SARA Key Performance Indicators & Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2019-2020

December 2020

Queensland Government

Contents

1.0   Introduction

The State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) was established in July 2013 to deliver a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to the state's assessment of development applications. For the majority of the 2019-2020 financial year, SARA was administered by the state's planning portfolio which was located within the former Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning. In May 2020, the Planning portfolio was restructured into Queensland Treasury (QT).

SARA's operations were significantly affected in March 2020 by restrictions imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the planning agency and state technical agencies that collectively contribute to SARA adapted rapidly to these challenges. Assessing and deciding development applications continued, notwithstanding most staff working from home for extended periods. SARA was able to uphold the integrity of its assessment function through the use of technology and rapidly modifying operation practices. Most of its performance outcomes were maintained during this challenging time.

SARA has an ongoing commitment to continual improvement and rapid response to challenges posed by the pandemic and continues to perform as one of the most efficient and effective state assessment entities.

Two key elements of SARA's improvement culture have been reported on annually against a suite of adopted key performance indicators (KPIs) and an annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, covering the various facets of SARA's functions. At the end of the financial year reporting cycle, actual performance against the adopted KPI targets is measured and documented in this annual report.

This process informs ongoing improvement and drives organisational change to deliver efficiency and best practice in the state's development assessment services.

SARA's KPIs for the 2019–2020 financial year focus on the following key areas:

- pre-lodgement processes
- information requests
- overall assessment timeframes
- post-decision assessment timeframes
- FastTrack5 assessment timeframes
- appeals
- customer satisfaction.

To measure SARA's performance against its qualitative KPIs, an annual Customer Satisfaction Survey is carried out. The results of this survey are included later in this report.

2.0　　SARA activity at a glance

In the 2019-2020 financial year, SARA issued a total of 2,335 decisions and responses under the *Planning Act 2016* (the Planning Act) and one application under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA). The breakdown of applications is as follows:

1598 responses	395 decisions	218 decisions
SARA as referral agency	SARA as assessment manager	Minor & other change applications
99.9% favourable response	100% favourable response	100% favourable response

