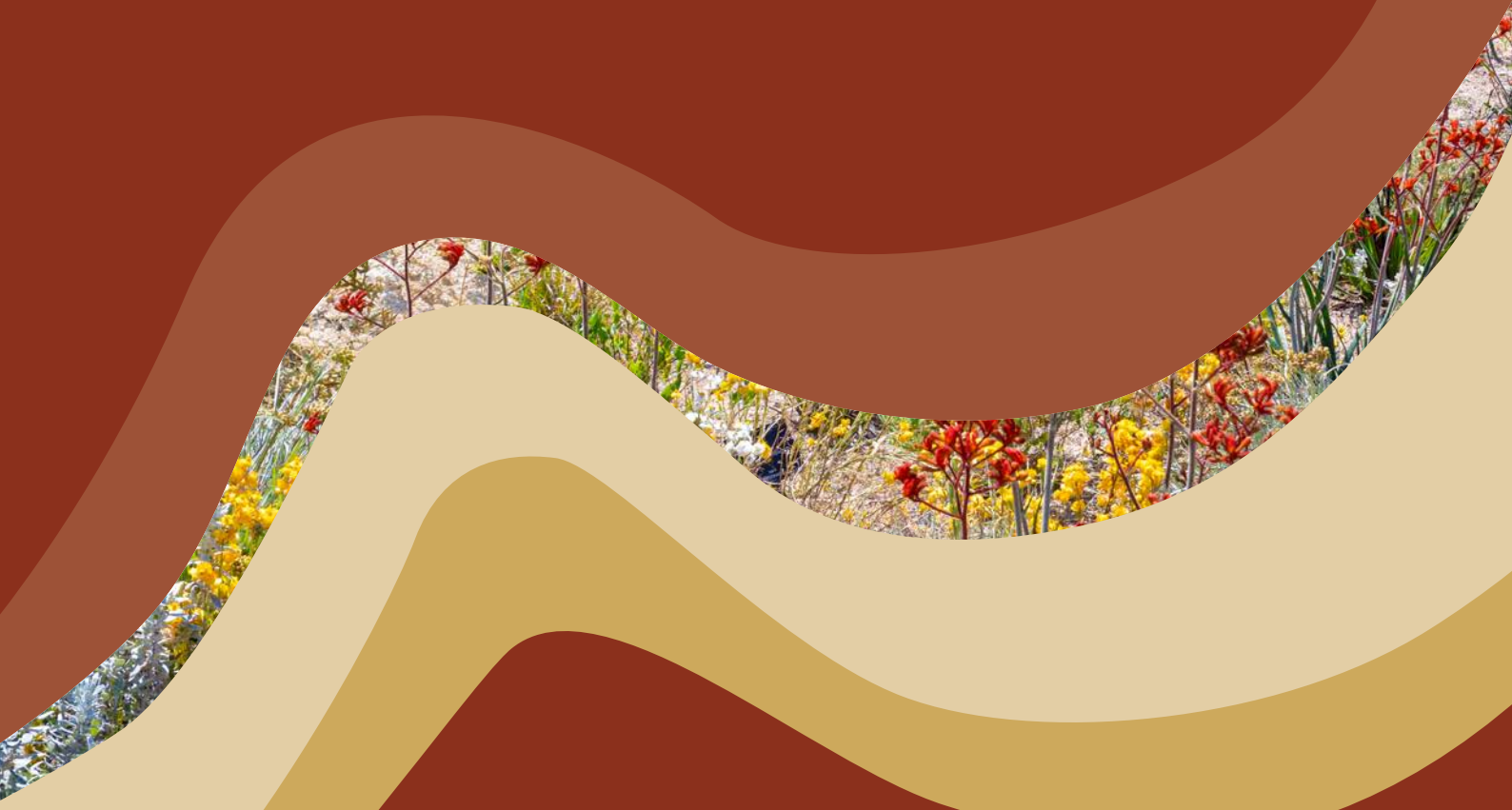
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of **Mines, Petroleum and Exploration**

Report

Annual environmental approvals analysis 2025–26





Contents

Foreword **3**

The year in review **5**

Analysis of end-to-end processing journeys **7**

PoW end-to-end processing analysis 7
PoW RFI analysis 9
Programmes of Work RFA analysis 12
Eligible Mining Activity notices 13
MDCP end-to-end processing analysis 14
MDCP RFI analysis 17
MDCP RFA analysis 19
Declined MDCPs 20
MDCPs in support of mining lease applications 21
NVCP end-to-end processing analysis 22
Native vegetation clearing permit response strategy 23
Response strategy outcomes 24

Looking forward: 2026–27 and beyond **26**

Strengthening approval coordination 26
Improving application quality and Resources Online processes 26
Improving inter-agency referrals 26
Measuring improvement 26

Disclaimer:

The information contained in this publication is provided in good faith and believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication.

Unless stated otherwise, all timeframes are in business days.

Foreword

The approvals system administered by the Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration (DMPE) plays an important role in facilitating responsible resource development in Western Australia while maintaining strong environmental outcomes. This review examines the key factors influencing the time taken to progress environmental approvals and identifies opportunities to improve the efficiency of the process.

Approval timeframes are influenced by a range of factors, including application quality and completeness, proposal complexity, requests for further information, assessment practices, proponent response times and the involvement of other government agencies.

Improving approval timeframes is therefore a shared responsibility and cannot be achieved through DMPE processing and assessment activity alone.

Recognising this, the review reinforces the importance of measuring performance across the entire approvals journey rather than focusing solely on departmental assessment time. Historically, DMPE has publicly reported on its performance against established assessment targets. While these measures remain important for transparency and accountability, they relate only to DMPE processing and assessment times and therefore reflect only one component of the broader approvals process. To provide a more complete picture, DMPE will continue reporting against its existing targets while also moving towards reporting on end-to-end approval timeframes. This approach will provide a more mature and accurate reflection of approvals performance, improve visibility of the factors influencing outcomes, and support a shared understanding of where system-wide improvements can be made.

The findings identify several opportunities to improve the approvals process. The next step is to translate these findings into practical action, focusing on reducing avoidable delays across the approvals journey while maintaining the quality and integrity of environmental decision-making. To support this, DMPE has developed performance targets across its key approval pathways, providing a meaningful basis for assessing performance over the coming year. The introduction of end-to-end reporting will further enable a more comprehensive assessment of whether the strategies outlined in this review are delivering their intended outcomes.

Importantly, the objective is not simply to process approvals faster. Appropriate time must be taken where applications are complex or involve greater environmental risk. The focus is instead on ensuring sufficient time is available to support sound decision-making, while reducing avoidable delay, duplication and inconsistency throughout the approvals process.

Table 1: Targets for improving approval timeframes in 2026–27

Approval type	Position at 30 June 2026	FY27 target	Objective
Native vegetation clearing permit (NVCP)	105 active applications	60 active applications	Reduce backlog to 60 active applications
Mining Development and Closure Proposal (MDCP)	45 days median for end-to-end processing	38 days median for end-to-end processing	15% reduction in end-to-end processing timeframes
Programme of Work (PoW)	14 days median for end-to-end processing	12 days median for end-to-end processing	15% reduction in end-to-end processing timeframes
Eligible Mining Activity (EMA) Notice	20 monthly EMAs	25 monthly EMAs	25% increase in EMA lodgement



For Mining Development and Closure Proposals (MDCPs) and Programmes of Work (PoW), DMPE will work with industry and other government agencies to achieve a 15 per cent reduction in median end-to-end approval timeframes (measured from application lodgement to decision) over the next financial year. The median is used rather than the average because a small number of very lengthy or complex applications can significantly skew the average and may not reflect the typical approval timeframe. The median is the point at which half of the approvals take less time, and half take longer. By focusing on end-to-end timeframes, this target measures the performance of the approvals system as a whole, rather than DMPE's processing time in isolation.

For native vegetation clearing permits (NVCPs), the immediate priority is to reduce the existing backlog to 60 active applications. Establishing this more sustainable baseline is a critical first step towards achieving ongoing improvements in assessment timeframes.

For Eligible Mining Activity (EMA) Notices, DMPE will work with industry to increase the submission of EMAs, supporting a more efficient approvals process by reducing the volume of PoWs requiring assessment and facilitating more timely authorisation of exploration and prospecting activities.

The targets outlined in this review are intended to provide a shared focus for industry, DMPE and other government agencies. DMPE will use the findings of this review to identify where changes to guidance, application requirements, assessment practices and coordination with proponents and other agencies can deliver the greatest improvement.

Success is more than faster processing. It is an approvals system that delivers timely, robust and proportionate decisions, with greater certainty for proponents and no compromise to environmental outcomes. These actions are intended to support a more consistent and proportionate approvals system, one that provides greater certainty for proponents, makes effective use of government resources and maintains the quality of environmental decision-making.

The year in review

The department is responsible for administering a range of environmental applications relevant to:

- exploration:
- prospecting;
- mining operations; and
- petroleum, geothermal, regulated substance, greenhouse and pipeline activities.

DMPE aims to finalise applications within target timeframes that are set out in its Environmental applications administrative procedures. Annual performance against target timeframes is provided in Table 2. For this analysis, 'finalised' refers to an application status of approved, refused, withdrawn or declined.

