



State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA)
1 William Street,
Brisbane 4000
Via Email: info@dsdilgp.qld.gov.au

22 November 2022

Re: State Code 23: Wind Farm development and associated planning guidance (v3.0 February 2022)

The Queensland Chapter of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) has learned that the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) is currently engaging with select industry practitioners on the February 2022 updates to State Code 23 and the associated planning guidance that have replaced the 2017 code and guidance. While we have not been formally invited to provide comments, we hope that you will give our comments herewith due consideration. We have a longstanding interest in this issue, in particular the impacts of wind farms on landscape and visual amenity values, as evidenced by our response to the draft wind farm state code made on 19 November 2015.

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture (AILA) is the peak national body for Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship. With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in the industry. AILA's newly released [Climate Positive Design Guidelines](#) and national position statement on [Urban Green Infrastructure](#) examine how landscape architecture plays an important role in developing these strategies.

AILA members are often consulted in Environmental Impact Assessment and other forms of environmental assessment of major infrastructure developments including wind farms. Our Queensland members work in accordance with the principles set out in our [AILA Guidance Note for Landscape and Visual Assessment \(June 2018\)](#). This response has been prepared by AILA members who are actively engaged by government and the development industry to provide Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) in Queensland, Australia and overseas.

Please find attached feedback from AILA Queensland regarding State Code 23, recommending that:

- PO9 is redrafted to give greater certainty about when it applies.
- that landscapes recognised by the LGA on account of their views, scenic amenity values or landscape character values are given particular consideration in the LVIA.
- that landscapes recognised in State planning or at a national or international level on account of their views, scenic amenity values or landscape character values are given particular consideration in the LVIA.
- PO9 is adjusted to ensure both a landscape and visual impact assessment be undertaken that includes a description of the potential impacts on scenic amenity and landscape values.
- all LVIAs should include an assessment of views including through the production of visualisations and not just those located in an area of high scenic amenity defined by an LGA.

AILA welcomes the opportunity to remain involved in the development of this important state code and would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised. Should SARA have any queries or wish to discuss, please contact Melanie West, AILA Queensland Chapter Manager on 0417 666 622 or melanie.west@aila.org.au

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tessa Leggo'.

Tessa Leggo
AILA Queensland President



Comments on changes to PO9

AILA is concerned that the change to State Code 23 PO9 weakens the requirements for adequate assessment of landscape and visual impacts. There is a risk landscape and visual impacts will not be adequately captured in the assessment of impacts and that communities will not have access to information about likely impacts on views and landscapes important to them.

To enable ease of comparison we set out below a table comparing the current and former codes for ease of reference in our commentary that follows:

State Code 23: Wind Farm Development (v3.0) February 2022	State Code 23: Wind Farm Development July 2017
State Code	
Areas identified by a local government as having high scenic amenity	Character, scenic amenity and landscape values
PO9: Development in an area identified by a local government as having high scenic amenity is sited and designed to protect the character, scenic amenity and landscape values of the locality and region.	PO: Development avoids, or minimises and mitigates, adverse impacts on the character, scenic amenity and landscape values of the locality and region through effective siting and design.
Performance Outcome: No acceptable outcome is prescribed	Performance Outcome: This Performance Outcome seeks to ensure that wind farm development minimises impacts on landscape and visual amenity values, particularly landscapes recognised as being of local importance. It also seeks to ensure that the wind farm and its component infrastructure are designed to minimise impact. No acceptable outcome is provided.
Planning Guideline	
Context	Context
This performance outcome only applies to areas identified in the relevant local government planning scheme as areas of high scenic amenity. In order to access a suitable wind resource, wind farm developments may be located in exposed and highly visible areas (such as ridgelines and hilltops) which may be identified by a local government as having particular scenic amenity. The height and potential scale of wind farms and wind turbines creates an unavoidable level of visibility which may impact on local perceptions of scenic amenity.	In order to access a suitable wind resource, wind farm developments may be located in areas of high scenic amenity or landscape value. The height and potential scale of wind farms and wind turbines creates an unavoidable level of visibility, and may impact on local perceptions of scenic amenity or landscape value. A visual assessment should be undertaken to understand and minimise the impact of a wind farm project on landscape significant to the local community. The