120	4 extensions
Early referral responses	Extend currency period applications
100% favourable response	100% favourable response
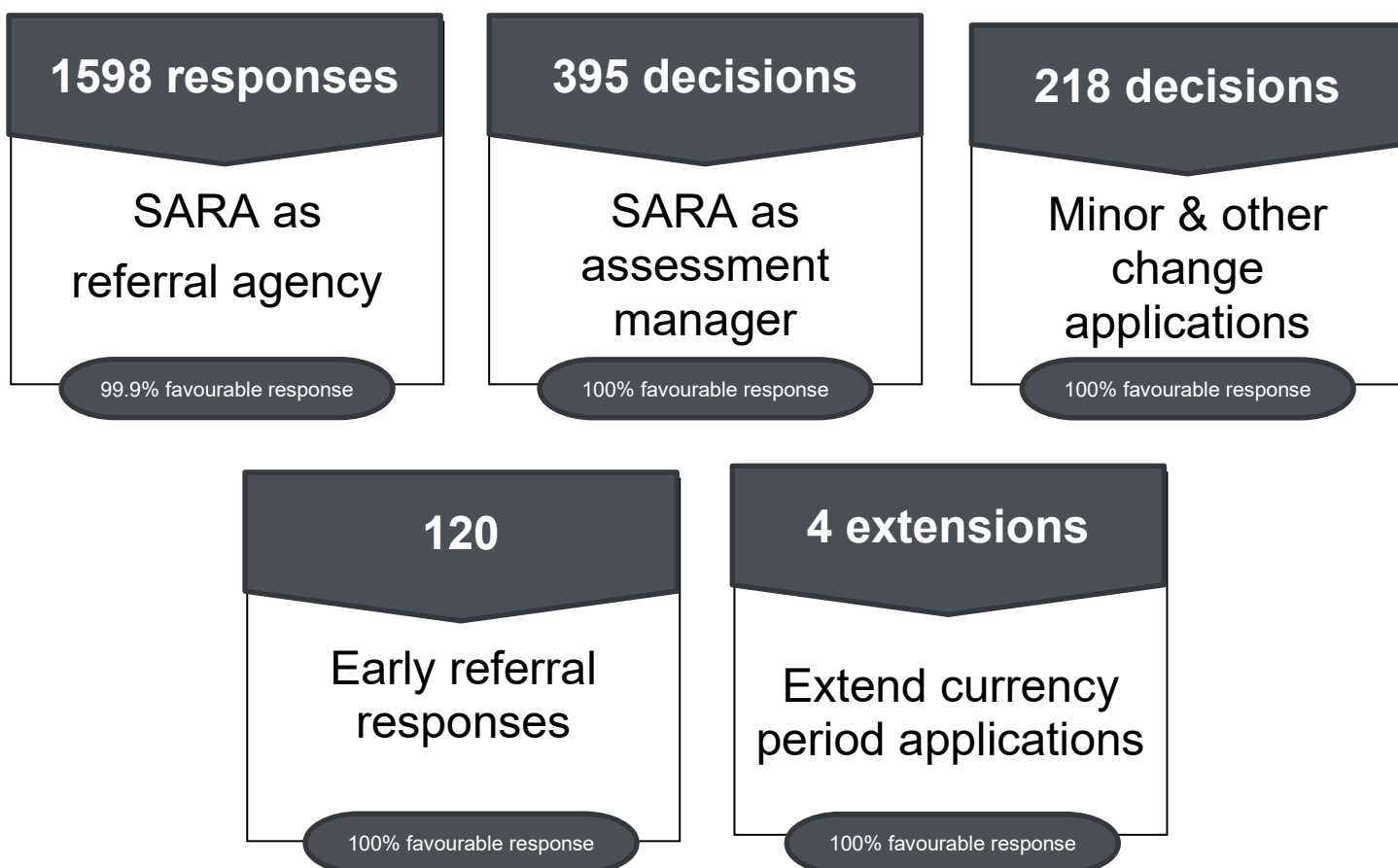
There was a high rate of favourable responses and decisions across each of the application types.

1119

Pre-lodgement advices issued

56% of the total number of decisions & responses issued
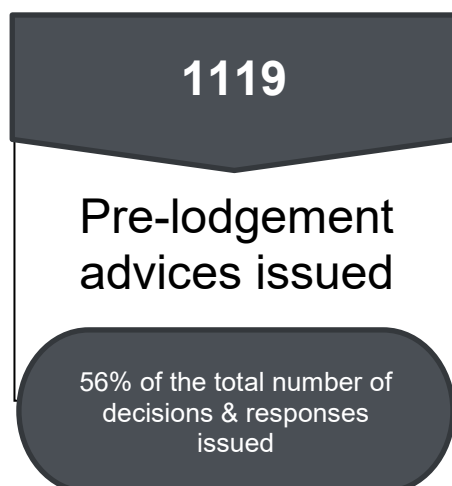
3.0   SARA's performance against 2019-2020 KPIs

The following sections provide a snapshot of SARA's performance against the adopted KPIs for the 2019-2020 financial year. The KPIs cover several core areas including customer satisfaction, assessment timeframes, information requests, pre-lodgement processes and appeals. The KPIs are measured against:

- **quantitative targets** through data obtained from SARA's online development application lodgement system MyDAS2

- **qualitative targets** through data obtained from the Customer Satisfaction Survey.

In the following sections:

a full green ring represents that the result achieved or exceeded the KPI target or statutory timeframe.

where the ring has two colours, this indicates that the result did not meet the KPI target. The green portion of the ring represents the proportion of the KPI target that was met, and the orange portion represents the proportion that was not met.

84%   the number in the ring is the 2019-2020 result for that KPI or statutory timeframe.

