

## South Africa set to modernise environmental governance with major EIA reforms

The government will launch a national stakeholder consultation process on proposed reforms to South Africa's environmental impact assessment (EIA) system. According to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), the consultation process will run from 11 March to 24 April 2026, and will include engagement sessions in each province.



Image credit: [Anna Shvets](#) on Pexels

The proposed reforms aim to strengthen the ongoing sector-led initiative to improve the efficacy of the EIA process, allowing flexibility to apply other instruments, modernise and strengthen the country's environmental governance framework towards sustainable development.

"Environmental impact assessments remain a cornerstone of South Africa's environmental management system.

"They give effect to section 24 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being, while promoting sustainable development.

"However, the current EIA process has tended to operate independently of complementary environmental instruments, constraining their ability to demonstrate integrated sustainability outcomes.

"Listed activities automatically determine the type of assessment required, with limited flexibility to respond to the specific environmental risk or sensitivity of a proposed development.

"The environmental sector is now proposing a more flexible, risk-based screening approach," said the department.



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## Broader adoption

This system would evaluate the nature, scale and environmental context of a proposed development to determine the appropriate level of assessment required.

Projects with significant environmental risks, particularly those located in sensitive environments, would still undergo full EIAs that include specialist studies and public participation processes.

Meanwhile, projects expected to have low or insignificant environmental impacts may follow a shorter assessment route or exit the process earlier where appropriate.

Environmental authorities would apply defined criteria and risk-based tools to ensure that decisions remain evidence-based, transparent and accountable.

The department said existing environmental authorisation requirements, public participation provisions and appeal rights would remain unchanged.

The proposed reforms encourage the broader adoption of environmental management instruments such as norms, standards and environmental management frameworks, where these tools are better suited to managing specific environmental risks.

This supports a more integrated and strategic environmental management system and is aligned with strengthening sustainability outcomes while improving regulatory efficiency.

"By focusing regulatory scrutiny where it matters most, the environmental sector aims to build a smarter, more responsive EIA system that supports both environmental protection and responsible development," said the department.



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The discussion document and details on how to submit comments are available on the [Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment website](#).

Stakeholders and members of the public have been encouraged to participate in the consultation process

The department will launch the national stakeholder consultation working in collaboration with the Department of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, provincial Environmental Affairs departments and other relevant sector stakeholders.

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