

EDO Qld working to improve public access to environmental information

EDO Qld is working with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to improve the effective operation of the public register under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (Qld) (**EP Act**).

Through our work seeking information for our clients under the public register of the EP Act, we are aware of various issues which are impeding the effective operation of this register.

As part of our law reform work, we are seeking the following reforms be made by the Department so that the public register operates to provide easy, timely access to documents to the public.

EDO Qld are also seeking amendments to improve other public registers under Queensland environmental laws, such as the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Qld).

Actions required to restore the effectiveness of the EP Act public register:

Legislative reforms

Reform EP Act to provide for the following provisions to strengthen the public register:

- a statutory processing timeframe of 2 business days;
- a statutory timeframe for uploading of Environmental Authorities and amended Environmental Authorities of 2 business days;
- provision for additional documents to be available on the public register including:
 - ministerial briefing packages;
 - applications for EA amendments; and
 - supporting information provided with applications for EAs;
- right to seek a declaration about a decision to refuse a public register search request;
- a requirement for the documents to be searchable and accessible online;
- a requirement for a responsible officer to be designated for the processing of register requests.

Administration of the register

EDO Qld seeks that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection improve the effective administration of the public register by:

- providing a director in the Department who is accountable for online services (such as mining authorities register) and public register search requests, available via phone and email;
- uploading all public register documents online within 2 days of being produced for the following Environmental Authorities:
 - large coal mining projects
 - coal seam gas projects;
 - coordinated projects;
- aiming to provide requested documents within 2 business days of receipt;
- provide material online once it is provided in response to a request, as occurs for *Right to Information Act* requests;
- ensuring the provision of an online database of all public register documents, updated in a timely manner or instantaneously through effective automation; and
- providing training and publically available written guidance for all public register staff, including those located in regional business units.