

Public to play EIA role

■ *The Nation*

THE GOVERNMENT PLANS to involve the community in conducting environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports to pre-empt social strife that may arise from large projects.

"EIA reports often lack credibility due to a complete lack of public participation," Natural Resources and Environment Minister Prapat Panyachatraksa said.

The EIA methodology will be overhauled to ensure that community residents have a say in the decision-making from the project's conceptual stage onward, he said.

In the past, disputes arose because of questionable EIA findings, he said.

Under existing rules, a winning contractor hires a consultant firm to conduct environmental studies. Many conservationists have said such studies are skewed to serve the contractor's interest rather than the public's interest.

In the planned overhaul, the government would make it mandatory for community involvement in the entire EIA process, starting from the drawing up of the terms of reference and the scope of each report.

It would also add a new requirement for every EIA report to factor in the health and social impacts of a proposed project.

The project categories requiring environmental studies would increase from 22 to 40.