

# Creecy announces new EA process for renewable energy projects

Forestry, fisheries and the environment minister, Barbara Creecy, has announced initiatives for further streamlining the environmental assessment (EA) process for renewable energy projects in the country. They aim to improve the efficiency of the EA processes to facilitate the development of solar PV and associated infrastructure in areas of low to medium environmental sensitivity.



Source: Gallo/Getty

Creecy said the initiatives to be implemented will exempt developers from obtaining environmental authorisation for certain listed or specified activities for the development of solar facilities.

“These initiatives are in addition to the interventions introduced since 2014 to streamline EAs related to renewable energy projects like gazetting of 11 renewable development zones (REDZ), five electricity transmission corridors and gas corridors, as well as the implementation of Generic Environmental Management Programmes for grid and substation development and expansion,” Creecy said.



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## Strategic infrastructure projects

In addition, she said, gazetted strategic infrastructure projects (SIPs) are processed in terms of the legislated 57 days as per the Infrastructure Development Act. Creecy said the Standard for the Development and Expansion of Power lines and Substations in identified geographical areas will be gazetted for implementation by the end of July 2022.

“Based on compliance with this standard, the development and expansion of power lines and substations will be excluded from the need to obtain an EA prior to commencement when developed in areas of 'low' and 'medium' environmental sensitivity as identified by the national environmental screening tool, and within the five strategic electricity corridors,” Creecy said.

She noted that the exclusions will be subject to a registration process, which will allow for compliance monitoring.

The minister will in August gazette two notices calling for public comment that are aimed at simplifying the deployment of solar PV facilities.

“The registration process will reduce timeframes from 300 days and 147 days respectively to approximately 60 days from inception of the project,” Creecy said.



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The exclusion of solar PV facilities from an EA based on compliance with an adopted environmental instrument will be subject to:

- The appointment of an independent environmental assessment practitioner and of specialists (agricultural, terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity; cultural heritage and paleontology);
- Confirmation of the environmental sensitivity rating through inspection by the various specialists and the preparation of a site sensitivity verification report by the environmental assessment practitioner which confirms the sensitivity rating and compliance with the allowable development limits; and
- The preparation of an environmental management programme by the specialists and the environmental assessment practitioner.

## Site sensitivity verification report

It will also include the signing of a declaration that the site sensitivity verification report is a true representation of the findings and is of medium or low environmental sensitivity for all themes; and that there is an environmental management programme in place and that the developer will implement the mitigation measures identified in the environmental management programme.

Creecy said additional planned interventions to simplify the environmental authorisation process for renewable energy application will ensure that environmental sensitivities on a potential site are identified alongside the introduction of a rating of site sensitivities in line with the screening tool requirements.

“These areas will be mapped and located on the environmental screening tool and a generic environmental management programme (EMPr) will be developed for each site,” Creecy said.

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