3.1   Information requests

In 2019-2020 SARA issued:

- 62 information requests as assessment manager
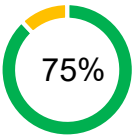
- 383 information requests as referral agency.

SARA met all relevant statutory timeframes for information requests. However, SARA did not achieve the KPI target for all measures. It did improve on the result of two KPIs in comparison to 2018-2019:

- KPI #1 was improved by two per cent

- KPI #4 was improved by one business day resulting in SARA achieving the KPI target in 2019-20

Wherever possible, SARA seeks to minimise information requests. Where an information request is issued, it highlights deficiencies in the information submitted with the application. Through the pre-lodgement process and improved advice to applicants, SARA is working to improve the quality of application material.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #1 As **assessment manager**, percentage of applications decided without an information request	85%	84%	N/A as there is no associated statutory timeframe for this KPI	

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #2 As **referral agency**, percentage of responses issued without an information request	85%	75%	N/A as there is no associated statutory timeframe for this KPI	
KPI #3 As **assessment manager**, median time taken to issue information request	8 business days	9 business days	10 business days	9 business days
KPI #4 As **referral agency**, median time taken to issue information request	8 business days	8 business days	10 business days	8 business days

3.2   Further advice

An assessment manager or referral agency has the opportunity to provide applicants with further advice. In 2019-2020 SARA issued:

- 39 further advice notices as assessment manager (10 per cent of assessment manager decisions)

- 297 further advice notices as referral agency (19 per cent of referral agency responses).

There are no statutory timeframes associate with the further advice process, however, SARA met the KPI target for each measure. These results are consistent with those reported for 2018-2019.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result
KPI #5 As **assessment manager**, median time taken to issue initial further advice	11 business days	10 business days

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result
KPI #6 As **referral agency**, median time taken to issue initial further advice	11 business days	11 business days

3.3 Decision timeframes

In 2019-2020 SARA issued:

- 395 decisions as assessment manager
- 1597 referral agency responses
- eight decisions on representations as assessment manager
- 98 decisions on representations as referral agency.

SARA met all relevant statutory timeframes and KPI targets associated with the decision process. SARA also demonstrated improvement on the result for KPI #7 from 2018-2019, improving the median time taken to issue a decision by four business days.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #7 As **assessment manager**, median time taken to assess an application and issue a decision	22 business days	15 business days	35 business days	15 business days
KPI #8 As **referral agency**, median time taken to assess an application and issue a response	20 business days	20 business days	25 business days	20 business days
KPI #9 As **assessment manager**, median time taken to assess change representations	15 business days	13 business days	20 business days	13 business days

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #10 As **referral agency**, median time taken to assess change representations	13 business days	10 business days	N/A as there is no associated statutory timeframe for this KPI	

3.4   Post-decision changes – minor change, other change and extension applications

If an applicant wishes to change their application after it is approved, they are required to make a 'change application'. The applicant has the option to make a minor change or a change other than a minor change ('other change'). The nature of the change and SARA's original role in the application determines SARA's role in accessing the change application.

An applicant may also apply to extend the currency period of their application, which is an 'extension application'. An extension application must be made to the assessment manager before a development approval lapses.

In 2019-2020 SARA assessed:

- 47 applications (with no affected entities) for a minor change
- three 'other change' applications as assessment manager
- 53 'other change' applications as referral agency
- four extension applications.

