

# SARA Key Performance Indicators and Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2017-2018

April 2019



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# 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.

Since its inception, SARA has become one of the most efficient and effective regulatory assessment entities in Australia. This has been achieved by a strong culture of continual improvement and a range of supporting governance initiatives.

Two key elements of SARA's improvement culture have been yearly reporting 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 2017–2018 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.

A new development assessment system commenced on 3 July 2017 with the introduction of the *Planning Act 2016* (the Planning Act), which replaced the former *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA).

In recognition of the changed development assessment system under the Planning Act, a new set of KPIs were adopted for the Planning Act applications assessed in 2017–2018. As there were also more than 750 development applications still being assessed under SPA in 2017–18, this document also reports on SARA's performance against these KPIs, which were kept the same from the previous year.

To measure SARA's performance against its qualitative KPIs, the Planning Group undertook its annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. The results of this survey are included in this document.

## 2.0 Summary of SARA activity

For the 2017–2018 financial year, SARA issued a total of 2687 decisions and responses (both for the Planning Act and SPA), comprising:

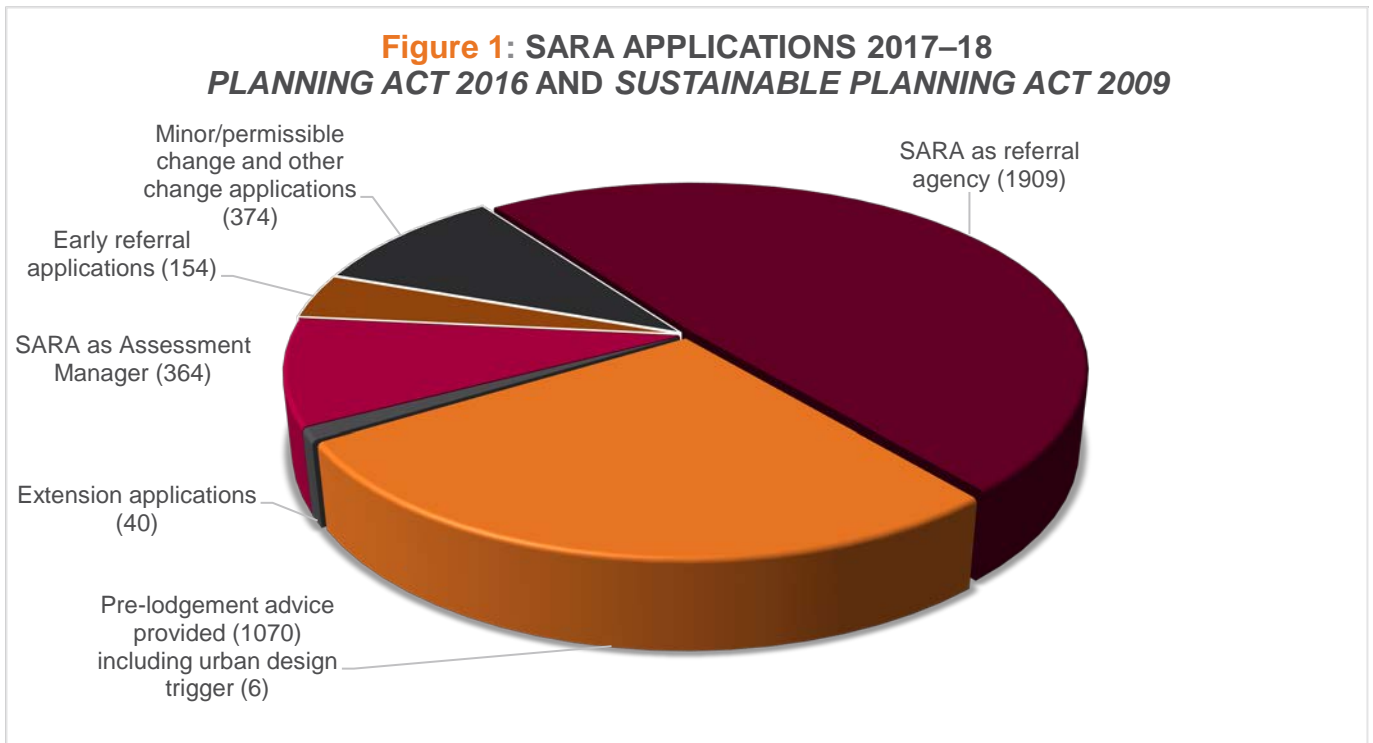
- 1909 referral responses by SARA as referral agency (including FastTrack5) of which 99.9% were responded to favourably, and 0.1% recommended refusal
- 364 application decisions by SARA as assessment manager of which 100% were approved
- 374 minor/permissible and other change applications of which 98.4% were responded to were approved, and 1.6% not approved
- 40 applications to extend the currency period (extension applications) of which 100% were approved.

