



Department of **Energy, Mines,
Industry Regulation and Safety**

Guideline

Criteria for assessment: Petroleum and geothermal energy exploration permits

April 2025

Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Clarifications.....	3
3. Assessment criteria	5
3.1 Minimum Criterion 1 (MC1): Technical ability/technical advice available to the applicant	6
3.2 Minimum Criterion 2 (MC2): Financial capacity of applicant	7
3.3 Minimum Criterion 3 (MC3): Work and expenditure	8
3.3.1 Rationale	8
3.3.2 Work.....	8
3.3.3 Expenditure	10
3.4 Minimum Criterion (MC4): Consideration of other matters	10
3.4.1 Past performance.....	11
3.4.2 Subsisting titles.....	12
3.4.3 Other considerations.....	12
4. Ranking of multiple applications	13
4.1 Ranking Criterion 1 (RC1): Work and expenditure.....	13
4.1.1 Technical evaluation	13
4.1.2 Relevance of work	13
4.1.3 Timing of work	13
4.1.4 Quantity of work.....	13
4.1.5 Type of work.....	15
4.1.6 Capability.....	15
4.2 Ranking Criterion 2 (RC2): Financial capacity.....	15
4.3 Ranking Criterion 3 (RC3): Technical capability	15
4.4 Ranking Criterion 4 (RC4): Consideration of other matters	15
4.4.1 Past Performance	16
4.4.2 Other considerations.....	16
5. Refusal to grant an exploration permit.....	16
6. Re-release of acreage	16
Appendix 1: Minimum criteria and comparative assessment of competing bid applications	17
Process flow: Decision tree methodology for comparative assessment of competing bid applications to identify the most deserving applicant (s31 PGERA and s21 PSLA)	18



1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the assessment and ranking criteria for applications for exploration permits made under sections 31 and 33 of the *Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Resources Act 1967* (PGERA) and section 21 and 23 of the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act 1982* (PSLA), (together, “the Act”).

2. Clarifications

- An application must meet the lodgement requirements of sections 31 of the PGERA and 21 of the PSLA before it can be assessed. Applications are deemed invalid if not accompanied by all required elements.
 - Note, there is no authority under the PGERA or PSLA to refund application fees for any reason, including when an application is deemed invalid.
- Applications will be assessed on the information contained in the written application, together with any additional information requested by the Minister. Further information should also be submitted in writing.
- The first two permit years are collectively referred to as the “firm period” and represent the minimum work commitment guaranteed to be undertaken by a permittee.
 - To assess the financial resources available to an applicant, only firm period work commitments will be considered.
 - To assess an applicant’s proposal for work, the entire work program will be considered.
- The Minister must be reasonably satisfied that the applicant has adequately addressed the Minimum Criteria (MC1 to MC4, see 3.1 to 3.4) to be deemed deserving of grant.
- Where more than one application for the same block or blocks is under consideration, sections 32A(2) of the PGERA and 22A(2) of the PSLA allow the Minister to grant a permit to whichever applicant, in the Minister’s opinion, is most deserving of the grant, having regard to criteria made publicly available.
- Under sections 32A(3) of the PGERA and 22A(3) of the PSLA, the Minister may rank the applicants in the order in which they are deserving of the grant, having regard to criteria made publicly available. Deserving applicants shall be ranked in accordance with the Ranking Criteria (RC1 to RC4, see 4.1 to 4.4).
- Under sections 32A(4) of the PGERA and 22A(4) of the PSLA, applications assessed as not deserving of grant are excluded from the ranking of applications.
- To be deemed the preferred applicant, the Minister must be reasonably satisfied that the application is the most deserving of the grant. Relevant consideration may include (but are not limited to):
 - the likelihood of achieving the fullest assessment of the potential within the permit area; and
 - the ability to fund the work commitments and any required decommissioning, rehabilitation, or remediation activities.