Table 2: Annual performance during 2025–26 against target timeframes for environmental approvals applications administered by DMPE

Application type	Number received	Number finalised	Target timeframe in business days	% finalised within target timeframe
Programme of Work (PoW)	3003	2958	15	69
Mining Development and Closure Proposal (MDCP)	218	138	30	70
Native vegetation clearing permit (NVCP)	162	167	60	14
Environment Plan (EP)	131	124	30 calendar days	48

As the MDCP framework commenced on 9 September 2025, the MDCP data does not encompass a full reporting period for the 2025–26 financial year. Additionally, the percentage finalised within target timeframe excludes declined applications. As 22 per cent of MDCPs were declined, generally on the day of receipt or within one business day, their inclusion materially influences the percentage of applications finalised within the target timeframe.

Environmental assessment timeframe performance during 2025–26 was significantly influenced by DMPE's mining and petroleum regulatory reform agenda. Major legislative reforms and the Resources Online digital transformation program required significant effort from existing DMPE resources to transition to new regulatory frameworks and business processes while also maintaining core regulatory functions.

During the year, DMPE completed its Fast-Tracking Mining Approvals (FTMA) reform initiative, a key component of the State Government's election commitment to streamline project approvals. The FTMA strategy has delivered benefits including improved assessment timeframes and efficiency, customer experience, and data and business intelligence.

A key component of the reform program was implementation of the *Mining Amendment Act 2022*, which introduced simplified and targeted approaches to mining environmental approvals, including MDCPs. Replacing the previous requirement for both a Mining Proposal (MP) and Mine Closure Plan (MCP) at the project approval stage, MDCPs reduce duplication and streamline assessment while maintaining environmental outcomes.



Since commencement of the MDCP framework, the average decision timeframe for an MDCP was 27 business days, less than half the 58 business days recorded for MPs prior to implementation. While the target of 80 per cent of decisions being made within 30 business days has not yet been achieved for MDCPs, the current position of 70 per cent of applications finalised within target demonstrates a significant improvement in timeliness, particularly when compared to the pre-reform position, where 24 per cent of MPs were completed within target timeframes.

Implementation of the new framework also created a significant transition workload. Approximately three times the normal monthly volume of MP applications were received prior to commencement, with 98 applications subsequently requiring manual transition to the MDCP framework. By 30 June 2026, 85 per cent had been finalised. DMPE avoided the need for proponents to withdraw and resubmit these applications by managing this transition internally.

Increased application volumes, proposal complexity and resource requirements associated with the reform program affected assessment performance during the year. DMPE responded by procuring additional assessment resources, strengthening case management and increasing industry engagement. Performance improved significantly during the latter part of the reporting year, with 93 per cent of Programmes of Work (PoW) finalised within target during the final six months of 2025–26. The Eligible Mining Activity (EMA) framework also removed approximately 2,000 business days from the assessment process for eligible exploration and prospecting activities.

Native vegetation clearing permit (NVCP) assessment performance continued to be challenged by increased industry activity, application surges, staff turnover and increasing complexity. Increasing assessment timeframes and application backlog led to DMPE implementing an NVCP Response Strategy in October 2025, including procuring additional resources, enhancing industry communication and strengthening case management. Since implementation of the strategy, the Division has increased its decision-making rate by 40 per cent, with 168 decisions completed during the reporting period, compared with 120 over the same period last financial year, supporting a reduction in the backlog and improved assessment timeframes.

While NVCP assessment performance remains below target in 2025–26, the improvement demonstrates the impact of the targeted measures implemented, with further work underway to return performance to sustainable levels.

Overall, the Division's assessment performance across all approval types improved materially during the latter part of 2025–26 as the reform program became embedded. The significant improvements in MDCP and PoW performance, together with increased NVCP throughput, demonstrate that the reforms and targeted operational responses are delivering tangible efficiency benefits while maintaining robust regulatory and environmental assessment standards.

Analysis of end-to-end processing journeys

The following sections provide an overview of the end-to-end processing journey of DMPE's key environmental approvals submitted during the 2025–26 period, focusing on DMPE processing time, time spent on hold (stop-the-clock) pending additional information or advice and other matters impacting approval timeframes.

Requests for Further Information (RFI) refers to the process where the applicant was contacted by DMPE to provide missing or clarifying information. Requests for Advice (RFAs) refers to the process where DMPE sought advice from other external government agencies.

RFAs were most commonly sought from:

- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)
- Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER)
  - Water services
  - Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)
- Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (LGIRS).

PoW end-to-end processing analysis

Key processing times for PoWs during the reporting period are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Key processing times for Programme of Work applications finalised during the 2025–26 reporting period

	Average DMPE processing time in business days	Median DMPE processing time in business days	Average end-to-end processing time in business days	Median end-to-end processing time in business days
Finalised PoW applications	10	8	20	14

To better understand the factors influencing PoW processing timeframes, DMPE undertook an end-to-end processing analysis of the assessment pathway during the reporting period, examining:

- the average end-to-end journey of applications through the assessment process;
- the frequency of key events that may place an application on hold; and
- the duration of key events that placed an application on hold.

Figure 1 illustrates these pathways from application through to final outcome and provides insight into where time is spent and where opportunities exist to improve overall processing efficiency.

RFI and RFA timeframes represent the average duration of those events where they occur and should not be added to the overall end-to-end processing timeframe. Some applications may experience multiple or overlapping RFI and RFA events, while others progress without either event, meaning percentages may not add up to 100 per cent.

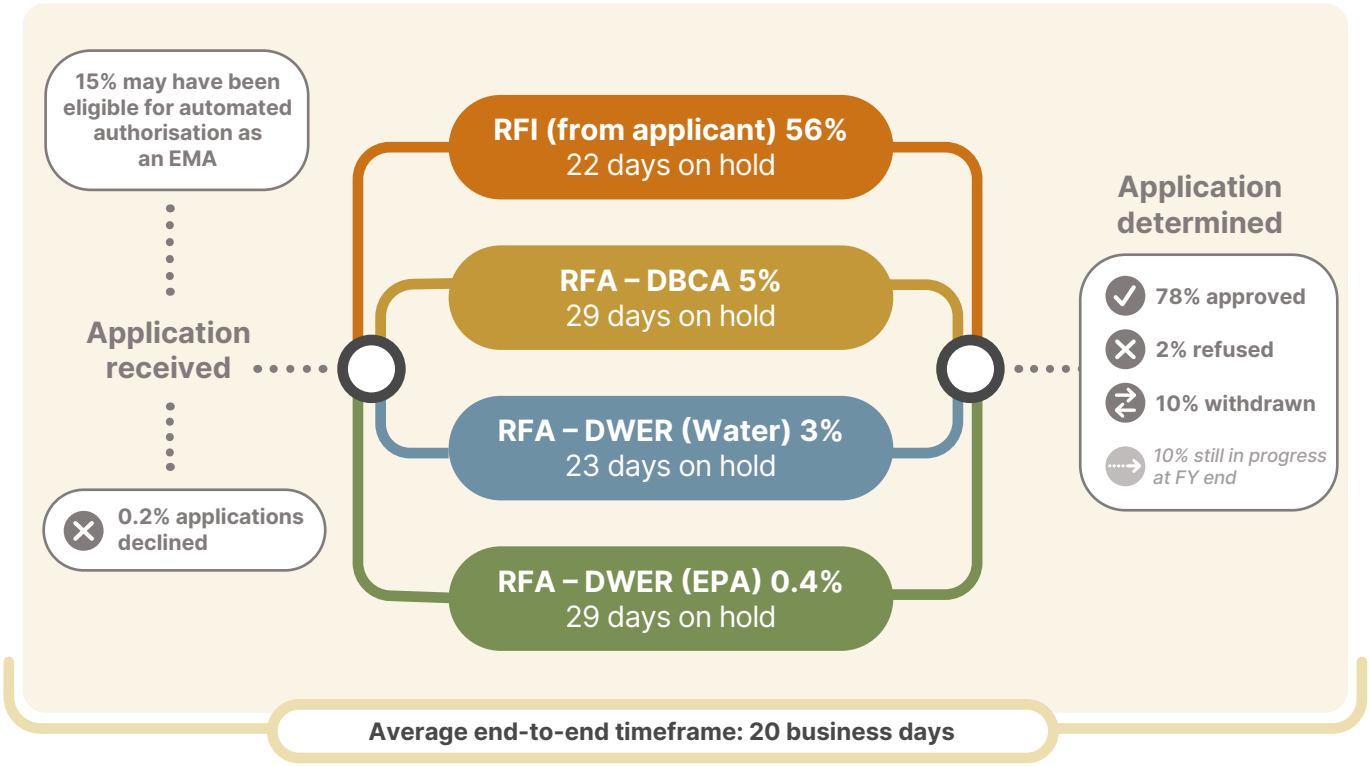


Figure 1: Average assessment pathway for PoW applications submitted during the 2025–26 reporting period showing RFI and RFA pathways, the percentage of total applications requiring each pathway, and average time taken for each event

Further analysis of the drivers of RFIs and RFAs and the opportunities identified to improve the assessment pathway is provided in the following section.

Ongoing work for DMPE: The RFI and RFA data presented in this report describes the nature and frequency of information requested during assessment. On its own, it does not capture the context in which individual requests were made. The next phase of work will involve a more detailed examination of the circumstances and outcomes associated with RFIs and RFAs to identify opportunities for continuous improvement for both industry and DMPE, including enhancing application quality, promoting consistency and proportionality in information requests, and ensuring assessment requirements remain commensurate with the risks and complexities of individual applications.