SARA met the statutory timeframes for these applications but did not achieve all the KPI targets. However, SARA did improve on the result of two KPIs from 2018-2019:

- KPI #11 was improved by four business days
- KPI #14 was improved by five business days.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #11 As **responsible entity**, median time taken to assess a minor change application and issue a decision notice *Note: this KPI is limited to applications without an affected entity*	14 business days	16 business days	20 business days	16 business days

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result	Statutory timeframe	2019-2020 result
KPI #12 As **assessment manager**, median time taken to assess an 'other change' application and issue a decision notice	22 business days	35 business days	35 business days	35 business days
KPI #13 As **referral agency**, median time taken to assess an 'other change' application and issue a referral agency response	20 business days	22 business days	25 business days	22 business days
KPI #14 As **assessment manager**, the time taken to assess and decide an extension to relevant period request	7 business days	8 business days	20 business days	8 business days

3.5   Appeals

Appeals against the Planning Act can occur:
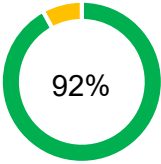
- if an applicant is dissatisfied with a development decision or condition
- if a submitter (someone who has made a properly made submission about a proposed development) is dissatisfied with a development decision.

QT manages a range of court proceedings, including disputes involving SARA decisions and conditions, as well as changes to approvals involving SARA. In 2019-2020 148 appeals were served on QT where SARA was triggered during the development application. However, only 12 SARA decisions and responses were disputed as part of the appeal and QT joined 15 court proceedings. The KPI target for appeals was met. There is no associated statutory timeframe for this KPI.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result
KPI #15 Percentage of total decisions and responses appealed	<2%	<1%

3.6   FastTrack5

Certain types of low-risk development may be eligible to be assessed under the FastTrack5 framework which involves a shorter, five-day assessment timeframe and a reduced fee. It is the responsibility of the applicant at the time of lodgement to nominate their application as being eligible under the FastTrack5 framework, provide the necessary supporting information and to pay the application fee promptly. SARA did not meet the KPI target for the FastTrack5 process, but it did improve on the result from 2018-2019. There were 37 FastTrack5 applications decided in 2019-2020.There is no associated statutory timeframe for this KPI.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result
KPI #16 Percentage of FastTrack5 referral application responses issued within five business days	100%	92%

4.0   Customer Satisfaction Survey results 2019-2020

Data for qualitative KPIs is obtained from the annual SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey, which was carried out in March and April 2020 for 2019-2020. Qualitative data provides a valuable insight into the experiences and satisfaction levels of SARA customers and stakeholders with the SARA process. The survey was emailed to a range of stakeholders, including MyDAS2 registered users. Almost 300 responses were received.

In the following sections:

a full green ring represents that the result achieved or exceeded the KPI target or statutory timeframe.

where the ring has two colours, this indicates that the result did not meet the KPI target. The green portion of the ring represents the proportion of the KPI target that was met, and the orange portion represents the proportion that was not met.

84%   the number in the ring is the 2019-2020 result for that KPI or statutory timeframe.

4.1   Customer satisfaction KPI results

The SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey invites respondents to provide comments about the pre-lodgement process, information requests, conditions, MyDAS2 and staff service. These qualitative responses provide valuable insight to customer experience, including opportunities for improvements, which are summarised in section 4.2.1.

SARA did not meet the KPI target for overall customer satisfaction or for customer satisfaction with the pre-lodgement process. These results, and the comments associated, will be used to inform the ongoing review into SARA's engagement with customers and how to improve the pre-lodgement experience for customers.

KPI measure	KPI target	2019-2020 result
Level of customer satisfaction with overall performance as assessment manager or referral agency	80% satisfied	78% satisfied
Level of customer satisfaction with the pre-lodgement process	90% satisfied	74% satisfied

4.2   Other Customer Satisfaction Survey results

The following table provides a summary of key findings from the results of the Customer Satisfaction Survey that are not related to a specific KPI.

Question	2019-2020	2018-2019
Pre-lodgement advice		
Pre-lodgement advice clearly communicated SARA's position, expectations and advice	68% agreed	76% agreed
Information requests		
Information request was clear and concise	70% agreed	82% agreed
Information request was reasonable	67% agreed	77% agreed
Decision notices, concurrence responses and conditions		
Conditions were reasonable	81% agreed	78% agreed
Conditions were clear and concise	80% agreed	77% agreed
Conditions included reasonable timing/timeframes for required actions	85% agreed	72% agreed
Staff service		
How satisfied were you with level of service provided by SARA officers?	83% satisfied	82% satisfied

Although the results around pre-lodgement advice and information requests decreased slightly from 2018-2019, satisfaction levels remain relatively high. Importantly, customer satisfaction around conditions and staff service improved. As part of the continual improvement across 2019-2020, work was undertaken to improve internal guidance material and the readability and formatting of external documents, which could be contributing factors to the improvement in results.

