

# The Move to eDA

## Background

The development assessment process is largely a paper-driven system.

Depending on the type of development proposal, applicants may be required to submit a complex mix of forms and prepare and attach a variety of supporting plans, reports, and assessment/impact statements. All of this work usually involving a substantial amount of paper, postage costs and time.

This approach to receiving and assessing development applications (DAs) often leads to delays, as applications are shuffled around the various consent authorities via the postal system. These delays invariably cost the applicant money and impact on the efficiencies of both referral and consent authorities.

The Development Assessment Forum (DAF) recognised this problem, and in 2002 commenced its eDA project.

## eDA

eDA, or Electronic Development Assessment, represents a national vision to transform a slow paper-based processes into a 21<sup>st</sup> century system - one that is electronic, efficient and able to meet the needs of those involved in development assessment.

The eDA 'Protocol' allows for the exchange of development assessment information between computer systems.

It will enable *anyone* submitting an application, whether a family renovating or a major developer, to do so over the internet, without the need to appear at a council reception office. It will also allow application referrals and agency responses to occur in a much more efficient manner.

In some cases, applicants will be able to keep track of how their project is progressing through council.

## The 'Protocol'

A fixed set of rules and processes have been developed to facilitate the lodgement and processing of applications via the internet.

These rules, known as the 'eDA Protocol', will allow the applicants and consent authorities to transfer DA information electronically between computer systems.

This seamless exchange of electronic information is known as 'interoperability'.

The eDA Protocol has been agreed upon by both users and software vendors, enabling the latter to incorporate the common rules into their products.

This industry-based approach will deliver broad benefits to a range of stakeholders through streamlining the development assessment process.

## How is the 'Protocol' being developed?

DAF has been working on this project for some time, with significant input from the three tiers of government and industry practitioners. A framework that allows information to be transferred electronically in a 'common' format (the XML schema) has been developed. The XML schema includes descriptions of most DA information used in transactions.

With assistance from the Australian Government's Regulation Reduction Incentive Fund (RRIF) Program, the 'National eDA Project' (NeDA) was established.

The project team, in partnership with 92 local councils across six states, has assisted suppliers of DA software to upgrade their systems in order to use the eDA Protocol.

The eDA Protocol is currently being applied:

- In Queensland - the State Government has adopted eDA to enable councils and State Agencies to exchange planning data seamlessly between each other.
- In Victoria - eDA is achieving integration between council systems and other systems such as the Streamlined Planning through Electronic Applications and Referrals (SPEAR).
- Similar exercises are either underway or being planned for in South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia.

### **Where to from here?**

The eDA Protocol has gone through several transformations as it is being implemented across the nation, and will continue to be refined as it is rolled out across the country.

Importantly, it will need ongoing maintenance to cater for future development and planning legislation changes.

The NeDA Project will also focus on establishing a governance structure within a national framework for the ongoing maintenance and management of the eDA Protocol.

### **A final word**

In short, the eDA Protocol provides the basis for a single agreed means of communicating development and planning information electronically.

It will ultimately be the vehicle for delivering the much needed improvements to the development assessment systems across Australia.

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