PoW RFI analysis

The improved data available through Resources Online provides DMPE with greater visibility of the types of information requested by the department during assessment, the frequency with which issues arise, and the time associated with resolving them. This provides an evidence base for identifying opportunities to improve application quality, applicant guidance, system design and assessment practices.

Biodiversity (35 per cent) and disturbance matters (31 per cent) account for approximately two-thirds of all RFI items issued during the reporting period. Other recurring themes include general assessment matters, water management, access and tenement conditions. The distribution of RFIs by category is provided in Figure 2, with average timeframes associated with each category provided in Figure 3.

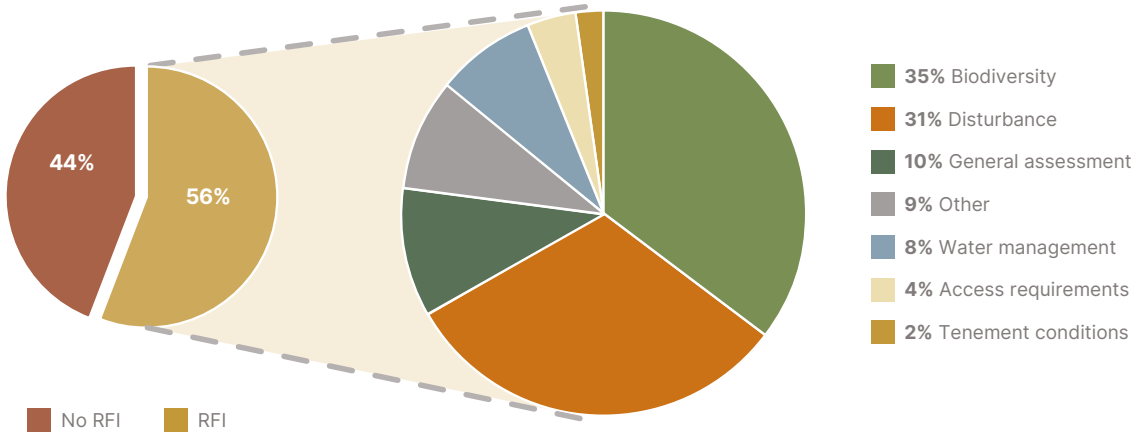


Figure 2: Proportion of PoW applications subject to an RFI, and breakdown of RFI categories

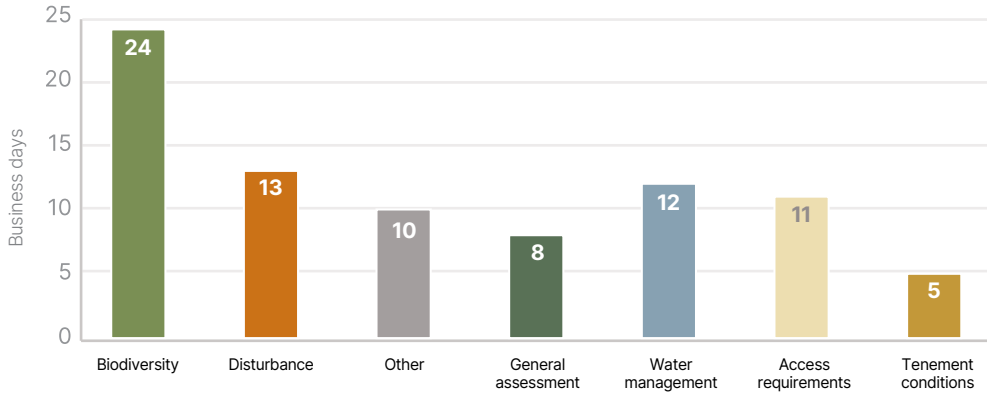


Figure 3: Average time (in business days) to resolve RFIs in each category



The data also demonstrates the impact of repeat RFI cycles. Approximately 16 per cent of applications subject to an RFI required more than one substantive round of information requests, with applications involving multiple rounds experiencing materially longer processing timeframes than those resolved through a single round.

While additional RFIs may be necessary where new matters emerge during assessment, this finding highlights the importance of applicants providing comprehensive responses to matters raised and DMPE clearly identifying all additional information required when an RFI is first issued.

A substantial proportion of RFIs also relate to matters that can potentially be addressed earlier in the process at the submission stage. Common examples include:

- clarification of proposed activities and disturbance;
- inconsistencies within application information;
- missing supporting information; and
- prerequisite tenure or consent matters.

These provide practical opportunities for both industry and DMPE to reduce the frequency of RFIs through improved application preparation and review prior to submission, clearer guidance, better application design and enhanced Resources Online validation.

Biodiversity RFIs

Approximately one-third of RFI items related to biodiversity matters. The most common information requests were:

- for biological survey information where proposed activities intersected areas containing, or potentially containing, conservation-significant species or ecological communities; and
- further information about measures proposed to avoid, minimise or manage impacts to these environmental values.

Biodiversity RFIs took an average of 24 business days to resolve (approximately 50 per cent longer than other RFI types), reflecting, among other factors, the complexity of some assessments involving conservation-significant environmental values and in some cases, the need to obtain specialist advice from other government agencies.

Consistent with DMPE's Environmental objectives policy for mining, sufficient information must be provided with an application in order for DMPE to understand the likely environmental impact and risks associated with proposed activities and whether those risks can be appropriately avoided, minimised or managed. The level of information provided with an application should be proportionate to the nature and scale of the environmental risk presented by the proposal. While all PoW submissions include a standard set of management commitments designed to address common environmental obligations, proposals that present higher or more complex environmental risks may require additional supporting information to demonstrate how those risks will be appropriately identified, managed and mitigated.

Learnings for industry: Where conservation-significant species or ecological communities are known or likely to occur and may be affected by proposed activities, applicants are encouraged to provide relevant and sufficiently current biological information and details of proposed management measures with their application. Providing appropriate information upfront can assist DMPE to assess potential impacts and determine whether specialist advice from another agency is required.

Learnings for DMPE: During 2026–27, DMPE will look to develop additional external guidance on addressing environmental risk in PoW applications. The guidance will assist industry to better understand how the nature, scale and location of proposed activities, and the sensitivity of environmental values, influence the information and level of detail expected in a PoW application. This work will help reduce the need for RFIs, support greater consistency between assessing officers, and promote a risk-based and proportionate approach to information requests, while recognising evolving community expectations regarding environmental protection.

Disturbance RFIs

Disturbance RFIs commonly related to:

- the nature and size of proposed activities;
- activity dimensions and density, including drill pad size and spacing;
- cumulative disturbance;
- disturbance associated with access; and
- whether the activities recorded in the application accurately reflected the proposed programme.

Despite occurring at a similar frequency to biodiversity RFIs, disturbance RFIs took an average of 13 business days to resolve. Many involved comparatively straightforward clarification or correction of information contained within an application.

Of particular note, 12 per cent of disturbance RFIs sought confirmation that the nature and scale of activities recorded in the submitted PoW were correct. Common examples included discrepancies between the number of drill holes, drill pads and sumps recorded in the application. Clarification is important to ensure that approved activities accurately reflect the proposed programme and to reduce the risk of proponents inadvertently undertaking activities outside the scope of an approval.

Learnings for industry: Applicants are encouraged to carefully review PoWs before submission to ensure proposed activities and disturbance are accurately represented and, if relevant, explain any intentional differences between activity numbers. Where proposed disturbance is larger than normally expected for exploration, or significant cumulative disturbance is present, sufficient supporting information should be provided to explain why the disturbance is required and how environmental impacts will be minimised and managed.

Learnings for DMPE: The frequency of relatively straightforward disturbance RFIs indicates opportunities to improve application design and Resources Online validation. DMPE will investigate options to identify inconsistencies between activity numbers, dimensions and spatial disturbance earlier in the submission process, supported by clearer guidance and worked examples.

Other recurring RFI themes

Water management: Most RFIs in this category concerned potential impacts to waterways and riparian vegetation. These commonly arose where buffered disturbance areas intersected waterways or drainage lines, even where impacts were not intended. Applicants are encouraged to review intersected environmental features when preparing a PoW, use the Resources Online excise functionality where appropriate and provide management information where impacts cannot be avoided.

Access: RFIs commonly sought confirmation that disturbance associated with vehicle and equipment access had been appropriately accounted for and that relevant access requirements had been addressed. In more than 100 applications, access tracks were not proposed despite activities occurring within areas of native vegetation. Applicants must ensure all disturbance necessary to undertake the programme, including access, is appropriately represented in the application.

General assessment: A significant proportion of RFIs within this category related to following up previously requested information. Applications awaiting a response remain on hold and require additional administrative effort to manage. Applicants are therefore encouraged to respond to RFIs within the timeframes established in DMPE's Environmental applications administrative procedures and follow up communications from the department, and proactively contact DMPE where additional time is required.

Programmes of Work RFA analysis

Resources Online also provides greater visibility of the circumstances in which DMPE sought technical or specialist advice from other government agencies. During the reporting period, only a small proportion (8 per cent) of submitted PoWs required referral for external advice. Where requests for advice were made, the majority went to DBCA, followed by DWER Water Services and EPA Services respectively. Applications may be subject to more than one RFA where advice from multiple agencies is required.

