

Environmental Assessment Office

Public Comment Policy

Purpose

This document contains the Environmental Assessment Office's (EAO) policy on the consideration and posting of public comments.

Background

Public consultation during an environmental assessment (EA) contributes to the collection and sharing of information related to the potential environmental, economic, social, heritage and health effects of a proposed project. Consultation is intended to ensure that opportunities exist for the public to understand the proposed project and to have their comments appropriately considered.

The EAO only solicits public comments during formal public comment periods. Each project has a public comment period in the Pre-Application and Application Review stages of the EA.

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

Project proponents receive all comments posted to EPIC for their response, 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.

Definition

A public comment is any written, legible communication (i.e. letter, online form, or fax) sent to EAO regarding a proposed project undergoing an EA. The EAO does not accept videos.

Public Comment Guidelines

The EAO seeks submissions that identify an issue or concern or otherwise contribute to a better understanding of the potential environmental, economic, social, heritage and health effects of the proposed project, rather than merely adopting a position for or against the project.

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 one or more individuals or organizations, is not considered suitable.
- Quoting third parties – Facts or quotes attributed to third parties must be publicly known or easily verified.
- 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.

- Non-written comments and submissions - Verbal comments (such as those made via telephone or at public open houses) are not captured or tracked by EAO as a public comment. The EAO requires those wishing to submit a comment to do so in writing. This will ensure that comment accurately reflects the individual's perspective so it can be recorded, tracked and considered.
- Withholding Personal Information - 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, they must inform EAO at the time of submission. In such an event, the comment will be posted using the phrase "personal information withheld".

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

As EAO cannot guarantee hyperlinks in public comments will not break during the time that the project information is publicly available on EPIC, hyperlinks will be removed.

Submitting Public Comments

In March 2010, EAO implemented an online public comment form to provide a more efficient method of tracking, accepting and viewing comments. The EAO accepts public comments through three methods:

1. By online form on the EAO website: www.eao.gov.bc.ca;
2. By mail; and,
3. By fax.

The EAO will only accept comments through online form, letter or fax, and no longer accepts comments by email.

The EAO requires that each person give permission to post their personal information online. To have your name appear with your comment, you must provide permission in the online form or state your permission in your letter or fax.

Timing

Public comments must be received within the time limits established for the formal public comment period. The EAO does not post public comments received outside public comment periods.

Removing a public comment at the request of the author

At the request of the submitter, EAO will remove either their personal information or the entire comment from EPIC.