Fact sheet – Guidance for councils

Working with the Development Coordination Authority

October 2026

The Development Coordination Authority

The Development Coordination Authority (DCA) is a planning entity within the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI).

DCA streamlines NSW Government involvement in the planning system. For local development applications (DAs), DCA acts as a one-stop shop, managing referrals and agency interactions through a single front door. For all other planning pathways, including local plan-making, State significant projects and State significant rezonings, DCA provides technical advice in areas where we have in-house expertise and coordinates input from relevant agencies where required, offering a consistent and efficient mechanism for government engagement.

Overview of the DCA framework

- Integrated development, concurrence and consultation requirements for local DAs and modifications are collectively known as 'referrals'.
- The referral provisions for DAs and modifications have been consolidated and revised and are set out in Chapter 4 of the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021*.
- The referral provisions are supported by the State Referral Provisions (SRPs), a guidance document that sets out how referrals are considered under the framework.
- DCA brings together technical expertise and specialist functions that were previously distributed across multiple NSW Government agencies.
- DCA has technical expertise in transport, biodiversity, heritage, flooding and evacuation, bushfire, water management, environmental protection, natural resources (mining), fisheries, agriculture, and planning and building for natural disasters and fire safety.
- DCA provides a single, coordinated response to all statutory referrals relevant to NSW Government DA and modification applications, where it holds the relevant referral functions and in house technical expertise (subject to applicable savings and transitional provisions). For other

planning pathways, DCA provides technical advice in areas where we have in-house expertise. Where DCA requires technical agency input, it will contact agencies for advice.

- DCA is an agency engagement option in the NSW Planning Portal and Major Projects Portal.
- A *referral check* process has been established, where DCA reviews nominated NSW Government DA and modification referrals before a formal referral is made.
- The DA and modification referral submission period for DCA and other referral authorities has been harmonised to 28 calendar days.
- A revised referral fee structure for applicants is in place.
- DCA now requests public submissions made on a DA or modification application from councils only when needed.
- The NSW Planning Portal and Major Projects Portal have been updated to accommodate the above changes.

Development applications and modifications

Integrated development, concurrence and consultation requirements are collectively called 'referrals'

Referral is the collective term for integrated development, concurrence and consultation requirements.

Referral authority is the collective term for consultation bodies, concurrence authorities, and DCA in relation to integrated development or if it is a consultation body or concurrence authority.

Each of these three input types involves referring a DA or modification application to another body for a response before the consent authority determines it. Given they share this common purpose, they are treated as a single category and share collective terms under the new framework.

Legislative reforms introduced on July 1, 2026, establish DCA and a new referrals framework

The referrals framework came into effect on 1 July 2026, simplifying requirements for when a DA or modification application must be referred by a consent authority for consultation or concurrence. It refines and updates over 800 concurrence and consultation provisions across 175 environmental planning instruments, consolidating them into a single, clear list focused on managing significant risks to matters of State interest.

The framework is supported by the State Referral Provisions, which provide clear and consistent guidance on how referrals are considered.

Under the framework, DCA is responsible for responding to most concurrence and consultation requirements and for issuing all general terms of approval for integrated development under *the Environmental Planning and Assessment (EP&A) Act 1979.*

Appendix A – List of referral provisions and associated legislative source and referral authority provides a summary of the referral provisions and relevant referral body for each provision.

DCA provides a single, consolidated response for all NSW Government referral matters relevant to the issue of development consent, via the NSW Planning Portal

Councils should refer all provisions applicable to NSW Government matters, relating to the issue of consent, to DCA via the NSW Planning Portal (the Portal). Referrals can be made throughout the DA or modification application process up until the application is determined.

DCA will provide general terms of approval, concurrences or responses to consultation as a single, consolidated response within 28 calendar days, via the Portal.

To prepare this response, DCA will rely on either internal expertise or external agency expertise, depending on the referral.

DCA's Referral Coordination and Assessment (RC&A) team is responsible for receiving these referrals, seeking advice from either DCA Technical Advisory or the relevant agency, and compiling and signing out the response back to the consent authority. For each referral, a referral coordinator from the RC&A team will be assigned as the key contact within DCA.