A detailed breakdown of receiving agencies for RFAs, with average business days to resolve the RFA is provided in Figure 4.

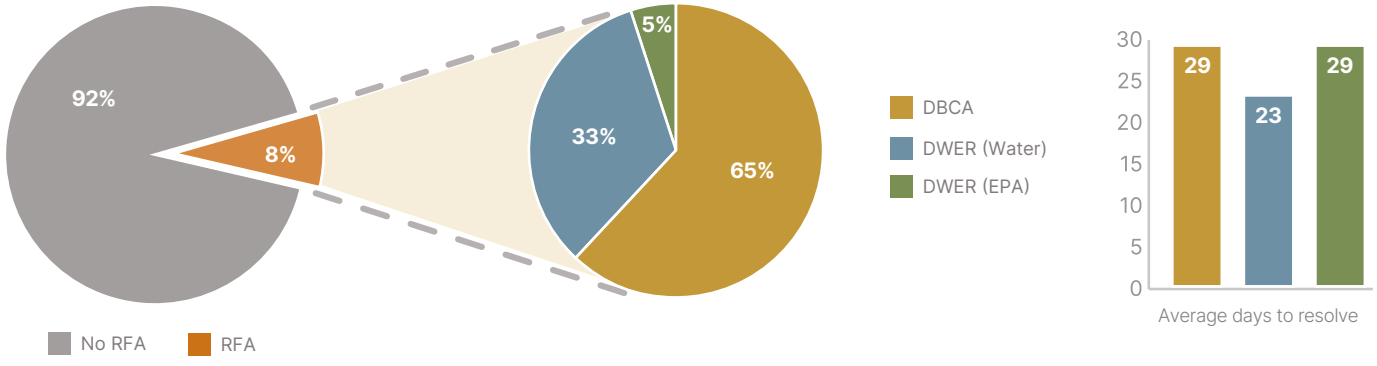


Figure 4: Proportion of PoW applications subject to an RFA, distribution of RFAs across external agencies, and average days to resolve RFA

Analysis of the matters referred indicates that potential impacts to biodiversity were the principal driver of requests for specialist or technical advice during the reporting period, consistent with DBCA accounting for almost two-thirds of RFAs.

DMPE has administrative agreements with other regulatory agencies that establish when consultation or specialist advice may be required. While some referrals are required in defined circumstances, in other cases the agreements provide for advice to be sought where an application has the potential to result in significant or negative impacts to specified environmental values.

Learnings for industry: Applicants are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the relevant Administrative Agreements and consider potential referral triggers when preparing an application. Where proposed activities may affect environmental features covered by these agreements, applications should be supported by sufficient information to demonstrate how impacts will be avoided, minimised and managed. Providing this information upfront can assist DMPE to determine whether specialist advice is necessary and where a referral is still required, facilitate a more efficient review by proactively addressing matters likely to arise during the receiving agency's assessment.

Learnings for DMPE: DMPE recognises that regulatory duplication and the time associated with external referrals are important considerations for industry. DMPE continues to work with other regulatory agencies to clarify respective roles and responsibilities and identify opportunities to streamline assessment pathways.

During the reporting period, DMPE worked with DWER to update Schedule 7 of the DWER–DMPE Administrative Agreement, providing greater clarity on when applications with the potential to impact water resources should be referred for comment, and streamlining the process for seeking advice.

A similar review of the DBCA–DMPE Administrative Agreement is scheduled to commence in late 2026. Findings from the 2025–26 RFA analysis will inform this work, with a focus on ensuring requests for advice are targeted to circumstances where there is a clear regulatory need and potential for environmental impact, supporting a more risk-based and efficient assessment process.

In parallel, DMPE will continue to build capability within its assessment teams to promote consistency in determining when specialist advice is required and to ensure referrals are appropriately targeted to proposals where external expertise will materially assist the assessment.

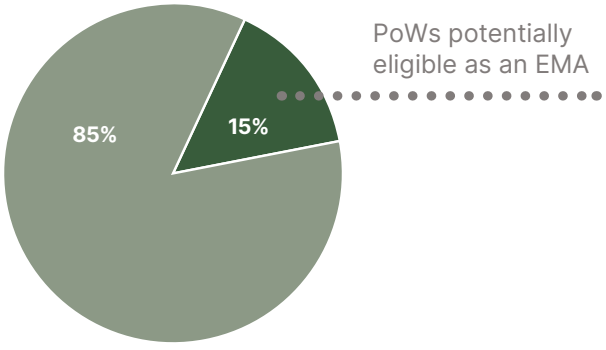
Eligible Mining Activity notices

Under the EMA Framework, applicants can obtain immediate authorisation for certain low-impact exploration and prospecting activities by submitting an EMA Notice through Resources Online. An applicant can commence work as soon as the notice has been successfully lodged, removing the assessment wait time and assessment journey associated with PoWs.

During the reporting period, DMPE received 240 Eligible Mining Activity (EMA) notices, removing approximately 2400 business days from the assessment process for exploration and prospecting activities, streamlining the approvals process for applicants and enabling DMPE resources to focus on higher risk applications.

Resources Online allows DMPE to track whether PoWs submitted may have been eligible for fast tracking under the EMA Framework by identifying PoWs that meet system-measurable EMA criteria. In 2025–26, almost 15 per cent of exploration and prospecting activities applied for via a PoW would have been eligible for immediate authorisation using the EMA Notice application pathway (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Proportion of PoWs submitted in 2025–26 which met system measurable EMA criteria





Learnings for Industry: Industry are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the EMA Framework and consider if future proposed exploration and prospecting activities could be applied for using the EMA framework. Further information on the framework is available on the DMPE website.

Learnings for DMPE: In 2026-27, DMPE will focus on promoting the framework more broadly, increasing industry awareness of its benefits and identifying barriers that may be limiting its use.

MDCP end-to-end processing analysis

Key processing times for MDCPs during the reporting period are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Key processing times for Mining Development and Closure Proposals finalised during the 2025–26 reporting period

	Average DMPE processing time in business days	Median DMPE processing time in business days	Average end-to-end processing time in business days	Median end-to-end processing time in business days
All finalised MDCP applications	18	12	37	24
Finalised MDCP applications excluding declined submissions	25	23	55	45

To better understand the factors influencing MDCP processing timeframes, DMPE undertook an analysis of the MDCP end-to-end assessment pathway during the reporting period. The analysis examines the end-to-end movement of applications from submission to final outcome, including periods of active DMPE assessment and periods where applications are on hold awaiting further information or external advice.

Figure 6 illustrates the main assessment pathways and key stop-the-clock events, with the following sections providing further commentary on these events.

RFI and RFA timeframes represent the average duration of those events where they occur and should not be added to the overall end-to-end processing timeframe. Some applications may experience multiple or overlapping RFI and RFA events, while others progress without either event, meaning percentages may not add up to 100 per cent.

