The Territory Government today announced a raft of additional measures to ensure its environmental approval process is comprehensive and transparent.

Chief Minister Adam Giles said the Government had listened to community concerns about various forms of development, such as onshore gas exploration and production, and had responded with a range of new measures.

“Development is needed in the Territory to create jobs and opportunities for all Territorians. But at the same time, Territorians want their lifestyle and environment protected. These new measures achieve that balance,” Mr Giles said.

The changes result from a major review of the Territory’s environmental assessment and approvals process conducted by Dr Allan Hawke AC.

This review by Dr Hawke follows his comprehensive inquiry and report into hydraulic fracturing, which found the environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing can be managed effectively by the creation of a robust regulatory regime.

Mr Giles said the Government had listened to Dr Hawke’s first report and asked for further advice on how such a regime could be achieved in the Territory.

“The Government is committed to ensuring the future development of our onshore oil and gas industry occurs safely and responsibly. That’s why the Government asked Dr Hawke for this additional review,” he said.

The Review into Environmental Assessment and Approvals Process raised three possible options and recommended the Government implement Option Three now, potentially as a stepping stone to moving to a single environmental approval at a later time.

The Government’s adoption of Option Three will create a regulatory setting that provides for:

- Certainty for major project proponents by providing a ‘single front door’ through the system
- Testing and accrediting project legislation and agency procedures by the Minister for the Environment in consultation with the NT EPA

- Establishment of the Minister for the Environment as the decision-maker for projects not subject to approval by an accredited approval process

- Transparent public reporting by proponents on compliance with environmental conditions

- Strengthened audit and compliance role for the NT EPA

- The Minister for the Environment to give proponents and the community certainty by publishing policies and procedures

- Clarity in the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and the NT EPA in the system

Mr Giles said implementing this recommended regime will deliver the robust environmental approval and assessment process the community wants.

"Implementing this strengthened type of environmental protection will require significant changes to the current approach," he said.

"That’s why we will involve stakeholders and the community to work with Government on how best to develop and implement these reforms."

The Territory Government will embark on a major consultation exercise, starting this week until September next year. This consultation will involve stakeholder briefings and workshops around the Territory.

Minister for the Environment, Gary Higgins said in adopting the regulatory regime recommended by Dr Hawke, the community can have greater confidence that environmental assessments are highly rigorous, with a clear role for everyone in the system including the NT’s independent Environmental Protection Agency.

"For instance, the criteria for what constitutes a significant environmental impact, and when an application requires an environmental assessment from the EPA, will be more clearly defined."

"This gives the community more confidence and proponents more clarity on what level of environmental assessment an application will require,” Mr Higgins said.

The recommended regime also enhances and strengthens the EPA’s environmental monitoring functions, giving it a greater role in ensuring developments are adhering to agreed environmental standards.

Mr Giles encouraged stakeholders and the community to be part of the process to deliver the new more robust regime.

“With community involvement we can ensure we have a system that provides clarity, confidence and comprehensive scrutiny of future development."
“This allows us to proceed with development, knowing it’s has been rigorously assessed and will be properly monitored, while preserving our lifestyle and environment that we all treasure,” Mr Giles said.

Note to Editors:
Reform options contained in the *Review into Environmental Assessment and Approvals*:

Option 1: retain the current system with incremental improvements; or

Option 2: create a single environmental approval process with the Environment Minister as decision-maker; or

Option 3: strengthen the sectoral ‘one-stop-shop’ model, supported by enhanced transparency and independent performance monitoring.

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