- In accordance with sections 31(4) of the PGERA and 21(4) of the PSLA, the Minister may at any time request further information in connection with an application.
 - Failure to provide any requested information may result in the application being assessed as not deserving and/or subsequently refused.
 - An applicant may also be required to furnish information of the continued suitability in respect to the criteria outlined, until such time as a formal offer to grant the exploration permit has been made.
- For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister may refuse an application under sections 32(1)(b) of the PGERA and 22(1)(b) of the PSLA if:
 - the application is deemed not deserving of the grant by failing to meet the Minimum Criteria (MC1 to MC4); or
 - the application is not ranked the preferred application in accordance with the Ranking Criteria.
- If the Minister is of the opinion that two or more applicants are equally deserving of the grant of a petroleum or geothermal exploration permit after assessment against the methodology, the Minister may request additional work and expenditure, within the firm period, to determine the most deserving applicant.
- If the preferred application does not proceed past a preliminary offer, then a preliminary offer to grant may be made to the next deserving applicant, and so forth.
- Application areas that do not proceed to a formal offer may be reserved under sections 28 of the PGERA and 18 of the PSLA for a future acreage release.
- Any reference to the Minister within this guide also refers to any officer of the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (DEMIRS) delegated specific powers of the Minister and thus empowered to make determinations on the Minister's behalf.
- The details of this guide apply to assessments of applications for petroleum exploration permits (PGERA and PSLA) and geothermal energy exploration permits (PGERA only), unless otherwise specified.

3. Assessment criteria

This section details the minimum criteria that will be used to determine if an application for an exploration permit is deserving of grant and will be considered in ranking an application where more than one application is deserving of grant.

Table 1 in *Appendix 1: Minimum criteria and comparative assessment of competing bid applications* provides for the initial application assessment for both sole and competitive bids.



MC1: Technical ability/technical advice available to the applicant

Does the applicant have the expertise to manage and undertake the commitments, obligations and operations relevant to an exploration permit.



MC2: Financial capacity of applicant

Applications should be accompanied by documents in support of the financial capacity and ability of the applicant to fund the firm period of the work program.



MC3: Work and expenditure

Applications should be accompanied by proposals of work and expenditure in respect of the blocks specified, and geological evaluation and exploration rationale for the work program.



MC4: Consideration of other matters

Evidence of pre-work and/or planning for environmental, native title, heritage and other land use concerns may be favourably considered by the Minister. The Minister may also consider the applicant's past performance in Australia or elsewhere.

3.1 Minimum Criterion 1 (MC1): Technical ability/technical advice available to the applicant

The purpose of MC1 is to assess the ability and expertise of the applicant to manage the commitments/obligations and operations relevant to the proposed permit.

To determine the applicant's ability to undertake the day-to-day management of the proposed work program (in accordance with good oil-field practice) and manage any relevant regulatory requirements (including the ability to negotiate land access agreements (native title and private land access), compile environment plans or well management plans), an applicant must satisfy the Minister of the technical capacity and competence available to them.

This will include the technical capacity and experience of key personnel and/or sub-contractors, and particulars of their current and previous involvement in other petroleum or geothermal energy exploration.

Evidence of technical capability should adequately reflect any unique challenges likely to be encountered in exploring for petroleum or geothermal energy resources.

An applicant should provide specific details and evidence of:

- The technical qualifications of the applicant and those of its key employees.
- The technical advice that is available to the applicant by way of consultants or other providers.
- The financial capacity to engage any expertise required.
- The ability to comply with the regulatory requirements for registered titleholders (or their nominated operators) in Western Australia.
- Where applicable, evidence of the applicant's successful track record in conducting similar or relevant work program activities in accordance with good oil-field practice.

3.2 Minimum Criterion 2 (MC2): Financial capacity of applicant

The purpose of MC2 is to assess the ability of the applicant to fund the commitments of the proposed work program, as well as address any accompanying liabilities such as decommissioning, rehabilitation and remediation.

The applicant must provide a statement detailing the financial resources currently available to them. It is insufficient to only provide a statement attesting to how the proposed work program is intended to be funded, i.e., an applicant cannot satisfy this criterion with a statement that funds will be sourced at a later date.

At minimum, this statement must provide particulars of the applicant's current financial resources that are available to fund the proposed work program for permit years one and two (including any subsequent costs of decommissioning, rehabilitation and remediation resulting from the work undertaken in these permit years).

The applicant must also articulate how funds will be secured to allow for later elements of the proposed work program to be undertaken.

Where an applicant holds interest in other petroleum titles within Western Australia, the applicant must also be able to demonstrate their access to financial resources sufficient to meet the title-related commitments of the application in addition to the existing titles, including work programs, decommissioning, rehabilitation, and remediation requirements.