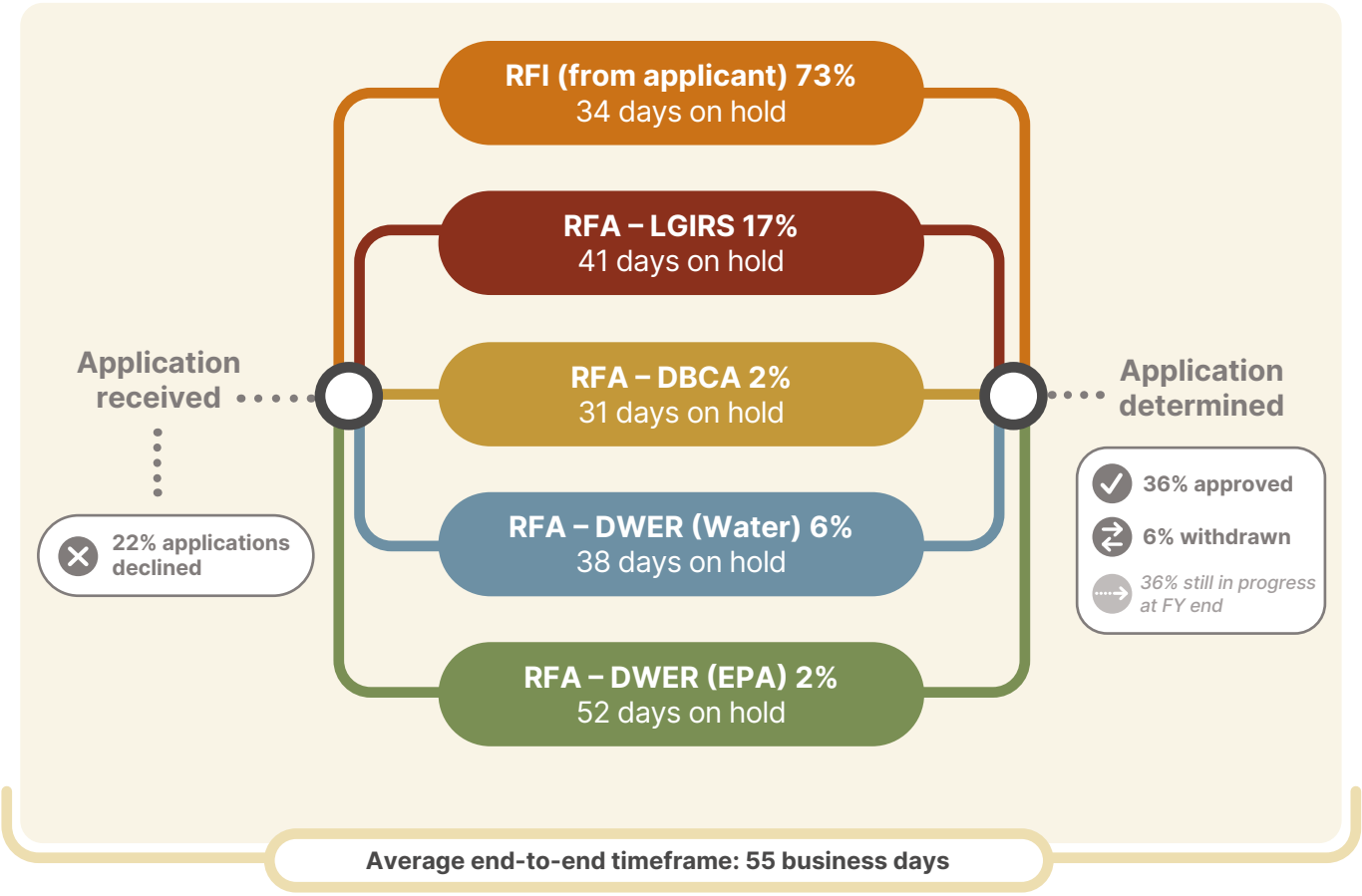


Figure 6: Average assessment pathway for MDCP applications submitted during the 2025–26 reporting period showing RFI and RFA pathways, the percentage of total applications requiring each pathway, and average time taken for each event

Figure 6 reflects the average assessment journey of an MDCP. A breakdown of the complexity of MDCP applications received and the percentage of each requiring an RFI is provided in Figure 7.

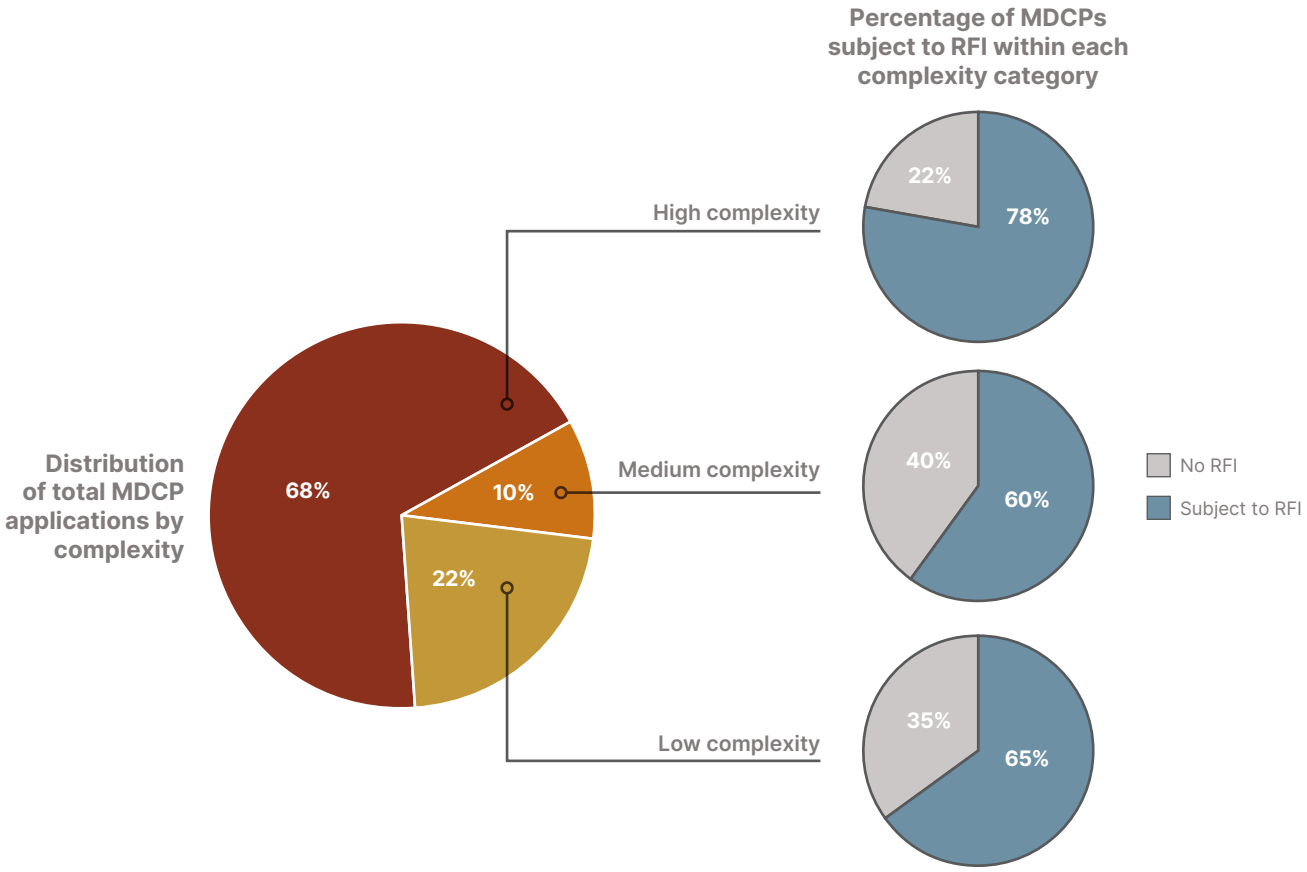


Figure 7: Breakdown of MDCP applications by complexity, and frequency of RFIs at each MDCP complexity level for the 2025–26 reporting period.

An analysis of the influence of application complexity on key assessment timeframes is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Key processing times for Mining Development and Closure Proposals at each complexity level

	Percentage finalised within target timeframe	Average DMPE processing time in business days	Median DMPE processing time in business days	Average end-to-end processing time in business days	Median end-to-end processing time in business days
Low complexity MDCP	**91**	19	18	40	29
Medium complexity MDCP	**100**	18	20	56	42
High complexity MDCP	**61**	28	21	59	48

Almost one in five MDCPs submitted were declined by DMPE (not accepted for environmental assessment). This highlights a further opportunity to consider whether clearer application requirements, guidance or pre-lodgement checks could assist applicants to submit proposals that are ready to progress to assessment. Further information on the reasons for declined applications is provided in the 'Declined MDCPs' section.

MDCP RFI analysis

During the reporting period, 158 MDCP applications were subject to an RFI event with 532 substantive RFI items identified (an RFI may contain multiple RFI items). The following sections provide an overview of common RFI themes, and opportunities for industry and DMPE to reduce, where possible, the frequency of these requests.

Almost one third of RFI-affected MDCP applications were subject to more than one RFI event. Repeat RFIs can arise for a range of reasons, including:

- incomplete responses;
- changes to proposals, and/or
- additional matters identified during assessment or specialist review.

Understanding and addressing the drivers of repeat information exchanges presents an opportunity to improve assessment efficiency for both applicants and DMPE.

Proposal and activity definition RFIs

Approximately 26 per cent of substantive RFI items related to defining the proposal and proposed activities. Common requests concerned clarifying aspects relating to key mining activities, activity envelopes and disturbance footprints, site plans, spatial information, and the overall scope of the proposal. A recurring issue was inconsistency between information contained in Resources Online, the MDCP document, activity tables, site plans and spatial files. RFIs also sought clarification on whether activities were existing or proposed, and on the maximum extent of proposed disturbance.

Clarifying these matters through an RFI is critical to ensuring that proposed activities, including their scope, nature and extent, are accurately understood and appropriately recorded on the Approvals Statement.

RFI example – consistency of proposal information
In one MDCP application, a number of supporting mining activities reflected on the site plan were not reflected or recorded in table 1. The RFI identified that these activities had been mistakenly omitted from the table. Had the matter not been identified, disturbance associated with these activities would not have been approved or recorded on the resultant Approvals Statement, meaning a subsequent MDCP would have needed to seek approval for these activities.

For industry: Applicants are encouraged to undertake a final consistency check before submission to ensure information included in the Resources Online submission, spatial data and information contained within the MDCP attachment document is consistent.

For DMPE: The frequency of these RFIs indicates opportunities for improved Resources Online validation, clearer guidance and pre-lodgement checks to identify inconsistencies earlier.



Environmental data and analysis, risk and outcomes RFIs

A further 26 per cent of substantive RFI items related to incomplete or insufficient environmental data and analysis, or inconsistencies between the environmental information presented and the resulting risk assessment. Where environmental information was limited, incomplete, not comprehensively analysed or not clearly linked to the risk assessment, there was often uncertainty as to whether all relevant risk pathways had been identified and appropriately assessed. This, in turn, affected the ability to demonstrate how risks would be managed, establish clear environmental and closure outcomes, and develop appropriate completion criteria and monitoring programs. In these scenarios, RFIs were required for DMPE to determine whether the potential impacts of proposed activities could be effectively managed in a manner consistent with its environmental objectives.