In addition, SARA issued:

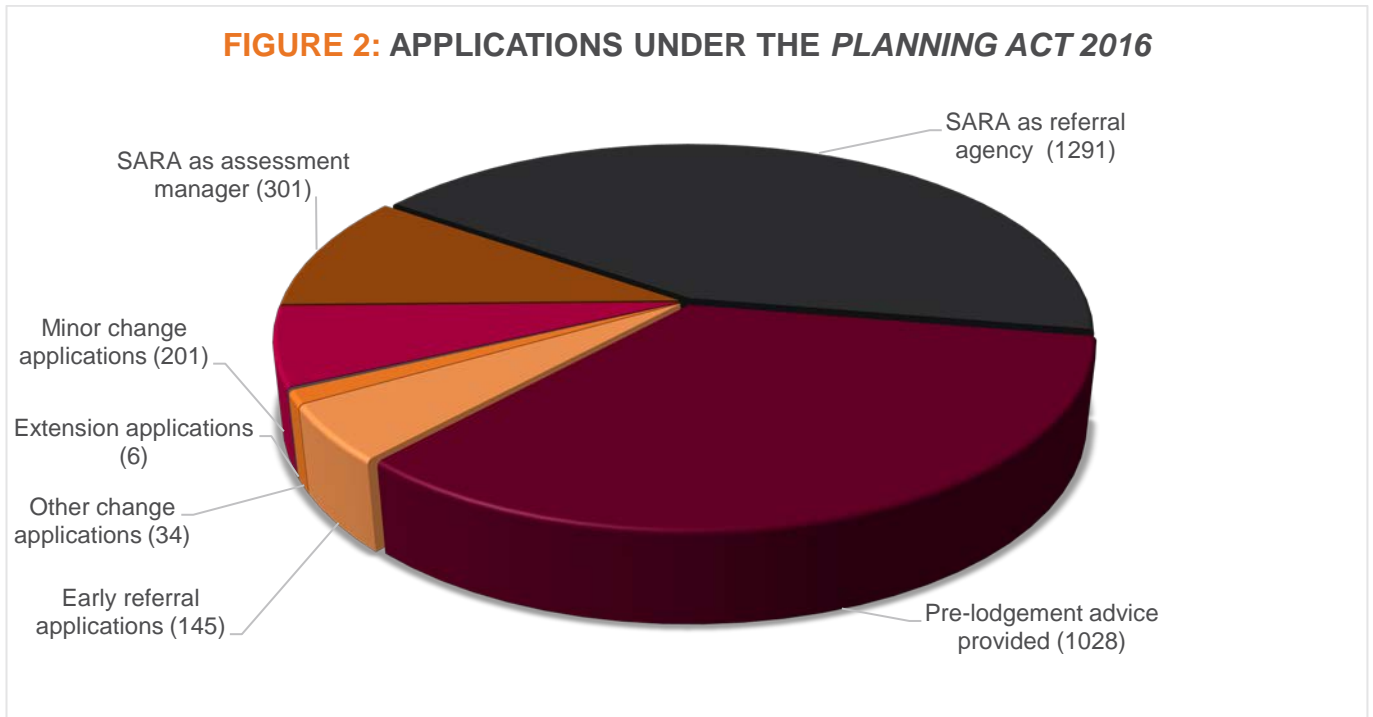
- 154 early referral responses
- 1028 pre-lodgement advices (including 6 for the urban design trigger).

A breakdown of SARA's activity for the 2017–2018 financial year is shown in Figures 1 to 3 below.