Some referrals continue to be assessed by other referral authorities

Under the referrals framework, certain bodies outside the NSW Government are still responsible for receiving and responding to some referrals relating to the issue of consent. Examples include referrals to airport operators, Commonwealth departments and electricity supply authorities.

Councils will continue to refer these matters directly to these agencies via the Portal. DCA is not involved with these referrals.

Some approvals and advice remain outside the DCA's role

Not all matters involving NSW Government agencies are managed by DCA. Where legislation assigns the decision-making responsibility to another Minister, agency or approval authority, that organisation remains responsible for receiving, assessing and issuing the relevant advice or approval.

DCA does not administer these functions and councils should continue to deal directly with the relevant agency or approval authority. Examples include:

- the Minister for Water's approval under section 256 of the *Water Management Act 2000*
- the Office of Local Government Chief Executive's approval under section 82 of the *Local Government Act 1993*
- approvals required from Transport for NSW under the *Roads Act 1993* (e.g. section 138)
- integrated development approvals issued under other Acts. While DCA issues general terms of approval for inclusion in a development consent, the subsequent approvals remain the responsibility of the relevant Minister or agency under the relevant legislation.

Savings and transitional provisions apply

The referrals framework and amended EP&A Regulation introduced on 1 July 2026, applies to development and modification applications lodged on or after this date.

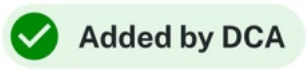
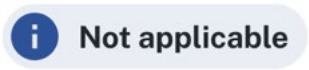
For development and modification applications lodged prior to 1 July 2026, councils refer these to agencies under the provisions that were in force prior to 1 July 2026. Agencies will receive these referrals and respond via existing mechanisms in the Portal.

Councils need to request a referral check before referring a DA to DCA

Prior to formally referring a DA or modification to DCA, councils need to nominate which referrals they intend to make to DCA and request a referral check through the Portal.

Within two business days, DCA will review the nominated referrals and advise:

- whether it agrees or disagrees with the nominated referrals, or whether any have been missed
- if the necessary documentation for the referral has been provided (for example, if a Bush Fire Risk Assessment is required as part of the application).

What councils will see in the Portal after the referral check	What it means
	DCA agrees that the provision applies to the application and **recommends** that it is referred to DCA.
	DCA does not agree that the provision applies to the application and **does not recommend** that the provision is referred to DCA.
	DCA **recommends** that the nominated provision be added to the referral case to DCA.
	Council may refer the provision to the relevant agency if applicable. DCA has not reviewed this provision, as it relates to a non-DCA agency. DCA is not involved with these referrals.
	DCA has **provided feedback** to the consent authority on a provision as part of the referral check. View the feedback under the 'Comments' banner in the Portal. The consent authority can also add comment for the referral body when submitting the referral check or formal referral.

If DCA has not responded within the two-business day period, councils can proceed with formally referring the application to DCA, ensuring the referral check does not delay the council assessment process.

The referral check may be completed before or after a DA is lodged, at council's discretion. While DCA recommends councils complete the check prior to a DA being accepted for lodgement, this may not always be practical or possible, in which case the check can be completed after lodgement, but prior to formal referral to DCA.

After a referral check is completed, the relevant council will make the final decision on which referrals, if any, need to be made as part of the DA or modification.

Modification applications require referral if they trigger a new referral provision or change a condition of consent

Under Part 4.3 of *State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021*, there are two situations where modification applications require referral. These occur when a modification application:

- triggers a referral requirement that did not apply to the original development application or a prior modification application (s4.44 of the Planning Systems SEPP).
- proposes to modify the development in a way that would affect a condition of consent that was imposed because of a previous referral (s4.45 of the Planning Systems SEPP).

Generally, the consent authority will be required to consult with DCA for modification applications with a referral requirement. However, for non-NSW Government referrals, the relevant non-NSW Government agency will be consulted.

DAs and modification applications must be referred based on when they were lodged

DAs and modifications lodged before 1 July 2026 ('in-flight applications') should continue to be referred based on the referral provisions that existed prior to 1 July 2026.

DAs and modification applications lodged after 1 July 2026 should be referred under the in-force referrals framework.

If councils accept an amendment to an in-flight application after 1 July 2026 that is not minor, the lodgement date of the application will change to the date the applicant applied for the amendment. As this will be after 1 July, the in-force referrals framework will apply.