RFI example – completion criteria

In one example, the project description and environmental data indicated that groundwater was likely to be encountered during operations. This was not reflected in the risk assessment, which only considered groundwater impacts at closure. As no groundwater-related risks during operations had been considered, no corresponding environmental outcomes or monitoring requirements had been established. This meant DMPE was unable to determine whether groundwater impacts from the proposed activities could be effectively managed in accordance with its Environmental objectives policy for mining.

For industry: MDCPs must demonstrate a clear relationship between environmental data and environmental risk through to management, outcomes, completion criteria and monitoring. Appendix 4 of DMPE's Guideline for preparing Mining Development and Closure Proposal, includes detailed information on the link between environmental data, risk identification and assessment.

For DMPE: Additional worked examples will be considered showing how environmental data, risk assessment, outcomes, completion criteria and monitoring should operate together and continue to support consistent expectations that are proportionate to the risk and complexity of individual proposals.

Materials, geochemistry and closure design RFIs

Approximately 12 per cent of substantive RFI items related to materials, soils and geochemistry, with a further 11 per cent relating to closure design and rehabilitation.

Common matters included soil and topsoil inventories, material balances, waste-rock and geochemical characterisation, including potential acid and metalliferous drainage. Closure RFIs included geotechnical stability, zones of instability, rehabilitation, and the design of waste-rock landforms and other mine features. These matters are often technically complex and may require additional investigation or specialist information as a proposal develops.

RFI example – geochemical characterisation

In one application, the MDCP stated that the proposed pit would have a maximum depth of 80 metres. However, the waste characterisation data included with the application indicated that the deepest sample collected during waste characterisation was from a depth of only 50 metres. As a result, a request for further information was generated to clarify the absence of waste characterisation sampling between 50 and 80 metres. This information was necessary to enable DMPE to appropriately assess any potential risks and environmental impacts associated with materials that may be encountered at the deeper sections of the proposed pit, and to determine whether DMPE's objective for terrestrial environmental quality (to maintain the quality of land and soils so that environmental values are protected) could be met.

For industry: Technical information should be representative of the proposed development and clearly carried through into risk assessment, design, management and closure planning. Where uncertainty remains, it should be identified together with how it will be addressed.

For DMPE: Consideration will be given to where clearer technical guidance and worked examples could reduce uncertainty about information requirements, while recognising that requirements will vary with the risk and complexity of each proposal.

MDCP RFA analysis

The RFA data provides further insight into where specialist advice from other government agencies contributes to MDCP processing timeframes. A significant component of the external referral pathway during the reporting period related to geotechnical assessment of high-risk or significant landforms.

Geotechnical referrals

During the reporting period, 17 per cent of submitted MDCPs were referred to the WorkSafe area of the LGIRS for geotechnical assessment. These referrals took an average of 41 business days to resolve.

Specialist geotechnical advice is often required where significant landforms are proposed to ensure they are designed, operated and closed in a manner that is physically safe and geotechnically stable.

Prior to the 2025 Machinery of Government changes, this advice was provided within the former Department of Mines, Energy, Industry Regulation and Safety. As WorkSafe and environmental assessment functions were both within the same department, geotechnical review formed part of the overall assessment timeframe and was not recorded as a formal external referral or stop-the-clock event.

Following the transfer of WorkSafe functions to LGIRS on 1 June 2025, requests for geotechnical advice became inter-agency referrals. Applications are now placed on hold while this advice is obtained, making the time associated with geotechnical assessment more visible through the RFA process.

Importantly, this does not represent a new assessment requirement. Geotechnical advice has historically been sought for proposals involving higher-risk or significant landforms. As part of the transition to the MDCP framework, DMPE also reviewed its referral criteria to place greater emphasis on the nature, scale and risk of proposed landforms and introduced an additional internal review before a geotechnical RFA is issued.

For industry: The increased visibility of geotechnical RFAs should not be interpreted as an increase in the underlying requirement for geotechnical review. Applicants proposing significant or higher-risk landforms should ensure relevant design and geotechnical information is provided upfront to support efficient specialist review where it is required.

For DMPE: Development of an Administrative Agreement with LGIRS is underway to provide a clearer framework for referrals and response timeframes. DMPE is also exploring opportunities to strengthen its in-house geotechnical capability, reducing reliance on external referrals where appropriate while maintaining specialist scrutiny of higher-risk proposals.



Other RFAs

Other RFAs during the reporting period sought specialist advice on biodiversity and water management matters. As with geotechnical referrals, DMPE will use the RFA data to better understand where external advice is adding time to the assessment pathway and whether referral triggers and information requirements can be made clearer.

Declined MDCPs

As reported above, almost one in five MDCPs submitted were declined in accordance with DMPE's Environmental Applications Administrative Procedures (meaning they did not progress for environmental assessment) during the reporting period.

The primary reasons for applications being declined are explored in Table 6.

Table 6: Primary procedural reasons for declined MDCP applications in 2025–26

Reason	% of MDCP applications declined	Further information
Inconsistencies with tenement details and/or application lodged against incorrect Mining Environmental Group (MEG)	41	Where there is an existing mining operation, a MDCP must be linked to the appropriate existing MEG to ensure the subsequent approvals statement is issued for the correct mining operation.
Form and content of MDCP not in accordance with relevant legislation.	34	The specific content requirements of an MDCP are set out in the *Mining Act 1978* and Regulations. To constitute a valid MDCP, applications must include this content in the format set out in DMPE's Guideline for Preparing Mining Development and Closure Proposals.
Ineligible use of MDCP for small mining operations form**.**	14	In accordance with DMPE's Small mining operations policy, the MDCP for small mining operations form can only be used in circumstances where an operation meets DMPE's definition of a small mining operation.
Application submitted on pending primary tenure.	4	Primary tenure (i.e. a mining lease) must be in place for DMPE to accept an MDCP for assessment.
Other	7	Administrative errors with submission including issues with required attachments (e.g. MDCP shapefiles)

MDCPs in support of mining lease applications

In previous years, the process illustrated in Figure 6 would have included an additional "on hold waiting for grant of tenure" pathway, reflecting DMPE's practice of parallel processing mining proposals submitted in support of mining lease applications (MPMLA) alongside the tenure application process.

Under this approach, when an MPMLA was submitted, DMPE would undertake a full environmental assessment of the mining proposal prior to the underlying mining lease being granted. Once the assessment was complete, the application would typically be placed on hold pending the outcome of the tenure process, as a mining approval cannot be finalised until there is live primary tenure in place. Following the grant of tenure, the mining proposal would then proceed to approval. In some cases, this occurred many months, or even years, after the initial submission.

As part of the transition to the MDCP framework, DMPE reviewed this process to better understand the regulatory effort being invested in the assessment of MPMLAs prior to tenure grant. DMPE analysed five years of MPMLA data to assess the effectiveness of this approach. The review sought to quantify the regulatory resources committed to assessing proposals before tenure certainty was established and to determine whether those resources could be more effectively directed towards projects with a clearer pathway to development.

Between 1 June 2020 and 30 June 2025, DMPE received 463 MPMLAs, with the average DMPE assessment timeframe for these applications being 41 business days. The status of these applications as of 1 July 2025 is reflected below in Figure 8.

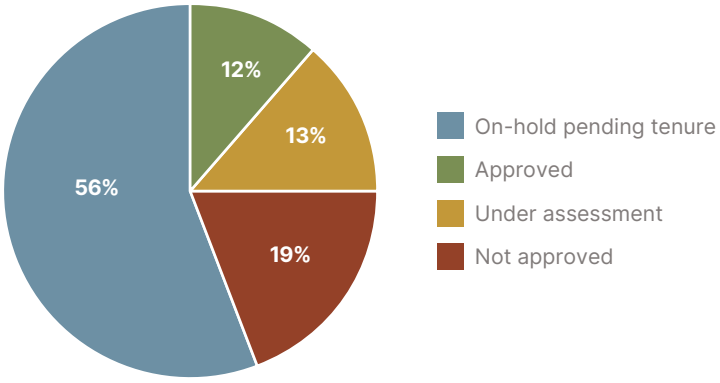


Figure 8: Status of mining proposals submitted in support of a mining lease application (MPMLA) between 1 July 2020 and 1 July 2025, as of 1 July 2025

The available data suggests:

- More than half of applications remain on hold awaiting tenure outcomes.
- Applications that ultimately progressed to approval spent an average of six months on hold pending grant of tenure (noting this is likely a conservative estimate as it excludes applications that remain on hold).
- Only a relatively small proportion of applications ultimately achieved approval.
- Nearly one fifth of applications never proceeded to approval.



Of the applications that did not proceed to approval, applying the average assessment time of 41 days indicates approximately 3,649 assessment days were invested in applications that ultimately did not proceed.

The data reflects significant commitment of regulatory resources that could have been directed towards assessing projects with tenure certainty and a clearer pathway to development.

DMPE Actions: Whilst parallel processing remains an important regulatory tool for streamlining the assessment of mining applications, benefits must be balanced against the efficient allocation of regulatory resources. DMPE is trialling a revised approach to processing MDCPs submitted in support of a mining lease application.

DMPE will continue to accept MDCPs at the time a mining lease application is lodged and conduct an initial verification to confirm the MDCP satisfies the approved form and content requirements under the *Mining Act 1978* and Mining Regulations 1981 and is a valid application for the purpose of supporting a mining lease application. Once tenure is granted, the applicant will then be advised to lodge the MDCP through Resources Online for environmental assessment. This approach is intended to better align assessment effort with projects that have achieved tenure certainty. The revised process will be implemented on a 12-month trial basis and reviewed following commencement to evaluate its effectiveness and identify any further opportunities to improve regulatory efficiency and resource allocation.