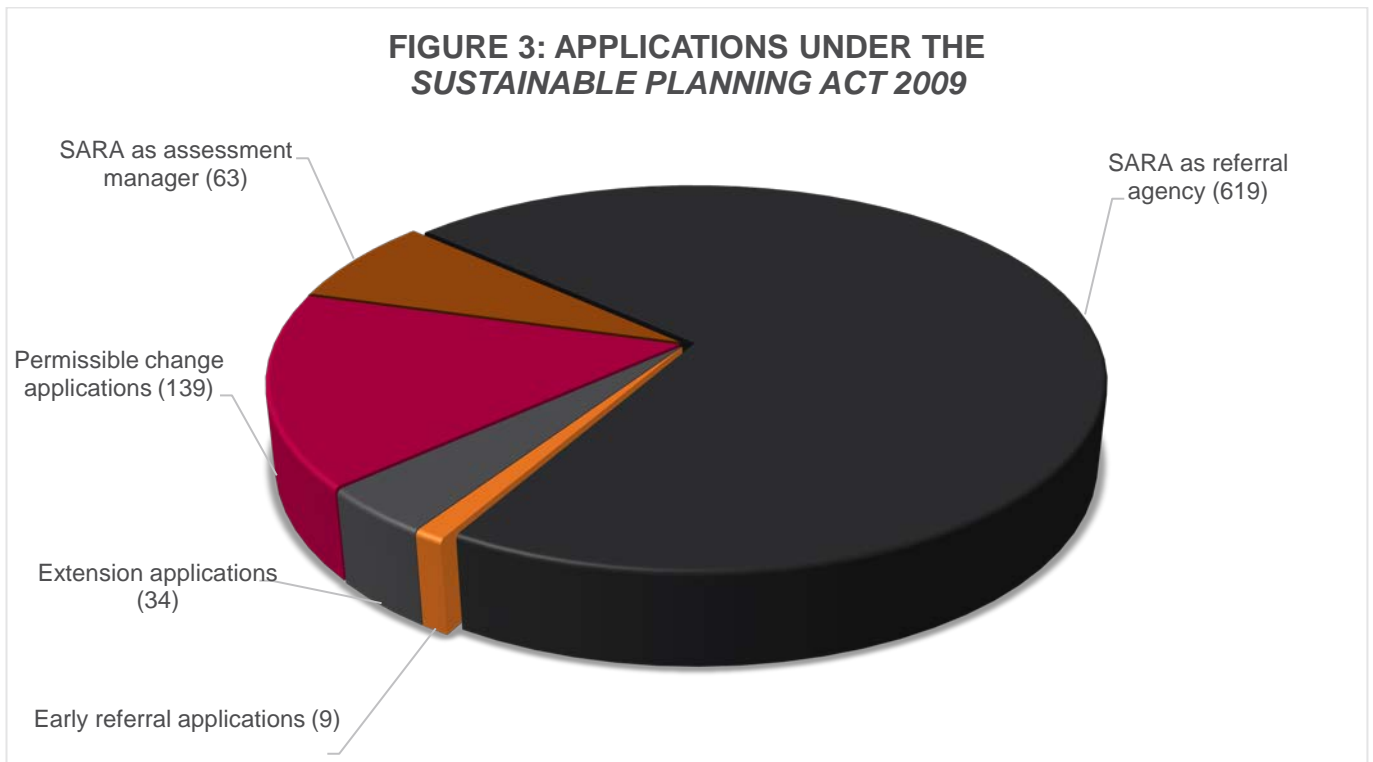
**Figure 1** provides an overall breakdown of SARA's activity for the 2017–2018 year under both the Planning Act and SPA. Most applications were assessed by SARA as a referral agency. Pre-lodgement advice, in the form of meetings and written advice, also formed a significant part of SARA's activity in 2017–2018.



**Figure 2** illustrates SARA’s activity for 2017–2018 under the Planning Act. Although most applications were received by SARA as a referral agency, the new pre-lodgement advice provisions accounted for the second largest number of applications received.



**Figure 3** provides a breakdown of applications assessed under SPA during the financial year. This overall number is smaller due to the new legislation, with an overwhelming majority being SARA as a referral agency.



## 3.0 SARA’s performance against 2017–18 KPIs

The following sections provide a snapshot of SARA’s performance against the adopted KPIs for the 2017–2018 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 the department’s online development application lodgement system MyDAS SPA and MyDAS2 for the Planning Act
- **qualitative targets** through data obtained from the Customer Satisfaction Survey.

This report includes KPIs related to both SPA and the Planning Act given that development applications were assessed under both pieces of legislation in 2017–18.

### 3.1 Planning Act 2016

The following sections provide details of SARA’s performance against the adopted KPIs for applications assessed against the Planning Act in 2017–2018.