	<p>visual assessment should not only include the turbines structures themselves, but also include the ancillary structures including wind farm monitoring towers and electrical infrastructure connecting wind turbines and substation(s).</p>
<p>Meeting acceptable outcomes and performance outcomes: Character, scenic amenity and landscape values PO9 Areas identified by a local government as having high scenic amenity</p>	<p>Meeting acceptable outcomes and performance outcomes: Character, scenic amenity and landscape values PO9 Character, scenic amenity and landscape values</p>
<p>A visual impact assessment report is required to demonstrate compliance with PO9. The report must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> include a description of the potential impacts on scenic amenity or landscape values identify and propose measures to avoid or minimise adverse impacts from the development on scenic amenity identified by a local government, including view corridors and viewpoints include visual simulations or photomontages demonstrating the anticipated visual impact of the development in the context of the surrounding area, and from key public viewpoints. <p>Methodology Not defined</p>	<p>Demonstrating compliance with this performance outcome of the code may include, but is not limited to, the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a visual impact assessment report that identifies and proposes measures to avoid or minimise adverse impacts from the development on significant landscape values and scenic amenity, including view corridors and viewpoints. The relevant local government planning scheme or regional plan may assist in identifying scenic amenity and/or landscape values to be addressed. <p>Methodology In order to address the impacts on scenic amenity or landscape values, a visual assessment should take into consideration the Queensland Government's (2007) Identifying and protecting scenic amenity values. The visual assessment report should include the following content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a description of the potential impacts on scenic amenity or landscape values visual simulations or photomontages demonstrating the anticipated visual impact of the development in the context of the surrounding area, and from key public view points



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a landscaping plan that details any proposed measures such as materials, finish or colour• which are intended to minimise visual impacts of associated wind farm structures.
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AILA supports the SARA's aim to protect landscape and visual values across the State, including the values of areas identified as having high scenic amenity values. However, we are concerned about the implications of the revised wording for the following reasons:

Trigger for assessment

PO9 does not clearly state what triggers the code so leaves it for the proponent to determine if the code is relevant to their proposed wind farm development. The code states that it only applies in areas of high scenic amenity. However, it is unclear if the code is only triggered if the wind farm project site (or parts of the project site) are located on land falling within the relevant LGA overlay. Or is it the intention that the code is also triggered where the wind farm is proposed immediately next to or in the wider area of land covered by a scenic amenity overlay? In which case how far from the scenic amenity overlay should the nearest turbine be to trigger the assessment? As SARA will appreciate, the visibility of large structures such as wind turbines, that are typically between 240m and 300m, can extend for many kilometres from the Site, potentially affecting scenic amenity values for an extensive area, including in LGAs located well beyond a project site boundary.

The correct interpretation of this code needs to be clarified to give certainty to developers and practitioners undertaking a landscape and visual impact assessment.

- *Recommendation: AILA recommends that PO9 is redrafted to give greater certainty about when it applies.*

Consistent scenic amenity baseline

The mapping of scenic amenity, landscape and visual amenity values are not sufficiently advanced across all Queensland LGAs to provide the baseline required to ensure the assessment of impact is equitable across the state.

Many (if not most) LGAs in Queensland have not undertaken a scenic amenity study and those studies that do exist vary in their currency and have not been prepared at a time when large scale renewable energy projects such as wind were not envisaged.. Those councils that have prepared a landscape or visual amenity assessment have not necessarily presented scenic amenity values of the LGA as an overlay. This is particularly the case in the more rural LGAs, which may not have sufficient resources for a comprehensive scenic amenity study. There is a risk that important scenic amenity values are missed, and the role of the landscape architect as a landscape character and visual assessment expert in identifying these may be an alternative approach to



ensuring those landscape and scenic amenity values considered important to the local community are adequately considered.

Furthermore, as many LGAs have policies within the strategic framework of their planning scheme that seek to protect 'scenic amenity and character', including authorities that list the types of landscape considered to be of value (e.g. forested ridges), which are not mapped. These provisions should be recognised in some form and trigger a proportionate landscape character and visual impact assessment.