Where an applicant does not have sufficient financial resources to fund the proposed work program, evidence of the ability to fund the work program from alternate sources is required. For instance, a parent company (or other investor) may execute a deed of guarantee or a letter of financial support. In these cases, the parent company or other investor must provide evidence of their ability to provide this financial support. This evidence must accompany the application at time of lodgement.

Specific details of the financial resources available to the applicant should be lodged in the form of:

- The most recent financial statement prepared in accordance with the ASX listing rules. The statement must have been completed within the previous 12-month period, at the time of lodgement.
- A current financial statement prepared by either a Certified Practising Accountant or a Chartered Accountant. The statement must have been completed within the previous 12-month period, at the time of lodgement.
- A current bank statement. The bank statement must be no older than 1 month at the time of lodgement.
- A cash flow statement. The cash flow statement must be no older than three months at the time of lodgement.

Note: If an applicant is relying on a parent entity's accounts to demonstrate financial capacity, details of funding methods and any guarantees between the entities must be provided. The financial assessment that would have applied to the applicant will instead apply to the parent entity to determine financial capacity.

3.3 Minimum Criterion 3 (MC3): Work and expenditure

The purpose of MC3 is to assess whether the proposed work and expenditure is acceptable to the Minister and appropriately addresses any exploration or appraisal risks, or field development requirements as identified in the exploration rationale.

3.3.1 Rationale

Applicants must provide a geological evaluation and exploration rationale for the full six-year proposed work program. This information will be used as the basis for assessing that the proposed work program addresses the perceived exploration risks.

An applicant should provide the specific details of:

- The applicant's geological evaluation of the area, including potential petroleum systems and plays, prospects and/or leads.
- The applicant's assessment of existing data, where relevant.
- The rationale underlying the proposed work program with sufficient detail to support that program.
- How the commitments in the proposed work program will investigate (assess and reduce risk) the systems, plays, prospects, and/or leads identified in the geological evaluation of the area.

3.3.2 Work

Applicants must demonstrate how the proposed work program will significantly progress the assessment of the petroleum or geothermal energy potential and/or develop the geological knowledge of the release area.

An applicant should provide a six-year work program that:

- States work program activities precisely to avoid ambiguity.
- Is credible, coherent and supportable, and does not contain any contingent work.
- Includes firm period commitments that are sufficient to enable work program commitments in later permit years.
- Only includes work proposed to be undertaken within, or in respect to, the area to which the exploration permit will be subject.

Petroleum resources

The proposed petroleum work program will be assessed having regard to:

- The quantity, type, and timing of any new geochemical, geological, and/or geophysical surveying to be undertaken.
- The quantity, type, and timing of geochemical, geological, and/or geophysical survey data to be purchased or licensed, and/or processed or reinterpreted.
- It is expected that purchased or licensed reprocessed data will have been reprocessed from raw data.

- Pre-purchased, non-exclusive survey data cannot form part of the proposed work program; but any interpretation of that data will be considered in assessing the relative merits of the proposed work program.
- Non-exclusive survey data proposed to be purchased after the award of an exploration permit may form part of the work program if this will not disadvantage other applicants who have purchased the data prior to making an application.
- The number, type (slim-hole, stratigraphic, open-hole, cased, etc.), and timing of exploration wells to be drilled, provided there is a coherent rationale.
- Work intended to appraise a known petroleum resource cannot form part of the proposed work program unless it can be demonstrated to have a significant exploration component.
- Proposed work considered equivalent or inferior to work previously carried out will not be considered exploration work for the purpose of progressing the assessment of the petroleum potential of the application area.
- The early elements of the proposed work program should be sufficient to enable the later elements to proceed and be aligned with the exploration strategy.