#### 3.1.1 Information requests





In 2017–18 SARA issued:

- 44 information requests as assessment manager
- 276 information requests as referral agency.

Although SARA did not achieve all of the stretch targets for the KPIs around information requests, all relevant statutory timeframes were met. In some circumstances, limited information accompanying an application will result in an information request needing to be made.

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

Planning Act 2016			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
<b>When an information request is not issued</b> <i>(note: no relevant statutory timeframe)</i>				
As <b>assessment manager</b> , percentage of applications decided without an information request	Stretch target	85%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>85%</b>		
As <b>referral agency</b> , percentage of responses issued without an information request	Stretch target	85%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>80%</b>		

When an information request is issued			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory timeframe achieved?
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to issue information request	Statutory timeframe	10 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>9 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	8 business days		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to issue information request	Statutory timeframe	10 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>9 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	8 business days		

### 3.1.2 Further advice

The further advice process provides the assessment manager with the opportunity to provide an applicant with formal further advice.

In 2017–18 SARA issued 78 further advice notices.

<b>Planning Act 2016</b>			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory timeframe achieved?
<b>When a further advice is issued</b> <i>(note: no relevant statutory timeframe)</i>				
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to issue initial further advice.	Stretch target	11 business days		No statutory timeframe defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>9 business days</b>		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to issue initial further advice.	Stretch target	11 business days		No statutory timeframe defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>10 business days</b>		










### 3.1.3 Decision timeframes

The statutory timeframes under the Planning Act are different to those under SPA. There have been significant improvements to SARA's performance from previous years in achieving the KPIs for decision timeframes.

In 2017–18 SARA issued:

- 301 decisions as assessment manager
- 1291 referral agency responses
- 7 decisions on representations as assessment manager
- 57 decisions on representations as referral agency.

<b>Planning Act 2016</b>			<b>Stretch target achieved?</b>	<b>Statutory timeframe achieved?</b>
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to issue a decision	Statutory timeframe	35 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>22 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	22 business days		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to issue a response	Statutory timeframe	25 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>18 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	20 business days		
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to assess change representations	Statutory timeframe	20 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>10 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	15 business days		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to assess representations about a referral agency response	Statutory timeframe	N/A		No statutory timeframe defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>7 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	13 business days		

### 3.1.4 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'. Under the Planning Act, 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 will determine SARA's role in assessing 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 before a development application lapses.

In 2017–18 SARA assessed:


- 201 applications (as responsible entity) for a minor change
- 2 'other change' applications as assessment manager
- 32 'other change' applications as referral agency
- 6 extension applications.

SARA met the statutory timeframes for these applications but did not achieve all of the stretch targets. In a small number of applications, the complexity of the requested change resulted in minor time delays as further information and clarification was sought. It was pleasing to note the small number of applications for post-decision changes, when compared with the total number of applications approved.

Planning Act 2016			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory timeframe achieved?
As <b>responsible entity</b> , median time taken to assess a minor change application and issue a decision notice <i>(note: KPI is limited to applications without affected entity)</i>	Statutory timeframe	20 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>20 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	14 business days		
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to assess an 'other change' application and issue a decision notice	Statutory timeframe	35 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>14 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	22 business days		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to assess an 'other change' application and issue a referral agency response	Statutory timeframe	25 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>12 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	20 business days		
As <b>assessment manager</b> , the time taken to assess and decide an extension to relevant period request.	Statutory timeframe	20 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>15 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	7 business days		

### 3.1.5 Appeals

The department manages a range of court proceedings including disputes involving SARA decisions and conditions, as well as changes to approvals involving SARA. The department joined a total of 37 court proceedings in the 2017–2018 financial year, adding to its existing 19 proceedings.


<i>Planning Act 2016</i>			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
Percentage of total decisions and responses appealed.	Stretch target	<2%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>2%</b>		

### 3.1.6 FastTrack5

Under the Planning Act, 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 to nominate and provide the necessary supporting information when making the application and to pay the fee promptly.

One application took longer than 5 business days which meant the result fell short of the stretch target of 100%. This delay was due to administrative and operational issues, including delays in the reconciliation of the payment of fees. These matters have been identified and investigated to ensure the FastTrack5 continues to deliver shorter assessment timeframes for simple applications.

In 2017–18 SARA assessed 52 FastTrack5 applications.

