly and indirectly damaging habitat.

What type of development is captured by the trigger?

Development that is captured by the trigger includes:

- operational work that is considered high impact earthworks in a GBR WPA, other than operational work for a domestic housing activity
- reconfiguring a lot if:
  a) any part of the land is situated in a GBR WPA
  b) the reconfiguration results in more than six lots, or any lot created is less than five hectares
  c) the reconfiguration involves operational work made assessable under schedule 3, part 1, table 4, item 10 of the SPR.
• material change of use, other than for a domestic housing activity, if:
  a) any part of the land is situated in a GBR WPA
  b) the material change of use involves operational work made assessable under schedule 3, part 1, table 4, item 10 of the SPR.

What kind of development is excluded?
Operational work defined as high impact earthworks excludes:

a) necessary infrastructure maintenance such as airports, buildings, dams, fences, helipads, roads, stockyards, vehicular tracks, watering facilities and constructed drains other than contour banks, other than to source construction material

b) works carried out for a forest practice

c) excavating not more than 100 m³ of material or using not more than 100 m³ of material as fill

d) excavating not more than 1000 m³ of material or using not more than 1000 m³ of material as fill, if the excavating is more than 200 m from the wetland in a GBR WPA

e) excavating to establish underground infrastructure for public use

f) carried out to restore or conserve the ecological processes or hydrological functions of a GBR WPA

g) carried out completely or partly in a declared fish habitat area or a wild river area, if the work is assessable development under schedule 3, part 1

h) the constructing or raising of waterway barrier works and self-assessable development under schedule 3, part 2

i) carried out under:
  • the Electricity Act 1994, section 101 or 112A
  • the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990, section 53, 68 or 69
  • a geothermal exploration permit under the Geothermal Exploration Act 2004.

The requirements will not place prohibitions on proposed operational works, but inappropriate development proposals that could adversely affect important wetland environmental values may be refused.

The Temporary State Planning Policy 1/11: Protecting Wetlands of High Ecological Significance in Great Barrier Reef Catchments provides direction on how the wetland environmental values are to be protected in accordance with DERM’s new concurrence role.

Find out if property is affected
If planning on undertaking any of the above-mentioned development captured by the assessable development triggers, and to find out if a specific wetland is within a wetland protection area, visit DERM’s website: <www.derm.qld.gov.au/property/mapping/mapsonline.html>. Enter the lot on plan and a PDF map will be returned via email.

More information
For more information about the development assessment trigger, refer to the Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009.

More information about DERM’s concurrence role can be found on DERM website, or by phoning 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

More information about Queensland’s wetlands can be found at <www.derm.qld.gov.au/wetlandinfo>.