



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 312

WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA:

Beetaloo Appraisal Well Approvals

1. The Department's published register of environment management plan decisions records that EMP STO8-2, the EP161 Beetaloo Basin Appraisal Pilot Environment Management Plan, held by Santos QNT Pty Ltd and Tamboran Resources Ltd, was approved on 12 May 2026 under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016.

- a. How many petroleum wells does that approved plan permit, at how many well pads, and over what period?

The Environment Management Plan (EMP) details the amount of approved petroleum wells and well pads approved under EMPSTO8-2: [Beetaloo Basin appraisal pilot](#) (Table 1).

In accordance with regulation 18 of the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016*, a revision of the current EMP must be submitted for approval every five years, which is available at: [Petroleum \(Environment\) Regulations 2016](#).

- b. What conditions were imposed on the approval, and which of them require monitoring or public reporting?

The approval notice and statement of reasons for STO8-2 is published and includes the approval conditions and available at: [Approval notice and statement of reasons](#).

Monitoring and reporting documents required under EMP conditions are published at:

- [POINT](#); and
- [Compliance and reporting | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#).

- c. In the Approved Environment Management Plans section of the register, an NT Environment Protection Authority (NTEPA) advice document is published against each of the 22 plans

approved between 6 June 2019 and 26 November 2024, and against none of the six approved since. In the approval notice and statement of reasons for STO8-2, the entry for the dates the NTEPA was requested to, and provided, advice under section 29B of the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority Act 2012 is recorded as “N/A”. Was the NTEPA’s advice sought on STO8-2 and, if not, why not?

The Minister did not request the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) advice under section 29B of the *Northern Territory Environment Protection Act 2012* for STO8-2. This was based on previous advice from the NT EPA that the environmental regulatory framework was well established and the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment had achieved significant experience and expertise in assessing EMPs.

The NT EPA’s advice and the Minister’s response are published at: [Advice to Minister | NTEPA](#).

- d. On what date, and by what decision, did the practice of publishing the NTEPA’s advice on the register cease, and for which approvals since 26 November 2024 was the NTEPA’s advice sought?**

Refer: [Advice to Minister | NTEPA](#).

- e. Has any modification notice under regulation 22 or 23 been given in respect of STO8-2 since 12 May 2026?**

All regulation 22 and 23 modification notices are published under the relevant EMP. Santos has provided two regulation 22 notices since May 2026 and these are published at: [Environment management plan decisions | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#).

- 2. What approvals for appraisal drilling in the Beetaloo Sub-basin have been granted since 1 July 2025?**

- a. For each, please state the proponent, the number of wells approved, the date of approval, and the instrument or regulation under which it was granted.**

This information can be accessed in the relevant EMPs and approval notices in the published register of EMP decisions at: [Environment management plan decisions | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#).

All EMP approvals, including for appraisal drilling activities are granted under the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016*.

- b. If no such approval has been granted, please state so.**

Refer: [Environment management plan decisions | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#).

- c. **Which approvals for appraisal drilling in the Beetaloo Sub-basin are currently under assessment, and for how many wells?**

All EMPs currently under assessment are published at:
[Environment management plans under assessment | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#)

3. **For each approval identified in question 1, what environmental, water and greenhouse gas impact assessments informed the decision?**

- a. **What conditions were imposed to monitor, mitigate and publicly report those impacts?**

The STO8-2 EMP approval has 12 approval conditions, including monitoring and reporting requirements and a Statement of Reasons that details how the assessment informed the decision is available at: [Approval notice and statement of reasons](#). These conditions are in addition to reporting requirements under the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016*.

- b. **Were the cumulative impacts of the wells assessed as part of broader Beetaloo Sub-basin development, rather than the proposal being assessed in isolation? If so, in which document is that cumulative assessment recorded?**

Under regulation 9 of the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016*, the EMP must meet certain approval criteria, including the requirement to include an assessment of the cumulative effects of the EMP's identified impacts and risks in conjunction with other activities in or near the permit area. A cumulative impact assessment is included in STO8-2: [Beetaloo Basin appraisal pilot](#)

- c. **What modelling was undertaken of potential impacts on groundwater resources and on nearby environmentally significant areas, and can it be tabled?**

The EMP includes modelling on flooding and noise impacts.

In relation to potential impacts on groundwater resources through water extraction, this is managed through the licensing framework under the *Water Act 1992*.