Geothermal energy resources

The proposed geothermal work program will be assessed having regard to:

- The number, target depth and timing of wells to be drilled, provided there is an adequate technical rationale for siting the wells.
- Drilling of shallow (approximately 400m) wells should be backed by sound technical rationale.
- The basic data to be collected in wells such as: lithology (cuttings, wireline logs, coring), temperature data (maximum bottom hole or temperature log, time after circulation stopped), fracture identification (if relevant), stress field data.
- The amount, type and timing of geochemical, geological and/or geophysical surveys or studies to be carried out and/or accessing existing non-exclusive data.
- The extent to which the applicant's technical assessment supports the number and conceptual targets of wells proposed in the application.
- Pre-purchased, non-exclusive data will not form part of the work program, but any interpretation of that data will be considered in assessing the relative merits of the work program proposed.
- Non-exclusive data proposed to be purchased after the award of a permit may form part of the work program if this does not disadvantage a competitor who has purchased the data prior to bidding.
- Proposed work considered equivalent or inferior to work previously carried out will not be considered exploration work for the purpose of progressing the assessment of the geothermal energy potential of the application area.
- The early elements of the proposed work program should be sufficient to enable the later elements to proceed and be aligned with the exploration strategy.
- Geothermal wells drilled as doublets will be considered as separate wells for each unique well path.

3.3.3 Expenditure

Each commitment expressed in the proposed work program must be accompanied by an indicative cost expressed in Australian dollars.

Applicants should note that the indicative cost will be considered in the assessment of the applicant's knowledge of exploration techniques.

3.4 Minimum Criterion (MC4): Consideration of other matters

The purpose of MC4 is to consider any other relevant matters. These may include other statutory approvals required, stakeholder engagement policies, subsisting titles and other potential obstacles that may impact the work program, along with the applicant's current and past involvement in exploration and development, including work commitments for other petroleum or geothermal tenure.





3.4.1 Past performance

The Minister may consider the applicant's past performance in Australia or elsewhere.

An applicant listed on the Departmental Non-compliance Register due to failure to comply with the requirements of the PGERA, PSLA, PPA, and/or associated regulations, will be requested to provide sufficient compelling evidence to justify why the circumstances leading to poor past performance have been mitigated or resolved such that the chance of reoccurrence is as low as reasonably practical.

Applicants may provide details of past performance in respect to:

- Assessment and compliance with State and Commonwealth legislation, including but not limited to:
 - *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA)*
 - *Environmental Protection Act 1986 (WA)*
 - *Contaminated Sites Act 2003 (WA)*
 - *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*
- Negotiating private land access agreements.
- Negating potential land access barriers that may impact on the proposed work program.
- Working with Aboriginal stakeholders on cultural heritage matters including management of any known Aboriginal sites.
- Negotiating 'in good faith' under the *Native Title Act 1993 (NTA)*.
- Reserved land under the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972*.

Consideration is given to situations where one or more of the applicants were participants in permits cancelled due to failure(s) in meeting work program commitments.

Any prior cancellation is taken into account and the circumstance of the default is relevant, however, weighted consideration is given to cancellations within the previous five years. Where this is deemed a significant decision-making factor in the potential offer of a permit to a separate applicant, the applicant shall be given the opportunity to establish that the earlier failure was not relevant to the current situation and that default would not occur if the permit were to be awarded.

3.4.2 Subsisting titles

Where an application is over an area which could result in subsisting titles being issued, applicants are encouraged to detail in the application:

- The relevant existing petroleum or geothermal titles current at the time of application lodgement which intersect the application area.
- Any potential impacts to the existing operations on an underlying title, demonstrating how these are intended to be mitigated or managed, which may include:
 - *A description of discovered petroleum pools or geothermal energy resources within the subsisting titles, or where there may be an impact on another title.*
 - *The outcomes of any consultation undertaken with existing title holders.*
 - *Whether the applicant intends to explore in the same geologic intervals as any declared locations, petroleum pools or geothermal energy resources within subsisting titles or another title.*
- Demonstrate that the proposed work program and expenditure is achievable without interference with subsisting titles.

3.4.3 Other considerations

Applicants may include in their exploration permit application particulars of:

- Other statutory approvals required to undertake the proposed work or operations, including environmental, native title and other land use planning considerations.
- Policies for managing stakeholder engagement and sensitivities surrounding other land users and land uses.
- Potential obstacles that may impact the proposed work program and how such barriers could be overcome such as land use, infrastructure, or seasonal restrictions.
- Details of the applicant and its relationship to any major corporation or group, substantial shareholding, directors, principal business activity, and place of incorporation/business.
- Where the applicant is a foreign company, its acknowledgement of the requirements for approval by the Australian Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB), and/or proposal for registering an Australian entity.
- A copy of the applicant's certificate of Insurance, detailing the level of cover for control of Well, Property Damage and Third-Party liability.
- The applicant's current and prior involvement in exploration and development in other national or international jurisdictions, including work commitments for other petroleum or geothermal tenure.

