What is SARA?

The Queensland Government is establishing a single State Assessment Referral Agency, known as SARA, which aims to reduce duplication and red tape across agencies. The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning will be the lead agency for SARA which aims to provide for a simpler, fairer development assessment system. SARA is part of a range of planning reforms being introduced by the Queensland Government through amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 to provide clarity to local governments and the development and construction industries.

Some of the many benefits of the new system include:

- a single agency lodgement point for development applications
- a single coordination point
- a final decision maker to ensure no 'unreasonable' requirements are imposed on applicants.

The outcome is a more efficient system that cuts costs and time for the applicant.

When will it start?

SARA will be launched on 1 July 2013 as part of the government's second six-month action plan.

How will it work?

The department, through its regional centres, will take on the single point of lodgement, coordination and decision making on behalf of all state agencies (not including government-owned corporations such as Energex, Ergon ports or airports). It will seek technical advice from each agency that had a former jurisdiction in the particular matter. However, for the purposes of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, these agencies will not be formal advice agencies.

There will be only one state agency decision notice issued from the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning. However, applicants and their representatives may still deal with the officers in other agencies as required.

Where do I go to lodge my DA or where can I get support?

The department has regional centres throughout the state. SARA is designed to be delivered regionally. A development application related to a particular region will be assessed by the relevant departmental regional office with delegation to regional staff. There is an escalation process where the Brisbane SARA central team can assist in resolving complex or conflicting matters by drawing on further technical expertise or coordination between agencies can become involved in resolution of certain issues.

A list of the department's regional offices can be found on the department's website.

Can I do this online?

Currently, the vast majority of referrals to state agencies are paper-based so we understand there will need to be a transition to utilising the online tools to prepare, submit and monitor your development application. Applicants and consultants should be prepared to start doing this electronically from 1 July 2013 when a new online system will accept electronic lodgement of applications for where SARA is the assessment manager and/or referral agency.
Who else will be involved in the creation of the new SARA model?

All relevant agencies are regarded as key stakeholders and have been included in the design of the new process.

Local governments and the Local Government Association of Queensland are also key to the effectiveness of the new model and will be consulted. Professional planners through the peak bodies will be important to the final design of the system. An ongoing consultative model ensures that feedback from industry is taken into account.

Which agency will manage conflicting advice that arises among the technical agencies?

The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning is the lead agency and it is the intention that conflicts will be resolved at the departmental regional office. However, a senior level forum with representatives from all relevant agencies will be established to resolve more complex issues. Under the new arrangements, the chief executive administering the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (currently the Director-General of DSDIP) will be the assessment manager or referral agency for all development applications where a state agency is currently the assessment manager or referral agency.

What will the review of triggers mean to SARA and will there be further reviews of the triggers?

All referrals, where a state agency currently has jurisdiction, will be rolled in under SARA on day one of operation. The exception to this is for technical building matters (e.g. fire safety systems, private health facilities etc under Schedule 7, Table 1 of the *Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009*).

There have been a number of trigger improvements made by state agencies in August 2012 and March 2013.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is undertaking further reform work later this year on vegetation management triggers and water triggers.

There has been some minor work undertaken on triggers for SARA prior to its launch, and this will continue into the future as part of the government’s reform program.

Can the local government as assessment manager talk with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning about responses?

Yes, the department is the point of contact for all applications with the state as referral agency.

Will eDA continue to be used?

Yes, existing systems and processes will still be used for the councils and agencies that wish to use them.

Will hard copy forms still be available?

Yes, although the department encourages all users to apply via the new online tool as it will be significantly quicker and simpler to use.

Will there be any changes to the fees?

Initially, the existing fee structures will remain with no anticipated increases beyond the normal CPI increase. A review of all fees will be undertaken in late 2013–14 with recommendations to be considered following consultation.

SARA will provide electronic payment options as part of the transition to an online environment.
What form will the assessment matters prescribed under regulation take?

The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning is preparing a document called the *State Development Assessment Provisions* (SDAP) comprising material that agencies currently use to assess development applications.

This will be aligned with the themes of the State Planning Policy (housing and liveable communities, economic growth, environment and heritage etc), consisting of approximately 19 modules with a series of state codes in each module. These state codes are based upon a standard code structure with performance outcomes and acceptable outcomes. These state codes will be used by the department and state technical agencies to assess development applications.

Will the department offer pre-lodgement advice to applicants covering all state referral issues, and will it commit to standing behind any pre-lodgement advice given?

Pre-lodgement meetings will be encouraged and the state will commit to the advice given at those meetings, with minutes issued to reflect those discussions (provided that the development application lodge is consistent with the proposal discussed at the pre-lodgement meeting).

In what form will the referral response from the chief executive be issued? Will it be set out under relevant trigger headings?

A referral agency response will be provided in a letter format, issued as an attachment to an email to the applicant. Where relevant, the responses will be formatted under trigger headings.

If an applicant is dissatisfied with conditions or a refusal, who will be the respondent for the appeal?

The respondent will be the chief executive of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 which is the Director-General of the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, as ‘owner’ of the conditions.

Contact us

For more information about planning reform and for a list of regional offices visit the department’s website [www.dsdip.qld.gov.au](http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au). If you have any questions email sara@dsdip.qld.gov.au.