AILA recommend that the requirement for an assessment not be limited to mapped high scenic amenity landscapes, but require a suitably qualified landscape and visual assessment expert to prepare a baseline that takes into consideration the mapped as well as community and / or professionally identified areas of important scenic amenity.

- *Recommendation: AILA recommends that the wording of PO9 be adjusted so that it applies to all landscapes not just those identified in local scenic amenity mapping, while recommending that landscapes recognised by the LGA on account of their views, scenic amenity values or landscape character values are given particular consideration in the LVIA.*

Recognition of state, national and/or international scenic amenity values

The wording of PO9 focuses on areas of local scenic amenity that are mapped by an LGA and does not explicitly recognise areas that may be mapped or recognised at state, national or international level. As it does not always follow that values recognised at a higher scale are reflected in local planning scheme there is a risk that areas of scenic amenity value may be missed.

For example, the SEQ Regional Plan has a scenic mapping overlay but the relevant local councils (e.g. MBRC, SCC, BCC, RCC) either do not have scenic amenity layers or their local scenic amenity layers do not wholly match the area identified in the regional plan. Should a wind farm be proposed in SEQ in an area covered by the SEQ mapping but not the local overlay, it would seem PO9 as currently written does not confirm that the proponent needs to consider the impact on regionally mapped values, only local ones.

Similarly, the code does not mention other designated protected areas such as national parks or World Heritage Areas. As these protected landscapes are not managed by the relevant LGA the local planning scheme will be silent on the scenic amenity value of these areas, so they will not trigger an assessment under the State Code (although may require an EPBC PER assessment).

- *Recommendation: AILA recommends that SARA consider redrafting PO9 so that it applies to all landscapes not just those within a local scenic amenity layer, while recommending that landscapes recognised in State planning or at a national or international level on account of their views, scenic amenity values or landscape character values are given particular consideration in the LVIA.*



Landscape character values

Where triggered, the PO9 planning guideline requires production of a visual impact report that must "include a description of the potential impacts on scenic amenity or landscape values." As the assessment of scenic amenity and landscape are separate processes, AILA would recommend that this be redrafted to say '*and*' given the emphasis of the Code to ensure wind farm development "is sited and designed to protect the character, scenic amenity and landscape values of the locality and region" We also recommend that the wording is revised to require a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) that addresses both of these separate but interrelated issues.

- *Recommendation: AILA recommends that PO9 is adjusted to ensure both a landscape and visual impact assessment be undertaken that includes a description of the potential impacts on scenic amenity and landscape values.*

Local views obtained by residents and communities

By focussing only on scenic amenity areas identified in a local planning scheme, it appears that PO9 can be addressed without adequately assessing the impacts of wind farms on the views and landscape experience of local people generally, unless they are located in an area of high scenic amenity. The former code recognised that wind farms "*may impact on local perceptions of scenic amenity*" and required the assessment "*to understand and minimise the impact of a wind farm project on landscape significant to the local community*". Views that are important to a local community often include areas that are not necessarily included in a scenic overlay. The potential landscape and visual impacts of wind farms are consistently raised by the local communities as a major concern. Undertaking an LVIA, including producing visualisations of a range of locations that likely to be experienced by people in the area, enables a local community to understand the likely visual impact and gives some confidence in the assessment process.

The code as currently written says that Queensland communities (in contrast to communities in other states such as NSW) may not have access to information about how a wind farm will affect landscape character and views in their area. With the need to achieve a social license to operate wind farms becoming an increasing issue across the state, this approach risks an inconsistent approach to the assessment and communication of issues that are of greatest concern to communities. Indeed the need to consider landscape character and visual impacts of large scale wind farm projects individually and cumulatively becomes greater as wind farms proliferate throughout the state, strengthening the need to provide assessments supported by clear illustrations and photomontages.

- *Recommendation: AILA recommends that all LVIAs should include an assessment of views including through the production of visualisations and not just those located in an area of high scenic amenity defined by an LGA.*