NVCP end-to-end processing analysis

To better understand the factors influencing NVCP processing timeframes, DMPE undertook an end-to-end processing analysis of the NVCP assessment pathway during the reporting period. The analysis examines the average end-to-end journey of applications through the assessment process, including the frequency and duration of key events that may place an application on hold. Figure 9 illustrates these pathways from application through to final outcome and provides insight into where time is spent and where opportunities exist to improve overall processing efficiency.

The average end-to-end processing timeframe for NVCPs during the reporting period was 151 business days. Of this timeframe, applications spent an average of 129 business days in active DMPE assessment and processing, with the balance reflecting periods on hold or awaiting information.

RFIs were the most common stop-the-clock event, with 60 per cent of submitted NVCPs subject to at least one RFI. Where an RFI occurred, it took an average of 38 business days to resolve. For NVCPs, DMPE tracks RFIs issued at two stages: during application and during assessment. During application refers to information requested before DMPE has accepted the application (addressing issues with the application), whilst during assessment refers to information required to progress the assessment of the application.

NVCPs have not historically been placed on hold when requests for advice from external agencies have been sought, which is why RFAs are not reflected in Figure 9.

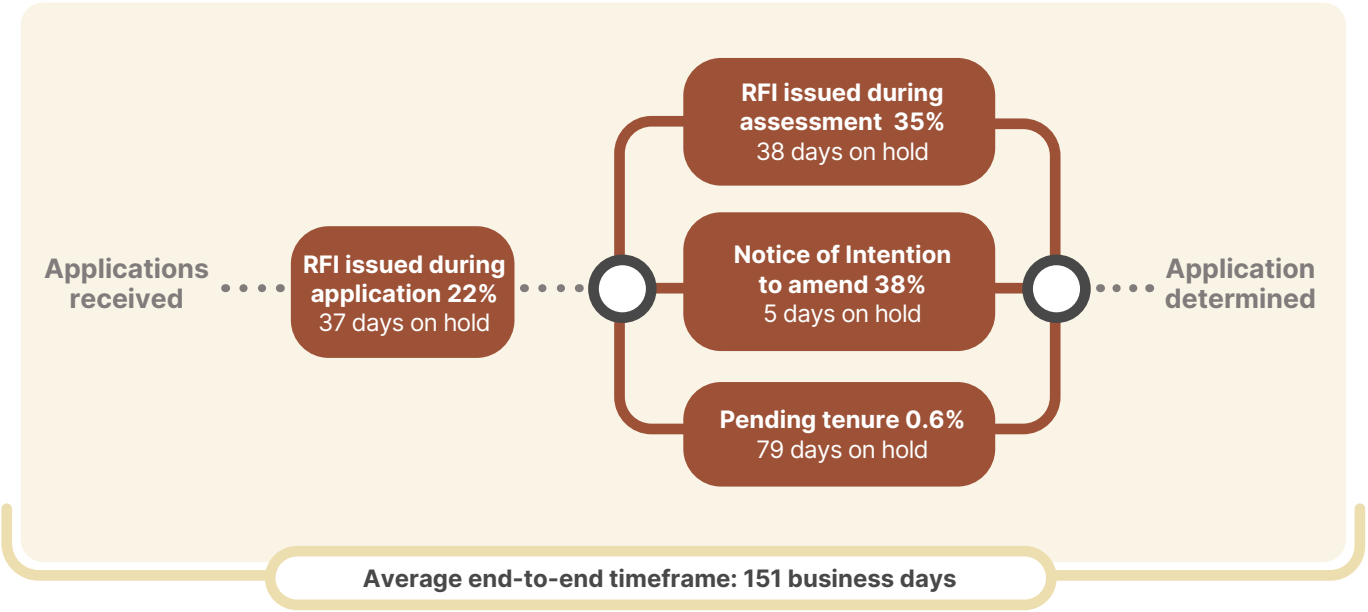


Figure 9: Overview of average NVCP journey during 2025–26 reporting period showing on hold events, the percentage of total applications requiring an on hold event, and average time taken

Note: NVCP data migrated to Resources Online on 9 June 2026. While the available NVCP data for the 2025–26 reporting period is more limited than that for PoWs and MDCPs, DMPE expects that more comprehensive analysis and reporting of NVCP processing timelines and drivers of RFIs will be possible in future approval reports, as future NVCP applications are submitted, assessed and tracked in Resources Online.

Native vegetation clearing permit response strategy

DMPE acknowledges that assessment timeframes, including both end-to-end and DMPE processing times, are not currently meeting performance targets and stakeholder expectations. While RFIs and RFAs are important factors influencing assessment timeframes, the primary driver of current NVCP timeframes is the volume of applications received and awaiting assessment. Accordingly, this section focuses on the strategies DMPE has implemented to reduce the backlog of applications awaiting assessment and manage the active caseload, as well as the outcomes achieved during the reporting period.

DMPE has experienced a steady increase in active NVCP applications ('active' being those either awaiting or under assessment) since mid-2024. Commencement of this upward trend correlates with spikes in applications received between June–August 2024, and a second spike between April–July 2025. The number of active applications peaked in August 2025, with 126 applications in the system at that time.

Spikes in incoming applications appear isolated but they have a material impact on backlog of applications awaiting assessment, with applications received outnumbering applications finalised by DMPE during these periods. This has a compounding effect, with active applications carrying forward into subsequent months and contributing to an increased assessment backlog, even when incoming applications return to 'normal' levels and assessment productivity remains consistent (Figure 10).

The increasing backlog is compounded by increasing application complexity and the highly variable nature of the number and complexity of applications received. This means assessment demand is difficult to predict, and a relatively small number of complex applications can have a disproportionate impact on team capacity and overall workload.

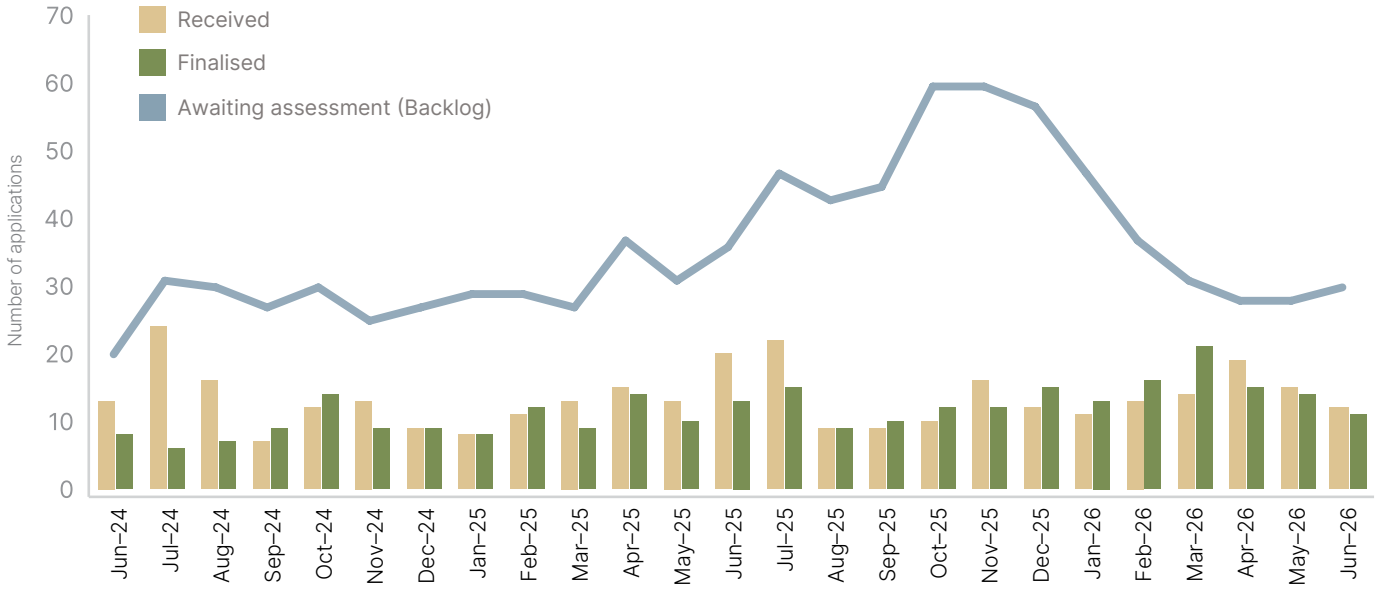


Figure 10: NVCP applications – numbers received, finalised and awaiting assessment (backlog) per month during a two year period between June 2024 and June 2026

In October 2025 DMPE implemented a 'Native Vegetation Response Strategy' (Response Strategy), with a goal to reduce the number of active applications back to a sustainable level and to return assessment timeframes back to previous performance levels. The strategy comprises of four interrelated elements:

- a rapid increase in assessment capacity within the NVCP assessment team;
- strengthened and more transparent communication with industry;
- targeted business process improvements; and
- digital transformation to modernise systems.