4. Ranking of multiple applications

Per sections 32A of the PGERA and 22A of the PSLA, in the case of an acreage release in which multiple applications for the grant of an exploration permit have been deemed deserving of grant, the Minister may employ a two-step methodology to determine the most deserving applicant.

Table 2 in *Appendix 1: Minimum criteria and comparative assessment of competing bid applications* provides for an applicant comparative assessment of competing bids to identify the most deserving applicant.

Pursuant to sections 32A(4) of the PGERA and 22A(4) of the PSLA, only applicants deemed as deserving will be ranked using Table 2.

The following criterion will be used to rank multiple deserving applications to identify which is deemed 'preferred' as the most deserving of grant.

4.1 Ranking Criterion 1 (RC1): Work and expenditure

The applicant's work program and expenditure will be assessed with consideration to the optimum use of the State's resources and advancement of geological knowledge.

The criterion for ranking assessment are (in no particular order):

4.1.1 Technical evaluation

Applicants that demonstrate a better evaluation of the petroleum or geothermal energy exploration potential of the area will rank higher.

In general, the quality of the technical evaluation is considered above the quantity of the systems, plays, prospects, and/or leads identified in the geological evaluation of the area.

4.1.2 Relevance of work

The proposed work program should be designed to reduce the uncertainty and risk of the systems, plays, prospects, and/or leads identified in the applicant's technical evaluation.

The early elements of the proposed work program should be sufficient to enable the later elements to proceed and be aligned with the exploration strategy.

Where multiple exploration targets are identified, work that is designed to investigate the different targets will be considered greater than work targeting an individual target.

Any work performed on identified petroleum pools should include a significant exploration component designed to advance prospective resources toward contingent or proven.

4.1.3 Timing of work

For the purposes of the ranking of deserving applications, work proposed for earlier permit years (especially the firm period) will carry higher weighting than work proposed for later permit years.

4.1.4 Quantity of work

Greater quantities of work will be ranked higher provided that the work is considered relevant. Quantities are based on the amount and quality of the work proposed and not the estimated expenditure.

Petroleum exploration permit - An example of a six-year petroleum exploration permit work program:

YR	Start Date	End Date	Minimum Work Commitments		Indicative Expenditure (\$AUD)
			Description	Activity	
1	01/01/2015	31/12/2015	Aeromagnetic survey Geophysical studies	Acquire and process 2000km ² of airborne magnetic data Interpretation of new and existing data	
2	01/01/2016	31/12/2016	2D seismic reprocessing		
3	01/01/2017	31/12/2017	2D seismic acquisition and processing	1000km 2D seismic survey	
4	01/01/2018	31/12/2018	Well planning	Exploration Well Planning and Approvals	
5	01/01/2019	31/12/2019	One (1) Exploration well	Targeting x formation to a minimum depth of 2000m	
6	01/01/2020	31/12/2020	Geotechnical studies		

Geothermal exploration permit - An example of a six-year geothermal energy exploration permit work program:

YR	Start Date	End Date	Minimum Work Commitments		Indicative Expenditure (\$AUD)
			Description	Activity	
1	01/01/2015	31/12/2015	Geological and Geophysical studies Seismic Interpretation and Geophysical Modelling Magnetotelluric Survey	Integration of Airborne Gravity, Gravity Gradiometry Including borehole and stress indicators 20 sites	
2	01/01/2016	31/12/2016	Purchase 2D seismic data Geothermal studies 3D seismic survey	150km data purchase Reinterpretation of available seismic data 500km acquisition	
3	01/01/2017	31/12/2017	Geothermal exploration well – shallow Well planning	Minimum depth 300m	
4	01/01/2018	31/12/2018	Geothermal exploration well – deep Extension well	Minimum depth 3000m (95 °C) Demonstrate closed-loop circulation, heat recovery	
5	01/01/2019	31/12/2019	Well study	Post well analysis (mapping)	
6	01/01/2020	31/12/2020	Commercial Studies	Preliminary feasibility study report	

4.1.5 Type of work

Exploration activities may incorporate data acquisition and/or exploration well(s) and include geological and geophysical surveying, exploration and appraisal drilling, study and testing of discoveries.

