

An Audit of the Environmental Assessment Office's Oversight of Certified Projects



OFFICE OF THE
Auditor General
of British Columbia

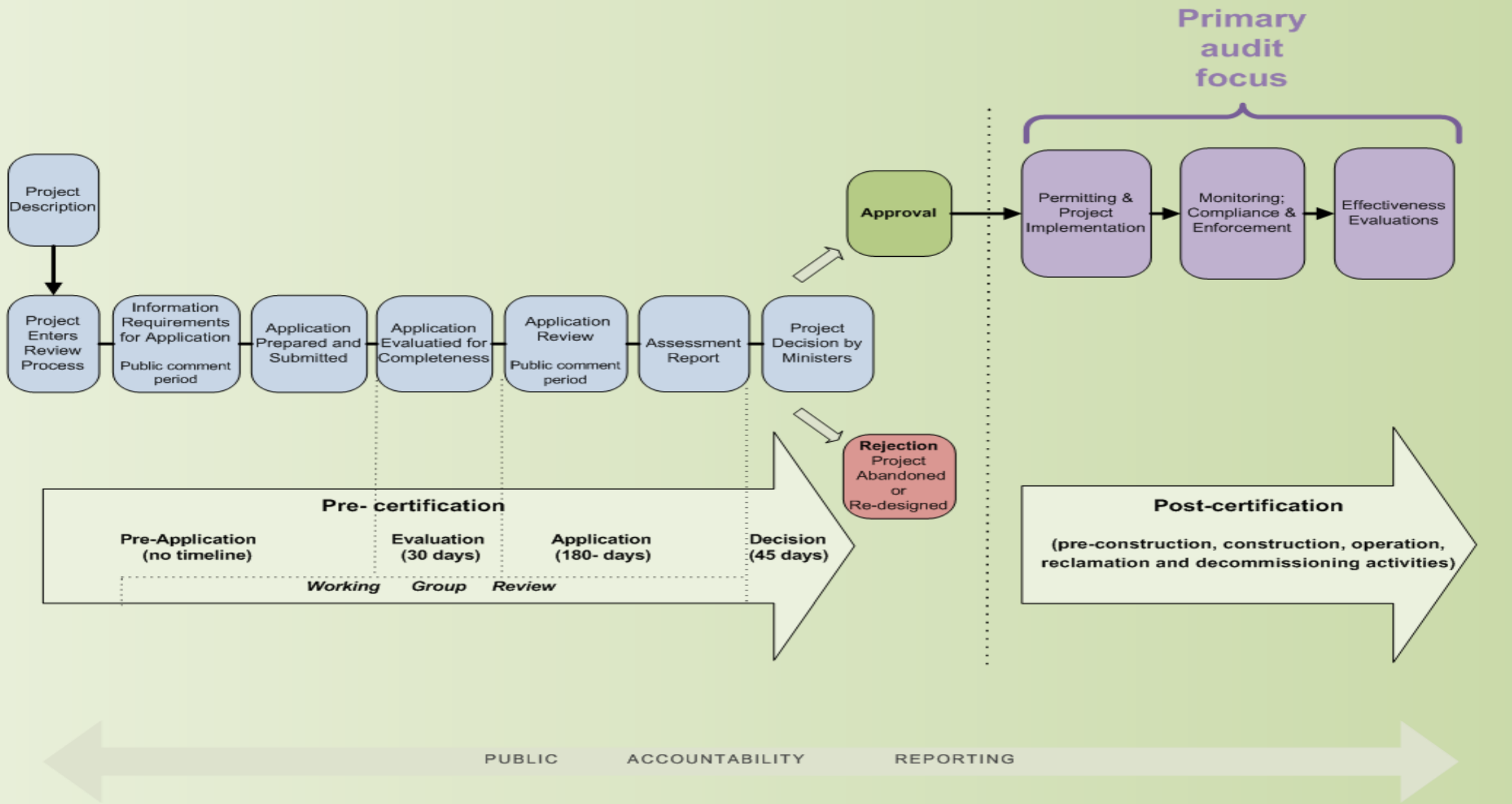
Background

Environmental Assessment Office (EAO):

- responsible for assessing major development (mines, energy, transportation projects)
- considers potential environmental, social, economic, heritage and health impacts of a proposal
- works with many agencies/groups

