

Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No:	449
Submitted by:	IAP2 Australasia
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

20 May 2025

State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
Queensland Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Australasia is the peak body for the stakeholder and community engagement sector, representing almost 16,000 engagement professionals across Australia and New Zealand. IAP2 is the leading provider of training and professional development in community and stakeholder engagement and provides professional recognition in the engagement profession through a post-nominals framework.

If this Bill passes, it is IAP2 members who will be implementing the provisions involving community and stakeholder engagement. IAP2 members are skilled professionals who welcome the opportunity to work with communities in implementing new projects, policies and programs.

IAP2 overall welcomes the focus on early and authentic engagement for projects. Involving engagement professionals in strategic project planning will ensure that key engagement considerations are addressed at the earliest stages of project planning. A skilled and experienced engagement practitioner will be able to identify the ways in which community input can best inform projects.

A clear and common understanding of the meaning of engagement is critical to the success of any engagement process. IAP2 defines engagement as:

an intentional process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders, and communities to shape the decisions or actions of members of the community, stakeholders, or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity, or outcome.

Every engagement must be an 'intentional process' to be effective, with a clear purpose for the engagement. IAP2 would caution against mandating engagement as a 'box-ticking' exercise,

as engagement without a clear purpose or without a decision to shape can work to reduce trust in organisations and institutions.

Recommendation: adopt the above definition of engagement in the social impact assessment guidelines.

IAP2 has some concerns about the proposed amended social impact assessment guidelines. The draft guidelines for the social impact assessment focus on engagement as risk management, and, while the Bill requires social impact assessment to be undertaken at an early project stage, the requirements in the draft guidelines do not seem to harness the benefits that early engagement can bring by having communities shape projects from the earliest stages together with expert technical advisers.

Treating stakeholder engagement as a positive process (adopting the above definition involving an intentional process and informing decisions) would see engagement being considered a valuable project opportunity, rather than as a risk to be managed. Communities hold valuable information that can guide project design and delivery, and intentional engagement would treat community as a useful input into a project, not merely a source of complaint. Key project considerations, including about timing of delivery and location of works, can be addressed early by relying on community knowledge.

The Minister's stated aim of 'early and authentic engagement' can be achieved by amending the draft guidelines to require project proponents demonstrate genuine community input, including for example:

- How stakeholder engagement helped to shape decisions
- Which problems or opportunities were put to stakeholders
- When were stakeholders invited to provide feedback
- How did the project proponent demonstrate the impact of stakeholder feedback, including which decisions it affected

Recommendation: Amend the social impact assessment guidelines to require the SIA to frame stakeholder engagement as a positive exercise to assist project design and delivery.

Given IAP2's status as the independent peak body and the leading provider of training and professional development in community and stakeholder engagement we strongly recommend the committee adopt IAP2's frameworks in the draft social impact assessment guidelines and other guidance material for community and stakeholder engagement.

IAP2's Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement is recognised as the international standard for public participation practice. It includes an evaluation framework to assess compliance with the Standard and provides a measure of engagement quality. IAP2 also offers the Spectrum, which is a tool for decision-makers that clarifies the levels of influence that communities and stakeholders have in a decision.

Departing from IAP2's Quality Assurance Standard or developing separate engagement frameworks risks creating standards that may be below the accepted industry best practice framework, or introduces confusion by including different requirements from those widely used in the industry. Relying on the existing framework that is accepted industry best practice provides engagement practitioners with the best opportunity for success, as they are able to utilise the tools and knowledge they regularly use in their engagement practice.

The IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard and associated evaluation framework provide the ability for engagement to meet various quality standards. If the Committee would like to ensure the

quality standard for engagement in certain projects meets a higher floor than other engagement methods, it is possible to do so with reference to IAP2's Quality Assurance Standard.

Recommendation: adopt the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement as the evaluation standard for engagement required by the social impact assessment.

IAP2 looks forward to working with the Queensland Government in the implementation of enhanced community and stakeholder engagement for all projects. There is considerable knowledge within communities and treating engagement as an opportunity can deliver greater trust in projects and social license for developments.

We would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee at a public hearing to outline where we believe these processes can be improved to deliver early and authentic engagement.

Regards



Marion Short
Chief Executive Officer
IAP2 Australasia

About IAP2 Australasia

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is the leading public participation organisation globally which seeks to promote and improve the practice of community and stakeholder engagement.

As an international leader in public participation, IAP2 has developed tools that are widely used and acknowledged. These include:

- IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation - for use in the development and implementation of public participation processes.
- IAP2 Spectrum - which assists with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum is widely used and is quoted in most community engagement manuals.
- **Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement** - which is recognised as the international standard for public participation practice.

IAP2 Australasia has over 16,000 members throughout Australia and New Zealand – and is committed to championing engagement that improves environmental, social and governance outcomes. Our vision is for “Authentic engagement, everyday”.

Policy Position:

As the peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector, IAP2 Australasia believes that engagement, when done well, improves social, environmental, and economic outcomes and increases trust in the democratic process.

We advocate for all communities to be authentically engaged in decisions that affect them, in alignment with the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement.

The Evidence for Authentic Engagement

There is significant evidence to support the need for increased authentic engagement to reduce risk and speed up the delivery of projects to support Australia's economic recovery. These include:

- Community opposition has contributed to the delay, cancellation or mothballing of more than \$30B of infrastructure projects in the last decade.
Source: The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019
- Better functioning cities and towns could deliver a \$29B increase in GDP in the long term.
Source: The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019
- 80% of Australians indicate it is important that government considers the views of the community when planning or investing in major infrastructure.
Source: The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019
- 82% of businesses said, “communicating and engaging with stakeholders openly was seen as the most critical factor for building trust”.
Source: Creating value and balancing stakeholder needs (KPMG and AICD survey – 2019)
- Securing a social license to operate reduces the No. 1 ranked stakeholder risk.
Source: Top 10 Business Risks and Opportunities – 2020 (EY)