<i>Planning Act 2016</i>			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
Percentage of FastTrack5 referral responses issued within 5 business days	Stretch target	100%		No statutory timeframe defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>98%</b>		

### 3.1.7 Urban design trigger

The urban design trigger included in the Planning Regulation 2017 commenced with the Planning Act. This new trigger is unique in that it provides the Queensland Government with the ability to influence and advise applicants and local governments on the suitability of a significant project's design, to ensure it contributes positively to the place and region. There is significant emphasis placed on the importance of addressing urban design considerations early in the design process and therefore engagement at the pre-lodgement stage is encouraged and may remove the need for the application to be formally referred as part of the development assessment process. In cases where a development application is referred to SARA for the urban design trigger, advice is sought from the Office of the Queensland Government Architect.

During 2017-2018 financial year, SARA responded to six pre-lodgement advice requests for written advice and two applications referred under the urban design trigger.

## 3.2 Sustainable Planning Act 2009 (SPA)

SPA was repealed with the commencement of the Planning Act. However, any applications that were currently under the SPA assessment process (including those still to be referred) at this time, continued to be assessed.

As expected due the repeal of the legislation, the flow of these applications assessed in 2017–18 was not consistent throughout the full year, with the bulk of the applications decided in the first three months of the period. At the end of the financial year the number of SPA applications in the system was significantly reduced to approximately 50 and these are expected to continue to reduce over the 2018–2019 period.



### 3.2.1 Information requests

In 2017–18, under SPA, SARA issued:

- 21 information requests as assessment manager
- 414 information requests as referral agency.

The stretch targets for the percentage of applications assessed without an information request were not achieved for the SPA applications assessed in 2017–18. A significant contributing factor to this result can be attributed to fact that it was the information request process itself, including the six-month applicant response period allowed under SPA, which caused the applications to be decided in the 2017–18 period.

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




<i>Sustainable Planning Act 2009</i>			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
<b>When an information request is not issued</b>				
<b>As assessment manager</b> , percentage of applications decided without an information request	Stretch target	85%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>67%</b>		
<b>As referral agency</b> , percentage of responses issued without an information request	Stretch target	85%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>33%</b>		

### 3.2.2 Decision timeframes

In 2017–18, under SPA, SARA issued:

- 63 decisions as assessment manager
- 618 referral agency responses as referral agency.

The stretch targets were not met in this category, this can be attributed to the complexity of the applications. Of the SPA applications remaining in the system, the greater proportion of them are by nature complex and required clarification around certain matters. Furthermore, SARA prefers to work with applicants to resolve outstanding issues, rather than issue a refusal.

<b>Sustainable Planning Act 2009</b>			<b>Stretch target achieved?</b>	<b>Statutory timeframe achieved?</b>
As <b>assessment manager</b> , median time taken to issue a decision	Statutory timeframe	20 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>27 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	17 business days		
As <b>referral agency</b> , median time taken to issue a response	Statutory timeframe	30 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>28 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	20 business days		





### 3.2.3 Post-decision changes

Under SPA, changes after a decision were known as a permissible change and, depending on the nature of the change and SARA's original role, SARA would either be a responsible entity or relevant entity for the assessment.


In 2017–18, under SPA, SARA assessed:

- 139 applications as responsible entity
- 103 applications as relevant entity.

SARA met the statutory timeframes for these permissible change applications but fell short of achieving the stretch lower targets. In a number of applications, the complexity of the requested change resulted in time delays as further information and clarification was sought.

<i>Sustainable Planning Act 2009</i>			Stretch timeframe achieved?	Statutory timeframe achieved?
As <b>responsible entity</b> , median time taken to assess a permissible change application and issue a decision notice	Statutory timeframe	30 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>30 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	20 business days		
As a <b>relevant entity</b> , median time taken to assess a permissible change request and issue a written notice	Statutory timeframe	20 business days		
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>12 business days</b>		
	Stretch target	10 business days		

### 3.2.4 Appeals



<i>Sustainable Planning Act 2009</i>			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
Percentage of total decisions and responses appealed	Stretch target	<2%		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>1%</b>		

## 4.0 Customer Satisfaction Survey results 2017–18

Data for qualitative KPIs are obtained from the annual SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey held in June and July 2018. Qualitative data provides a valuable insight into the experiences and satisfaction levels of SARA customers and stakeholders. The survey was sent to 1734 registered MyDAS2 users with a total of 327 responses received. The purpose of the survey was to understand the overall satisfaction of SARA’s assessment regardless of whether it was under the Planning Act or SPA. However, the MyDAS2 questions would only be applicable to the Planning Act.