Response strategy outcomes

Since commencing the strategy in November 2025, the Division has:

- increased its decision-making rate by 40 per cent (168 decisions compared with 120 over the same period last financial year);
- reduced the average assessment timeframe by 10 business days; and
- reduced the backlog of applications awaiting assessment by almost 50 per cent (backlog reduced to 34 applications on 30 June 2026, from 60 in October 2025) (Figure 11).

Reducing this period where applications sit awaiting assessment is a key priority for DMPE, as it enables earlier engagement with proponents, faster issue resolution, and improved predictability in overall approval timeframes.

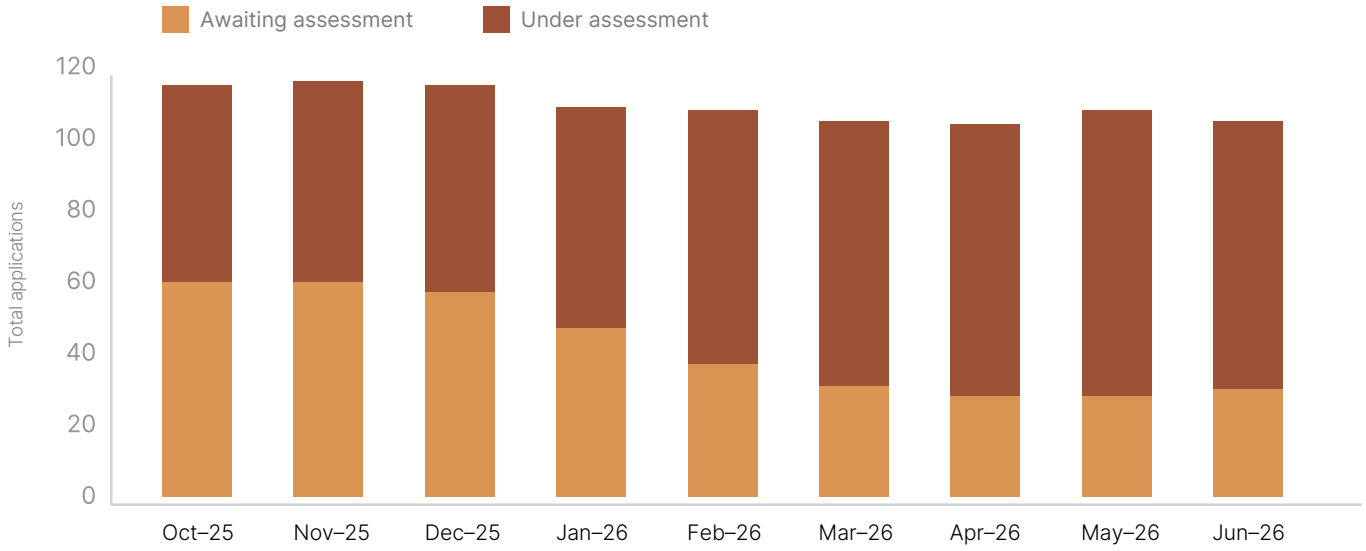


Figure 11: Numbers of NVCP applications awaiting assessment and under assessment since implementation of NVCP response strategy



Looking forward: 2026–27 and beyond

The 2025–26 analysis establishes a baseline for understanding where time is spent across environmental approval pathways and where improvements can be targeted. During 2026–27, DMPE will focus on practical measures to reduce avoidable delays while maintaining assessment requirements that are proportionate to environmental risk and proposal complexity.

Strengthening approval coordination

As part of broader cross-government initiatives to support State priority projects, DMPE previously introduced dedicated triage officers to assist with application readiness, front-end coordination and early identification of issues that may affect progression through the approvals process. Building on this approach, during 2026–27 DMPE will trial an Approval Coordinator role across the broader environmental approvals system. The role will provide senior technical support where complex or emerging issues arise during assessment, helping assessment teams resolve matters earlier, coordinate specialist input and reduce the risk of issues progressing through prolonged or repeated information exchanges.

The Approval Coordinator will proactively review findings from RFI and timeliness analysis to identify recurring areas of uncertainty and target improvements to guidance, assessment practices and applicant engagement. Where appropriate, the Coordinator will engage with applicants to clarify regulatory expectations and help identify potential issues before they become barriers to assessment.

The trial will assess whether dedicated senior technical coordination can improve consistency, early issue resolution and reduce avoidable or repeat RFIs. The role will complement (rather than duplicate) the existing triage function. Triage officers support the front-end progression of State priority projects, while the Approval Coordinator will focus on technical issue resolution and broader process improvement across the environmental approvals system.

Improving application quality and Resources Online processes

This analysis identified opportunities to address some issues earlier in the application process, including inconsistencies in application information, spatial data and supporting documentation. DMPE will continue to improve Resources Online validation, applicant guidance and worked examples, with the aim of reducing avoidable RFIs and improving application readiness. Assessment calibration will also continue to support clear, consistent and proportionate information requests.

Improving inter-agency referrals

DMPE will continue working with partner agencies to clarify referral triggers, information requirements and response expectations, with a focus on reducing unnecessary regulatory duplication. This includes ongoing work with DWER and DBCA and development of an Administrative Agreement with LGIRS to improve the efficiency of geotechnical referrals for MDCPs.

Measuring improvement

The 2025–26 results provide a baseline against which future performance can be measured. DMPE will monitor end-to-end and active processing time, RFI and RFA frequency and duration, repeat RFI cycles and other significant stop-the-clock events. This will allow DMPE to assess whether changes to systems, guidance, assessment practices and coordination arrangements are resulting in faster and more predictable approval pathways over time.

Government of Western Australia

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8.30am – 4.30pm

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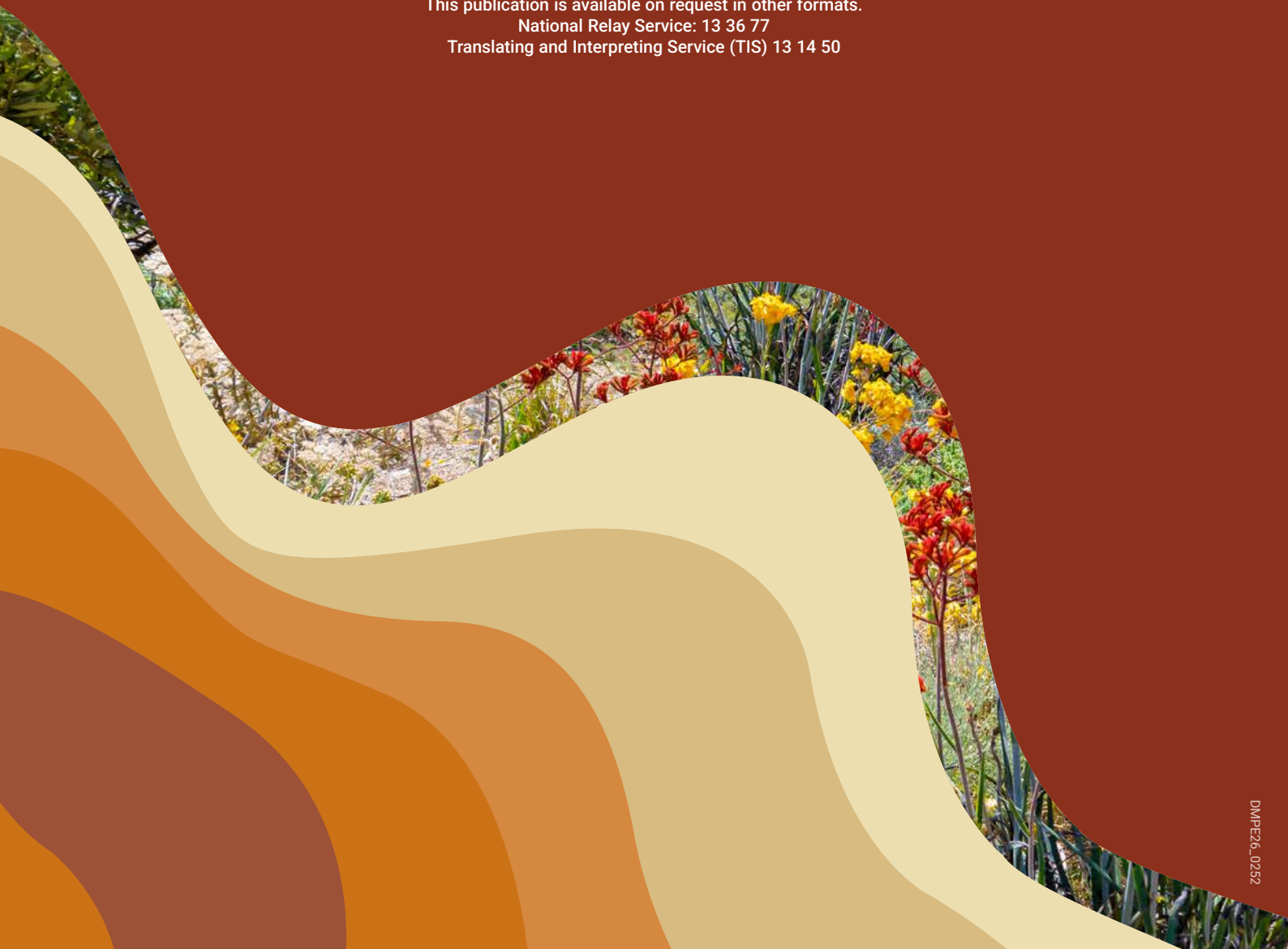

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