In the Beetaloo region, water extraction decisions are informed by the *Georgina Wiso Water Allocation Plan 2023-2031*, which is supported by regional monitoring data and a three-dimensional coupled surface water and groundwater model. The regional model has been recently updated and recalibrated in 2024 to incorporate

additional monitoring data. The model updates also incorporated uncertainty analysis that provides predictive capability to assess potential groundwater impacts associated with onshore gas activities. [Daly-Roper River Model \(DR3\) Recalibration](#)

All water licence applications, assessment reports, statements of reasons for decisions and water extraction licences (including various conditions) are publicly available at [Water licence and notice portals | NT.GOV.AU](#).

d. What emissions estimates were considered, including both direct project emissions and downstream emissions from the gas produced?

The STO8-2 EMP details the scope 1 greenhouse gas emissions sources in section 3.15 and table 36 of the EMP. There are no scope 2 emissions anticipated as part of the regulated activities and scope 3 emissions are not required to be reported under the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme.

e. Were any independent scientific reviews commissioned or relied upon, and can they be tabled?

No independent scientific reviews were commissioned for the assessment of STO8-2. Northern Territory (NT) Government Officers with technical and scientific expertise provided advice on matters of flora and fauna, water resources, environment policy and heritage matters as part of the EMP assessment.

4. For each approval identified in question 1, what conditions would trigger the suspension, amendment or revocation of the approval if environmental impacts exceed those assessed?

The Department's Compliance and Enforcement Policy details how the regulator approach to ensuring compliance with the EMP and relevant legislation. There are a range of compliance and enforcement tools that are described in these documents:

- [Compliance and enforcement | Department of Lands, Planning and Environment](#); and
- [Compliance and Enforcement Policy](#).

a. Has any such condition been triggered to date?

No such condition has been triggered to date.

5. For each approval identified in question 1, did the Government consider whether the project should be referred for assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*?

No, the NT Government did not make a referral for assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Referrals are the responsibility of the interest holder.

a. If a referral was made, what is its number and current status?

Refer to the EPBC Act public portal to determine whether an interest holder has made a referral: [All EPBC Projects · EPBC Act Public Portal](#)

b. If no referral was made, what is the basis for the view that the project is unlikely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance, and in which document is that view recorded?

The National Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determines whether a proposal may have significant impact on matters of national environmental significance.

c. Has the Government sought or received advice on the question of referral? If so, on what date and can it be tabled?

The STO8-2 EMP provides a summary of how the interest holder considered whether the regulated activities required referral under the EPBC Act.

d. The statement of reasons for STO8-2 records that “The EMP was not referred under the *Environment Protection Act 2019*, as the reg 9(3) regulated activity does not have the potential to cause a significant impact on the environment”. It records no corresponding reason in relation to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. On what basis was the regulated activity not referred under that Act, and in which document is that basis recorded?

The Statement of Reasons relates to NT legislation. It is the interest holder’s responsibility to determine whether a proposed action is likely to require referral and to support this obligation, the National EPA provides an EPBC Act self-assessment tool and guidance.

e. The statement of reasons for STO8-2 records that a 1999 record of Carpentarian Grasswren in the Atlas of Living Australia within approximately 30km of the project area “has been excluded from the NT Fauna Atlas following a screening process”. On what date was it excluded, and by whom?

The NT Fauna Atlas collates biodiversity data for the NT from a wide range of sources, including other biodiversity information platforms such as Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and eBird.

The record referred to in question 5e was reported in 1999 to the eBird platform and is also represented in the ALA.

All species locality records have the potential for errors, including erroneous location details, miscoding of species identity, misidentification by the observer or subsequent taxonomic changes.

When providing advice on development applications, scientists within the Department's Flora and Fauna Division review species records from the NT Fauna Atlas in the vicinity of the project area to inform an assessment of which species of conservation significance may be potentially impacted by the Project. This includes inspection of any data that appears anomalous, particularly if a record is a geographic outlier (ie. well outside the spatial distribution shown by other records of that species) or within a habitat type not usually associated with that species.

In the case of this Carpentarian Grasswren record, it is a conspicuous outlier that is 100km to the west of other records of the species in the Gulf Fall region and the locality is on a lateritic plateau with very different habitats to the rugged sandstone ranges and outcrops where all reliable NT records of this species occur. Given the text description of the location matched the geospatial reference, it is highly likely that this is a misidentification (or a miscoding when the species identity was entered). On this basis, Flora and Fauna Division excluded this record when providing advice to the regulator in relation to STO8-2.