### 4.1 Customer satisfaction KPI results

SARA achieved the stretch target for overall customer satisfaction but fell short of achieving the stretch target for customer satisfaction with the pre-lodgement process. The results from the qualitative question in the SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey outlined in section 4.2.1 provides a valuable insight into the reason for this result and identifies some key items where improvements can be made by SARA to improve customer experience and satisfaction. Regardless, these results reflect a high level of customer satisfaction.

Key performance indicator			Stretch target achieved?	Statutory measure achieved?
Level of customer satisfaction with overall performance as assessment manager or referral agency	Stretch target	80% satisfied		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>82% satisfied</b>		
Level of customer satisfaction with the pre-lodgement process	Stretch target	90% satisfied		No statutory measure defined
	<b>2017–2018 result</b>	<b>81% satisfied</b>		

SARA has a policy of not setting minimum information requirements for pre-lodgement meetings to encourage customers to undertake pre-lodgement in respect of their applications. In some cases where applicants have little information on their proposal, this results in a number of questions being posed of applicants, which may result in a lower level of satisfaction. Further work will be done in 2018–2019 to improve on the pre-lodgement process.

## 4.2 Other Customer Satisfaction Survey results

The following table provides a summary of other key findings from the Customer Satisfaction Survey that are not specific KPIs. There is consistent improvement across all categories, with customer satisfaction reaching as high as 89 per cent on some matters.

Question	2017–2018
<b>Pre-lodgement advice</b>	
Pre-lodgement advice clearly communicated SARA's position, expectations and advice	82% agreed
The advice received through the pre-lodgement provided guidance on potential issues	86% satisfied
The advice received through the pre-lodgement helped me to understand what was needed to lodge my application	85% satisfied
<b>Information requests</b>	
Information request was clear and concise	79% agreed
Information request was reasonable	78% agreed
<b>Decision notices, concurrence responses and conditions</b>	
Conditions were reasonable	88% agreed
Conditions were clear and concise	89% agreed
Conditions included reasonable timing/timeframes for required actions	89% agreed
<b>Staff service</b>	
How satisfied were you with level of service provided by SARA officers?	88% satisfied

### 4.2.1 SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey results comments

The survey also provided an opportunity for customers to input a free text response to the question: *'Could SARA improve its pre-lodgement service?'*

There were 118 responses received for this question, with 51 per cent of respondents satisfied and 49 per cent responding that SARA could improve delivery of this service. From this group, 57 respondents used the free text box to provide detailed suggestions and comments. Comments generally related to:

- advice about more timely, consistent and enhanced technical advice from technical agencies
- need for better resolution of conflicting agency requirements
- pre-lodgement process can be onerous and has limited flexibility regarding what is discussed
- advice provided is too generic
- there are sometimes delays in receiving minutes and advice
- SARA should offer more informal and better opportunities to discuss variations to developments
- pre-lodgement meetings need to better define what information needs to be lodged with the development application.



## 5.0 Continual improvement

The results from the KPI report and annual SARA Customer Satisfaction Survey provide the department with valuable insights into areas for further refinement and improvements to SARA operations. From this perspective, key areas that SARA will focus on during the 2018–2019 financial year include:

Key monitoring areas	Continual improvement
Pre-lodgement	Further training for departmental officers around the conduct of pre-lodgement services to improve customer experiences. Further advice to applicants about the pre-lodgement process.
Information request	Training and capacity building with departmental and technical agency officers around the appropriate use of information request and further advice notices. Improving guidance to applicants about well-prepared applications.
Further advice	
Decision and response timeframes	Continue to monitor and maintain the decision and response timeframes for applications assessed by SARA as the assessment manager or referral agency.
Post-decision changes	Detailed analysis to determine the underlying causes of the result for the processing of minor change applications and extension to relevant period applications.
Appeals	Continue to monitor and maintain the percentage of total decisions and responses appealed.
FastTrack5	Continue to monitor and improve the FastTrack5 applications including their administrative processes, to ensure they continue to deliver shorter assessment timeframes.
Other	Further training for department officers around drafting statement of reasons.
	Further training of department officers to ensure development approval conditions are framed to 'best practice' standards and are lawful and enforceable.



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