Any existing referral case that applies to the application in the Portal will be automatically cancelled. If referral provisions still apply to the amended application, council will need to make a new referral to the new referral authority, including DCA. The referral check process will still apply for referrals to DCA in these instances.

DCA will now request public submissions from councils only when needed

Councils are no longer required to upload public submissions by default when referring an application that requires a concurrence or is integrated development. This change is intended to save councils from having to upload public submissions even where they are not needed for DCA or another referral authority to provide its response.

Instead, if DCA or the agency providing technical expertise requires public submissions to be able to respond, DCA will request the submissions as part of the Request for Information (RFI) process. The clock will pause until DCA receives the submissions.

Note: For development applications for designated development, a copy of any submissions must still be provided to the Planning Secretary. Council should email copies of any submissions to information@planning.nsw.gov.au. The email should be addressed to the assessment officer who issued the SEARs. There is **no** requirement to upload the submissions to the Portal.

A 28-day timeframe applies to referrals

From 1 July 2026, DCA and other referral authorities have 28 calendar days to respond to referrals.

The 28-day period starts when council refers the application through the Planning Portal, and any required fees are paid by the applicant. The clock pauses if additional information is requested and restarts once it has been provided.

If an application is referred under a new provision during assessment, or if an application is re-referred, the 28-day period for the application will reset.

If no response is received within 28 days, council may proceed with determining the application. However, if DCA is unlikely to be able to provide a response, within the statutory timeframe, it will communicate the expected timeframe for a response.

Fees apply to most referrals

The following fee structure applies to DAs and modifications lodged on or after 1 July 2026.

Fee	Activity
$1,100	Each unique* referral for most development applications.
$550	Each unique* referral for modifications made under s 4.55(2) of the EP&A Act
No fee	All other inputs, including: • any consultation or advice on modifications made under s 4.55(1) or (1A) of the EP&A Act • any referral required under the *Sydney Water Act 1994* or *Hunter Water Act 1991* • development in the resort areas of Kosciusko National Park made under section 4.39 of SEPP (Planning Systems) 2021 • development for new places of public worship made under section 4.40 of SEPP (Planning Systems) 2021

* Re-referring under the same provision will not attract a fee.

Applicants can request a review of a DCA decision required under a condition of consent

Applicants can request a review of a decision by DCA. This only applies to decisions where conditions of consent are required to be carried out to the satisfaction of DCA. The review will be undertaken by DCA.

Requesting local SEARs for designated development

Requests for local SEARs should be lodged with DPHI assessment teams through information@planning.nsw.gov.au. DPHI assessment teams will coordinate with DCA to obtain technical inputs as required.

DCA provides technical input for designated development applications on matters which would previously have been referred to the agencies listed in **Appendix B - Technical expertise now available in DCA**.

Requests for clarification or advice on issued SEARs should be made to DCA's front door at dca.enquiries@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

Consultation on issued SEARs

Where issued SEARs require consultation with agencies listed in **Appendix B – Technical expertise now available in DCA**, proponents and council staff should now refer matters to DCA.

However, where consultation requirements specifically nominate the following agencies, consultation should continue to occur directly with those agencies:

- Transport for NSW (TfNSW)

- Hunter Water Corporation (HWC)
- WaterNSW.

DCA does not currently coordinate SEARs matters for Sydney Water. Proponents and consent authorities should continue to refer Sydney Water matters directly through the agency's established pathways.

Pre-lodgement advice for local development

DCA does not currently provide a formal pre-lodgement service or written pre-lodgement advice for local development, including designated development. Our primary focus is providing timely technical advice through statutory referrals and other formal assessment processes.

Applicants seeking advice on a proposed development should contact their local council in the first instance. Councils remain the primary point of contact for pre-lodgement discussions and may seek informal engagement with DCA where appropriate.

Requests for informal engagement are considered on a case-by-case basis. Priority may be given to proposals involving significant complexity or where early technical input within DCA's areas of expertise is likely to provide the greatest benefit to the assessment process.