Geotechnical studies may include such things as regional seismic interpretation, regional basin modelling, seabed bathymetry analysis (offshore only), mapping of seismic data, play based exploration, horizon mapping, integrated geological and geophysical evaluations. The number and type of studies should be specified.

It is generally expected that companies will drill at least one well in the first six years of an exploration permit.

Work that has the highest potential to reduce the key exploration uncertainties and risks will be ranked higher.

In general, data acquisition is considered more favourably than studies, new data acquisition is considered greater than reprocessing, 3D seismic will be considered of greater value than 2D seismic, and well(s) are ranked superior to seismic surveys.

Appropriate use of survey acquisition and processing technology will be considered favourably.

4.1.6 Capability

If relevant, applicants that have identified risks that may prevent the proposed work program being completed in the firm period and have demonstrated intent to mitigate those risks will be assessed more favourably.

This may include the particulars identified in Minimum Criterion (MC 4) (3.4.3).

4.2 Ranking Criterion 2 (RC2): Financial capacity

The applicant that can demonstrate their access to financial resources sufficient to meet the title-related commitments of the application in addition to any existing titles, including work programs, decommissioning, rehabilitation, and remediation requirements will be assessed more favourably and ranked higher than an applicant that cannot articulate how funds will be secured.

Applicants able to provide evidence that shows they have access to a sufficient asset base to repay its liabilities, are not a high financial risk in terms of debt position and have sufficient financial leverage to fund the firm period work program (at a minimum), will be assessed more favourably.

4.3 Ranking Criterion 3 (RC3): Technical capability

Superior technical qualifications of employees and contractors will rank higher than those lesser qualified. Applicants that can demonstrate a prior working relationship or demonstrate existing agreements with third party contractors will be regarded more favourably.

4.4 Ranking Criterion 4 (RC4): Consideration of other matters

The Minister may take into consideration the applicant's past performance in relation to previous petroleum or geothermal tenure in Australia, or if relevant, elsewhere.

4.4.1 Past Performance

Applicants that have previously demonstrated successful execution of the proposed operations, either in the State, or in another jurisdiction will be ranked higher. Any history of failure to satisfy work commitments in previous or existing titles may be considered during ranking.

Particular consideration is given in situations where one or more of the applicants were participants in permits that had been cancelled because of a default in meeting work program commitments.

4.4.2 Other considerations

Applicants that have previously demonstrated successful execution of current and prior involvement in exploration and development in other national or international jurisdictions, including work commitments, heritage management issues and environmental management for other petroleum or geothermal tenure will be ranked higher.

5. Refusal to grant an exploration permit

Applicants should note that the Minister may refuse to grant a permit to an applicant in accordance with sections 32(1)(b) of the PGERA and 22(1)(b) of the PSLA. While the Acts do not specify the grounds for refusing to grant a permit, reasons may include:

- The application is assessed as not deserving of the grant of a permit.
- The application is assessed as deserving but inferior to that of another deserving applicant.
- The work program bid is inadequate to significantly advance the petroleum or geothermal energy resource potential of the area.
- The work program bid is not supported by a sound technical assessment.
- The Minister is not satisfied that the applicant possesses the financial or technical capacity to complete the work program bid.
- The Minister is not satisfied the applicant possesses the financial capacity to facilitate the proposed work program, or in addition to other guaranteed work program commitments in other titles which the applicant and/or parent company has an interest.
- The Minister is not satisfied that, based on past performance, the applicant will comply with permit conditions.

6. Re-release of acreage

Acreage release areas may be re-released, at the discretion of the Minister, if:

- the Minister does not receive an application considered deserving of the award of an exploration permit, or
- a deserving applicant is refused prior to the grant of an exploration permit.

Expressions of interest can be lodged via the call for nomination process.

