

Optimisation of EIA process to enhance efficiency and relevant transitional arrangements will end in mid-2025

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) announced today (November 11) that amendments to the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (EIAO) and the Technical Memorandum on Environmental Impact Assessment Process (Technical Memorandum) have been effective since their implementation on June 30, 2023. The related transitional arrangements will be terminated on June 30, 2025.

The spokesperson for the EPD said that the amendments have streamlined the entire environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, including simplifying the technical assessment requirements, facilitating direct application for environmental permits, establishing a Central Environmental Database (CED), and updating the list of designated projects. These optimisation measures have effectively enhanced the efficiency of EIAO operations. Since the implementation of the amendments, the time required for overall EIA projects has been reduced by half to approximately 15 to 24 months.

Effectiveness of optimisation measures

Under the optimised process, the EPD introduced the CED. Since its launch, the database has received positive feedback from stakeholders including government departments, consulting firms and academia. In the past year, about 80 EIA and planning projects have utilised the online tools of the database for research purposes. Moreover, there are around 2 000 public visitors per month browsing the environmental data on the database. The EPD will continue to update the CED and enhance it by extracting relevant ecological data from the approved EIA reports to help project proponents plan their projects and improve the standard of EIA studies.

For those designated projects with minor environmental impacts and proven mitigation measures, project proponents can directly apply for an environmental permit by submitting a project brief and effective mitigation measures with the facilitation arrangement.

For more complex and time-consuming projects, under the optimised EIA process, project proponents can utilise various innovative technical assessment measures in the CED, including using baseline air quality data and online noise assessment models, and conducting standardised ecological surveys in advance, which can shorten the overall EIA time by approximately 20 to 30 months.

Termination of transitional arrangements

For projects with EIA studies agreed before June 30, 2023, the EPD provided transitional arrangements, allowing the use of existing technical assessment methods. Given that the amendments have been in effect for over a year and the project proponents and the industry have generally adapted to the new requirements, the transitional arrangements will end by June 30, 2025.

The spokesperson said, "Project proponents adopting transitional arrangements must submit an application for approval of the EIA report to the Director of Environmental Protection on or before June 30, 2025. Applications submitted after this date must demonstrate that the technical assessment complies with the amended Technical Memorandum. Project proponents may also choose to apply for a fresh EIA study brief."