5.0   Continual improvement

The results from the KPI report and annual SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey provide valuable insights about opportunities for further refinement and improvements to SARA operations. In response to the downward trend in customer satisfaction over the last three years, focus is being directed towards the information request, advice notice and pre-lodgement meeting processes. This forms the basis of SARA's continual improvement program in 2020-2021. There are several other projects also being undertaken to improve SARA operations. All continual improvement projects are outlined in the table below:

Key monitoring areas	What we did in 2019-2020	In 2020-2021 we will:
Pre-lodgement	Continue to implement operational changes to SARA's pre-lodgement advice practices. These changes should continue to improve our customer's experience with seeking and receiving value adding advice. Further training for all SARA officers will be undertaken to ensure our revised processes and practices are being implemented.	Review the changes to the pre-lodgement process in 2019-2020 and consider how they align to the recommendations from the external review. Investigate how the process can be improved to ensure that SARA officers are prepared for the discussions that may occur during the pre-lodgement and that the pre-lodgement process is as efficient and effective as possible for applicants. Consider the benefits of developing an iterative pre-lodgement process for complex projects. For example, where an applicant has a complex project proposal, they would meet with SARA to discuss the concept and proposal of the application. Then subsequent meetings would be more detailed and allow for more application specific advice to be provided. An opportunity to trial this iterative approach with complex applications will be explored and learnings from the trial will be incorporated into future progression of this approach.
Information requests and further advice	Feedback received from the 2018-2019 customer satisfaction survey highlighted changes made to SARA processes and procedures that occurred late in the financial year had not yet led to improved satisfaction. SARA accepts further work is required to ensure the issuing of these statutory notices is clear and consistent for the benefit of applicants. SARA will continue to implement and monitor the effectiveness of changes made in its business practices earlier in 2019.	Explore two options to address the uncertainty and confusion regarding the intent and use of these two statutory tools: • explanatory text on each statutory tool to explain the difference and to identify if there is anything an applicant needs to be aware of (for example receiving an advice notice does not stop the assessment timeframe period) • where possible, issue one letter with both statutory tools, noting however that each tool has its own specific use, and it may not be appropriate in every circumstance for this to occur. Explanatory text will be important to convey this message to applicants.
Post-decision changes	Implement the improvements identified last year and review how the test for 'minor change' is being used.	Monitor the effectiveness of the 'minor change' test.

Key monitoring areas	What we did in 2019-2020	In 2020-2021 we will:
Trigger review	Project in 2020/2021.	Review the triggers that are used to categorise the type of state interest that is affected or impacted by the proposed development application. It is anticipated that this review will provide information about: • the certainty and clarity of the triggers • if there is opportunity to expand the triggers in Fast Track 5 and early referral responses categories. • any triggers that are not achieving their intent or causing confusion or disputes. • any triggers that could be improved or removed.
State Development Assessment Provisions (SDAP) review	Project in 2020/2021.	Review SDAP to provide more certainty for proponents in how to comply with state codes and provide robust and defensible assessment benchmarks.
KPI review	Project in 2020/2021.	Review the current KPIs to consider their effectiveness in delivering good planning outcomes. It is anticipated that any new or amended KPIs will be introduced for the next financial year.
Increase industry engagement	Project in 2020/2021.	Undertake a review of the engagement opportunities and activities that are currently occurring across the state with industry and the intention and desired outcomes of those activities. The purpose of the review is to identify whether the existing avenues for engagement with industry are suitable for all those within the development industry.