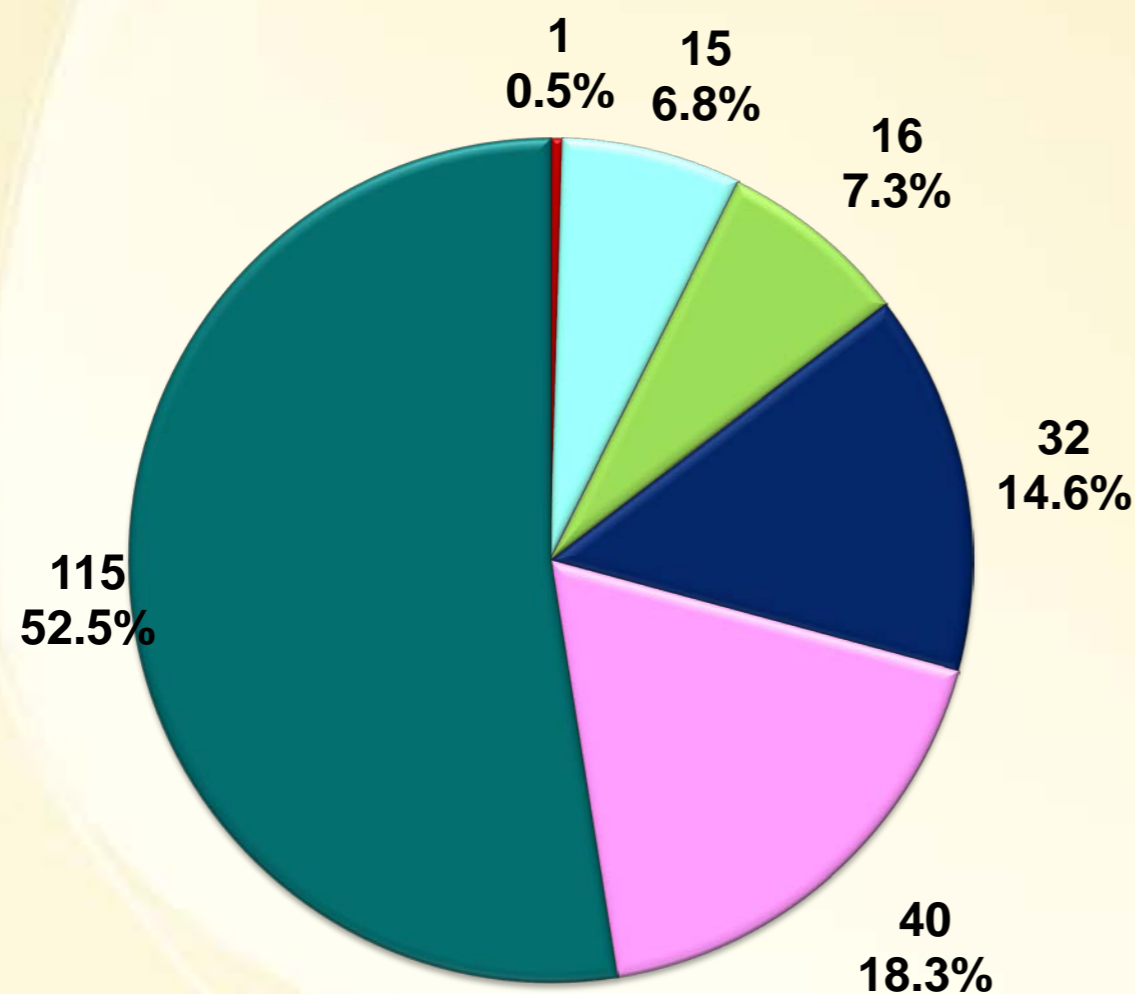


Environmental Assessment in B.C.



Status of projects

219 projects have/currently undergoing an environmental assessment (since 1995)



- Refused Certification
- EA Deemed Unnecessary
- Terminated or Withdrawn
- Under Review - Active
- Under Review - Temporarily Inactive
- Approved



Audit objectives

To determine whether the EAO is:

- providing sufficient post-certification oversight
- evaluating the effectiveness of the mitigation measures
- making appropriate information available to the public



Overall conclusion

We concluded that the EAO is not:

- providing sufficient oversight
- evaluating the effectiveness of mitigation measures
- providing appropriate accountability information to the public



Oversight of certified projects

The EAO's oversight is not sufficient to ensure potential significant adverse effects are avoided or mitigated.

Specifically, the EAO is not ensuring that:

- certificate commitments are measurable and enforceable (absence of policy for mitigation options)
- monitoring responsibilities are clearly defined
- compliance and enforcement program is comprehensive.



Recommendations

Oversight of certified projects

1. Ensure commitments are clearly written in a measureable and enforceable manner.
2. Continue to work with the Ministry of Environment to finalize a policy framework on environmental mitigation.
3. Clarify the monitoring responsibilities and compliance mechanisms for each commitment.
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive compliance and enforcement program that includes an integrated information management system.



Effectiveness of environmental assessments

The EAO is not evaluating the effectiveness of mitigation measures

Without evaluations, EAO cannot say with certainty whether:

- projects avoid or mitigate potential adverse effects
- the anticipated benefits of each project are being achieved

EAO has created a new position to address this gap



Recommendation

Effectiveness of environmental assessments

5. Conduct evaluations to determine whether environmental assessments are avoiding or mitigating the potentially significant adverse effects of certified projects.



Accountability information

The EAO is not making appropriate monitoring, compliance and outcome information available to the public

- Some information is available on EAO's website (primarily self-monitoring information)
- Performance measures in MoE annual report do not address effectiveness



Recommendation

Accountability information

6. Provide appropriate accountability information for certified projects.



Summary of Recommendations

1. Ensure commitments are clearly written in a measurable and enforceable manner.
2. Continue to work with the Ministry of Environment to finalize a policy framework on environmental mitigation.
3. Clarify the monitoring responsibilities and compliance mechanisms for each commitment.
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive compliance and enforcement program that includes an integrated information management system.
5. Conduct evaluations to determine whether environmental assessments are avoiding or mitigating the potentially significant adverse effects of certified projects.
6. Provide appropriate accountability information for certified projects.