DCA involvement in other matters

DCA may also provide advice and input into some post approval matters required to satisfy conditions of consent, including Independent Environmental Audits. DCA's involvement in these matters will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Request for DCA involvement in these matters should be submitted through the DCA's Front Door via dca.enquiries@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

DCA provides advice under Part 5, Division 5.1 and 5.2 of the EP&A Act 1979

DCA should be consulted on Review of Environmental Factors (REFs) or Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) prepared for activities under Division 5.1 or 5.2 of the *EP&A Act 1979*, where legislation identifies DCA as a consultation agency, or where technical expertise within DCA is required to support the assessment of environmental impacts.

DCA should be consulted under the following provisions:

- *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, s 7.11 and 7.12
- *Marine Estate Management Act 2014*, s 55 and 56
- *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, s 221ZY and 221ZZ
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s2.13(1)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s2.15(2)(g)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s2.62A(2)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s 2.122(3)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s 2.182(3)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s3.10(1)

- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s3.12(3)
- SEPP (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021, s3.38A(2)
- SEPP (Precincts — Central River City) 2021, s 3.24(2)
- SEPP (Precincts — Western Parkland City) 2021, s 3.24(2)
- SEPP (Precincts — Western Parkland City) 2021, s 4.25A(4)

Request for DCA involvement in these matters should be made to dca.part5assessments@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

Local plan-making

DCA will work with councils and the Local Planning and Council Support (LPCS) team within DPHI to provide expert advice on planning proposals (PPs). These advisory inputs inform:

- formal pre-lodgement advice and scoping requirements for planning proposals
- planning proposal and Gateway assessment of potential impacts and if required conditions are to be placed on gateway determinations
- post gateway and exhibition advice
- finalisation.

DCA provides advice on certain matters for PPs

DCA provides advice on planning proposals, including proposals already in progress that have not yet been referred for advice. Proponents and council staff should now refer matters to DCA that would have previously been referred to agencies listed in **Appendix B – Technical expertise now available in DCA**.

DCA does not currently coordinate planning proposal matters that relate to Sydney Water. Proponents and consent authorities should continue to refer Sydney Water matters directly through the agency's established pathways.

Pre-gateway determination or requests for scoping proposal advice

For technical advice relating to scoping proposals or pre-Gateway determination matters, councils and applicants should contact the Department's LPCS teams, who will coordinate any required input from DCA, to ensure advice is consistent and appropriately managed. Where possible, engagement should occur through the scoping process set out in the LEP Making Guideline.

DCA is exploring opportunities to establish a formal pre-lodgement service in the future that provides a consistent approach across all technical disciplines.

Post-gateway consultation

For matters arising after a Gateway determination has been issued, including consultation on Gateway conditions, referrals should be submitted to DCA via the Portal.

Where a Gateway determination condition requires consultation with agencies listed in **Appendix B – Technical expertise now available in DCA**, councils should now contact DCA. However, where Gateway conditions specifically identify one of the following agencies, proponents and council staff should continue to refer the matter directly to that agency:

- Transport for NSW (TfNSW)
- Hunter Water Corporation
- WaterNSW

When requesting post-gateway advice from DCA via the Planning Portal, submit a single referral request for all relevant technical disciplines and include all reasons for the referral.

Generally, matters relating to all other technical domains, including Sydney Water will continue to be referred to the relevant existing authority for advice through established mechanisms. DCA will not be involved in these matters.

DCA should be consulted under Section 9.1 Ministerial Directions

Formal consultation with DCA is required for planning proposals involving matters associated with the following Section 9.1 Ministerial Directions:

- P3.4 Mining and Petroleum Protection
- P3.5 Oyster Aquaculture
- P5.3 Foreshores and Water Catchment Areas
- P5.6 Threatened species, threatened ecological communities and their habitat. Note that this direction effectively replaces consultation under s3.25 of the EP&A Act, which was repealed on 1 July 2026
- P5.9 Planning for Bush Fire Protection

The Local Environmental Plan Making Guideline identify NSW government agencies and authorities that may require consultation during the LEP making process, based on the nature and location of the proposal.

Frequently asked questions

DCA represents a major change to the planning system, and we are committed to supporting councils and other stakeholders through this change. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) fact sheet provides answers to some frequently asked questions.

For more information on anything not covered in this fact sheet, you can check the DCA webpage at planning.nsw.gov.au/development-coordination-authority or contact dca.enquiries@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

Appendices

Appendix A – List of referral provisions and associated legislative sources and referral authority

Appendix B – Technical expertise now available in DCA