

Public Comment Policy

VERSION 1.1

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ISSUED BY:



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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OFFICE



EAO

Environmental
Assessment Office

Version Control History

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Version 1.0	2020-03-16	Original Version	Kevin Jardine
Version 1.1	2022-08-10	Removing facsimile as option for submitting public comments	Elenore Arend

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PURPOSE

This document provides the Environmental Assessment Office's (EAO) policy on the consideration and posting of public comments pursuant to sections 13 (4), 19 (5), 23, 27 (2)(a) and 28 (2)(b) of the *Environmental Assessment Act (2018)*. The information contained in this policy pertains to the formal public comment periods as described in the Act and does not limit the EAO from considering input received through other public engagement methods. This policy is to be read and interpreted in conjunction with the Act.

BACKGROUND

Public engagement during an environmental assessment (EA) contributes to the collection and sharing of information related to the potential environmental, economic, social, cultural and health effects of a proposed project. Public engagement is intended to ensure that opportunities exist for the public to understand the proposed project and to have their comments appropriately considered. Public comment periods are an important and mandatory tool the EAO uses to gather public input on potential impacts of a proposed project during an EA.

For each project, there are four phases in which the EAO must conduct a public comment period for a minimum of 30 days. Public comment periods will be held upon the publishing of:

- The Initial Project Description;
- The proposed Process Order;
- The draft Application; and
- Drafts of the Assessment Report and EA Certificate, with certificate conditions and project description.

The EAO may conduct additional public comment periods and carry out other public engagement activities in relation to a project. The Chief Environmental Assessment Officer may also order that a public comment period need not be carried out if it is determined that there is insufficient public interest in the assessment of a reviewable project. The decision and reason for not proceeding with a public comment period will be clearly defined and accessible to the public.

The EAO maintains a publicly available on-line application that displays all projects and important documentation; this is known as the EAO Project Information & Collaboration website ([EPIC](#)). Information on the EA process, documentation required for a proposed project, and public comments on a proposed project can be accessed through EPIC.

Project proponents receive all comments posted to EPIC and are required to respond. This is done in the form of a tracking table or other format as determined by the project lead. The EAO will duly consider the public comments posted to EPIC and the proponent's responses during the EA for the proposed project. In the Early engagement phase, the EAO will issue a Summary of Engagement outlining the feedback received.

DEFINITION

A public comment is any written, legible communication sent to the EAO through authorized channels (i.e. online through EPIC or by posted letter) regarding a proposed project undergoing an EA during the identified public comment period.

Alternative forms of feedback may be accepted on a case-by-case basis as determined by the Project Lead, in collaboration with the Manager of Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement. The EAO is committed to ensuring equitable and accessible opportunities to comment are made available where required.

PUBLIC COMMENT & MODERATION GUIDELINES

The EAO seeks submissions that identify an issue or concern or otherwise contribute to a better understanding of the potential environmental, economic, social, cultural and health effects of the proposed project. The EAO does not seek comments that only adopt a position for or against the project.

Transparency (and by extension, data integrity) is critical to maintaining public trust, which is why EPIC has been designed in such a way that the EAO has no ability to modify or otherwise alter submissions provided by commenters. As such, commenting guidelines for the public and a robust comment moderation policy are essential to maximize the number of meaningful comments received during an engagement.

The EAO will accept public comments and will post them to EPIC, provided they meet the following guidelines:

- **Suitable language** - Submissions must be written in language that is appropriate for publication. Using language that is profane, or which is defamatory or abusive to specific individuals, is not considered suitable. Similarly, comments that contain racism or discrimination are not accepted.
- **Quoting third parties** – Facts or quotes attributed to third parties must be publicly known or easily verified. Quotes should be limited to excerpts from work products or professional opinions.
- **References and links** – References and links must be publicly available and will be verified. The content of links and references must meet the comment moderation policy.
- **Petitions** - Submissions that are received in the form of a petition must show that all signatories have consented to have their personal information disclosed. In the absence of consent to such disclosure from each signatory, only the text of the petition will be posted to EPIC. If the petition is submitted by an organization, the consent language should meet the requirements of the [Personal Information Protection Act](#).
- **Non-written comments and submissions** - The EAO requires those wishing to submit a comment to do so in writing. This will ensure that comments accurately reflect the individual's perspective, so it can be recorded, tracked and considered.
 - Verbal comments submitted via telephone or voicemail will not be accepted; however, exceptions may be made for accessibility reasons on a case-by-case basis, in which case the submission can be transcribed by EAO staff and uploaded to EPIC on behalf of the commenter. A consent disclosure equal to that required by commenters submitting written comments must be provided by the verbal commenter in their submission.
 - Verbal comments at public open houses or other in person events are not captured or tracked by the EAO as a public comment. Engagement activities conducted at an in-person event that is specifically designed to capture verbal feedback is permitted, and the results of that activity should be captured separately from comments on EPIC.
- **Provide commenter name and location** -The EAO requires that people or organizations who submit a comment provide their name and location of residence. However, if the person or organization making the comment does not wish to have their personal information posted with their comment, there is a box they may check in the online form to have their comment attributed to 'Anonymous'.
- **No other personal information** - Comments must not contain personal or otherwise identifying information of the person submitting the content or others in the body text of the submission (e.g. home/work address, email address, telephone number). Similarly, information that could be easily interpreted to identify an individual ("I live in the only house on the south side of Smith Creek in Townsville") are also not accepted. In such a case, the comment must not be published. If the comment contains relevant information that is helpful to the assessment - resources permitting - the commenter may be contacted and encouraged to resubmit their comment without the personal information present.

The EAO posts the comments received that meet the above guidelines to EPIC within seven days of receipt.

SUBMITTING PUBLIC COMMENTS

The EAO accepts public comments through the following methods:

1. By online form on EPIC: www.projects.eao.gov.bc.ca; and
2. By mail

The preferred method of receiving feedback from the public during a formal public comment period is electronically, through EPIC. Written feedback received by posted letter are also accepted for accessibility reasons. Email feedback is not accepted. This is to ensure:

- Feedback is captured for the relevant engagement (as multiple engagements may occur at the same time);
- Consent is given for all comments to be part of the public record;
- The privacy of those submitting feedback is maintained; and
- Feedback is collected and analysed efficiently, so changes can be quickly and accurately implemented.

TIMING

Public comments must be received within the time limits established for the formal public comment period. The EAO may post additional comments directly to EPIC if the late comment is delayed as a result of technical challenges or other extenuating circumstances relating to the delivery of the comment.

REMOVING A PUBLIC COMMENT AT THE REQUEST OF THE AUTHOR

At the request of the author, the EAO will remove the entire comment from EPIC. To maintain record integrity, the EAO is not able to edit or otherwise remove specific portions of a comment, including personal information – the entire comment must be deleted.

EPIC COLLECTION NOTICE

Before submitting, the following notice is provided stating the rationale for why the EAOs collect personal information, under which authority, and who the public may contact for more information:

How it Works

All accepted comments submitted to the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) will be published online within seven days of receipt. Comments are not accepted if - in EAO's view - they are profane, abusive or do not relate to the matter being consulted upon as stated in our Public Comment Policy.

EAO forwards all accepted comments to the project proponent so they can be considered during the project's environmental assessment.

EAO requires that you provide your city/town when making a comment. In order to have your name displayed with your comment, you must select the 'Make my Name visible to public' option. All hyperlinks in comments will be converted to plain text. All attachments must be no larger than 10MB and must be a .png, .pdf, .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlst, .ppt, .rtf, .pptx, .txt or .bmp file.

Collection Notice

Your personal information is collected by the Environmental Assessment Agency for the purpose of commenting on the [Project Name] project under the authority of s.26(c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. In submitting your comment, you consent to your comment being published online and shared with the proponent. This consent is valid from this date forward and may be revoked by contacting the EAO representative below. Should you have any questions about this collection please contact:

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