Appendix 1: Minimum criteria and comparative assessment of competing bid applications

Table 1

Minimum criteria assessment of application	
Application	A
MC1 Technical capability	
MC2 Financial capacity	
MC3 Work and expenditure	
MC4 Consideration of other matters	

KEY:

Satisfied	Not Satisfied
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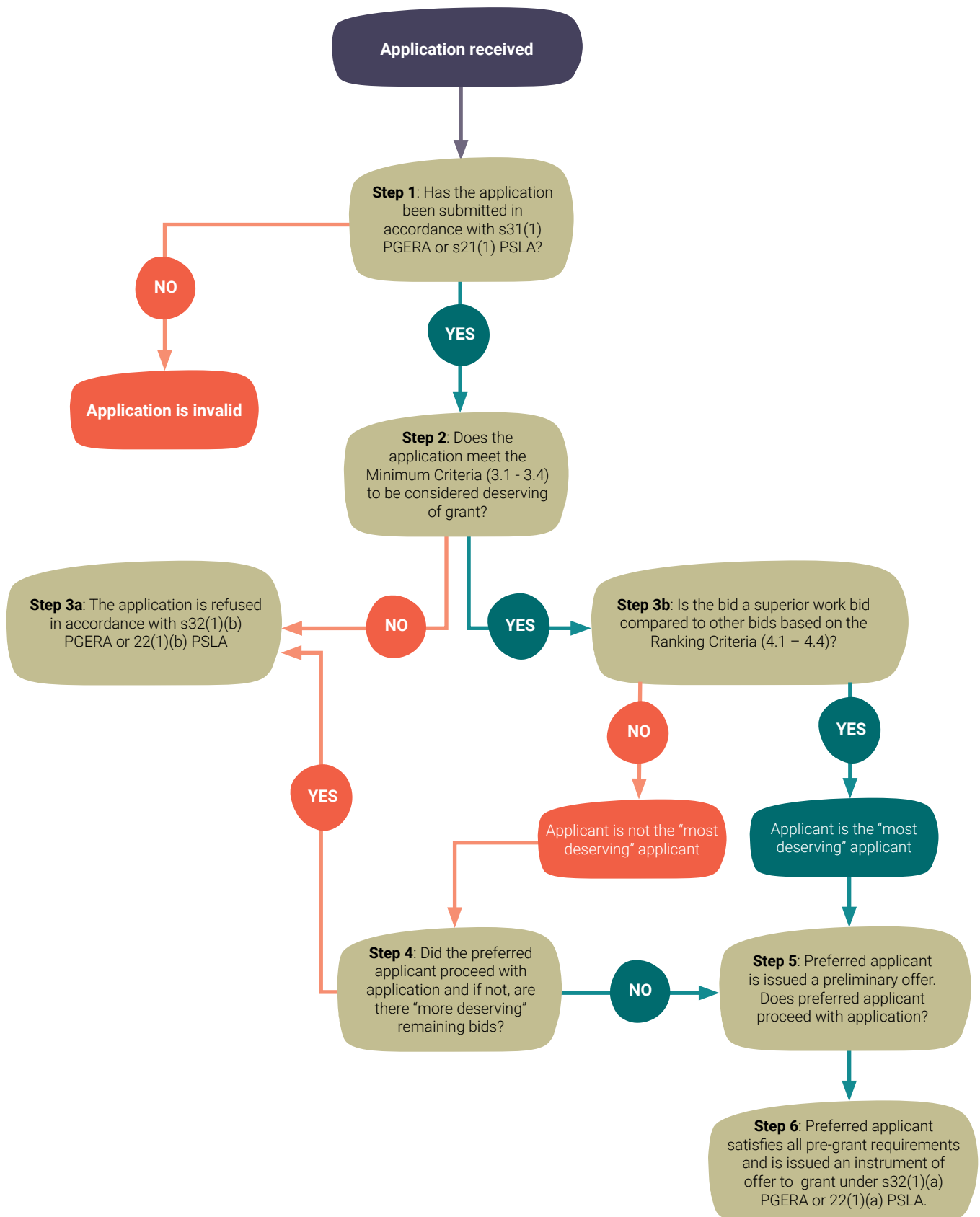
Table 2

Comparative assessment for competing bid applications		
Application	A	B
RC1 Technical capability		
RC2 Financial capacity		
RC3 Work and expenditure		
RC4 Consideration of other matters		
Most deserving rank	1	2

Key:

Superior	Relevant but inferior	Significantly inferior	Equal
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Process flow: Decision tree methodology for comparative assessment of competing bid applications to identify the most deserving applicant (s31 PGERA and s21 PSLA)



Government of Western Australia

**Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation
and Safety**

8.30am – 4.30pm

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