

Federal Bill C-39 Proposes One-Project, One-Decision, One-Year Environmental Review



Major changes in the federal environmental permitting process are afoot. On September 21, Parliament tabled the *Building Canada Strong Act* (Bill C-39) proposing a coordinated “one project, one decision, in one year” federal review process for all assessments, permits, and consultations.

Current Environmental Project Review Is Slow, Inefficient & Expensive

Under the current system, major projects are subject to multiple, overlapping federal review and permitting processes under different environmental laws. Because each process has its own timelines, information requirements, and consultations procedures, project proponents end up waiting years for federal clearance. Bill C-39 is part of a broader government effort to make the federal review process faster, simpler, and cheaper. The four key changes:

1. Single Coordinated IAA Decisions

Current Rules: Projects subject to review under the federal *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA) require both an IAA decision

statement from the Minister of Environment **and** separate permits under the *Fisheries Act*, *Species At Risk Act* (SARA), and any other federal environmental legislation that applies.

Proposed Changes: The so-called *Build Canada Now* provisions, Bill C-39 Part 1, would create a coordinated, concurrent review process for all federal assessments, permits, and consultations culminating in a single IAA decision from the Minister that incorporates **all** required approvals, enforceable conditions, and mitigation measures. Decisions on projects involving potential impacts across different environmental laws would be made by the Minister jointly with the minister responsible for the relevant sector with departments to continue enforcing their respective permits.

2. Single Assessment for Nuclear & Major Energy Projects

Current Rules: Overlapping and concurrent federal review is also required for nuclear projects regulated by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) and major energy projects regulated by the Canada Energy Regulator (CER).

Proposed Changes: Under Part 2 of Bill C-39, aka the *Keep Canada Moving Act*, nuclear and major energy projects would undergo single federal assessment. For pipelines, transmission lines, and offshore renewable energy projects, that sole assessor would be the CER; for nuclear and uranium projects, that would be the CNSC. Permitting and assessments would also be coordinated with other federal departments to ensure those decisions are made concurrently with the CER or CNSC decision.

3. One-Year Federal Decision Deadline

Bill C-39 would require the government to make a final decision on a project no later than one year with the clock to begin ticking after the proponent submits a completed application. Applications will be deemed complete when the

proponent furnishes all required studies and finalized information.

4. Regions of National Interest

Bill C-39 would authorize the government to designate geographic zones called “Regions of National Interest” (RNI) where certain high-priority projects would receive conditional pre-approval and undergo expedited federal review. Such zones could include transportation corridors, energy production and transmission systems, telecommunications networks, and industrial regions. Before designating an RNI, the government would have to perform an IAA regional assessment to identify the geographic area, activities in the region, and required conditions or mitigation measures necessary for those activities.

Next Steps

The government plans to move quickly on Bill C-39, which is already through First Reading. It has also issued a parallel Cabinet Directive ordering federal agencies to begin aligning their internal processes with the one-year timeline. Meanwhile, the legislation has run into political resistance, including from First Nations groups fearing that the new expedited review process will marginalize their role in pre-approval consultations. Even if Bill C-39 does pass, it will require detailed regulations to implement.