

Environmental assessment: What the Minister must decide

The Environment Act defines an environmental assessment as a process by which the environmental effects of an undertaking are predicted and evaluated and a subsequent decision is made on the acceptability of the undertaking.

The Minister must decide as to whether, and how likely, the undertaking will cause **adverse effects** or **significant environmental effects** that cannot be **mitigated**. If the Minister decides that there are no effects, or if the effects can be mitigated, then the project will be approved. If the Minister decides she needs more information, she can request it or order a focus report, or an environmental assessment report.

“adverse effect” means an effect that impairs or damages the environment or changes the environment in a manner that negatively affects aspects of human health

“environmental effect” means, in respect of an undertaking,

(i) any change, whether negative or positive, that the undertaking may cause in the environment, including any effect on socio-economic conditions, on environmental health, physical and cultural heritage or on any structure, site or thing including those of historical, archaeological, paleontological or architectural significance, and

(ii) any change to the undertaking that may be caused by the environment,

whether the change occurs inside or outside the Province;

“significant” means, with respect to an environmental effect, an adverse effect that occurs or could occur as a result of any of the following:

- (i) the magnitude of the effect,
- (ii) the geographic extent of the effect,
- (iii) the duration of the effect,
- (iv) the frequency of the effect,
- (v) the degree of reversibility of the effect,
- (vi) the possibility of occurrence of the effect;

“mitigate” means, with respect to an undertaking, to eliminate, reduce, or control the adverse effects or the significant environmental effects of an undertaking, and may include restitution for any damage to the environment caused by such effects through replacement, restoration, compensation or any other means;