

EIA 'best practice'

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Environmental Impact Assessment should be:

Purposive – the process should inform decision-making and result in appropriate levels of environmental protection and community well-being.

Rigorous – the process should apply 'best practicable' science, employing methodologies and techniques appropriate to address the problems being investigated.

Practical – the process should result in information and outputs which assist with problem solving and are acceptable to and able to be implemented by proponents.

Cost-effective – the process should achieve the objectives of EIA within the limits of available information, time, resources and methodology.

Efficient – the process should impose the minimum cost burdens in terms of time and finance on proponents and participants consistent with meeting accepted requirements and objectives of EIA.

Focused – the process should concentrate on significant environmental effects and key issues; i.e., the matters that need to be taken into account in making decisions.

Adaptive – the process should be adjusted to the realities, issues and circumstances of the proposals under review without compromising the integrity of the process, and be iterative, incorporating lessons learned throughout the proposal's life cycle.

Participative – the process should provide appropriate opportunities to inform and involve the interested and affected publics, and their inputs and concerns should be addressed explicitly in the documentation and decision-making.

Interdisciplinary – the process should ensure that the appropriate techniques and experts in the relevant biophysical and socioeconomic disciplines are employed, including use of traditional knowledge as relevant.

Credible – the process should be carried out with professionalism, rigor, fairness, objectivity, impartiality and balance, and be subject to independent checks and verification.

Integrated – the process should address the interrelationships of social, economic and biophysical aspects.

Transparent – the process should have clear, easily understood requirements for EIA content; ensure public access to information; identify the factors that are to be taken into account in decision making; and acknowledge limitations and difficulties.

Systematic – the process should result in full consideration of all relevant information on the affected environment, of proposed alternatives and their impacts, and of the measures necessary to monitor and investigate residual effects.

EIA 'best practice'

The EIA process should provide for:

Screening – to determine whether or not a proposal should be subject to EIA and, if so, at what level of detail.

Scoping – to identify the issues and impacts that are likely to be important and to establish terms of reference for EIA.

Examination of alternatives – to establish the preferred or most environmentally sound option for achieving the objectives of a proposal

Impact analysis – to identify and predict the likely environmental, social and other related effects of the proposal.

Mitigation and impact management – to establish the measures that are necessary to avoid, minimise or offset predicted adverse impacts and, where appropriate, to incorporate these into an environmental management plan or system.

Evaluation of significance – to determine the importance or acceptability of residual impacts that cannot be mitigated.

Preparation of environmental impact statement (EIS) or report – to document the impacts of the proposal, the significance of effects, and the concerns of the interested public and the communities affected by the proposal.

Review of the EIS – to determine whether the report meets its terms of reference, provides a satisfactory assessment of the proposal(s) and contains the information required for decision-making.

Decision-making – to approve or reject the proposal and to establish the terms and conditions for its implementation.

Follow up – to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of approval; to monitor the impacts of development and the effectiveness of mitigation measures; and, where required, to undertake environmental audit and process evaluation to strengthen future EIA applications and mitigation measures and to optimise environmental management.

EIA operating principles

EIA operating principles of good practice and performance**EIA should be applied:**

- to all proposals likely to cause potentially significant adverse impacts or add to actual or potentially foreseeable cumulative effects;
- so that the scope of review is consistent with the size of the proposal and commensurate with the likely issues and impacts;
- to provide timely and appropriate opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement, with particular attention given to indigenous peoples and other vulnerable minorities whose cultural traditions and way of life may be at risk; and
- in accordance with the legislation, procedure and guidance in force and with reference to international standards of EIA good practice.

EIA should be undertaken:

- throughout the project cycle, beginning as early as possible in the pre-feasibility stage;
- with explicit reference to the requirements for decision-making and project approval and authorization consistent with the application of ‘best practicable’ science and mitigation techniques;
- in accordance with proposal-specific terms of reference, which should include clearly defined tasks, responsibilities, requirements for information and agreed timelines for their completion; and
- to gain the inputs and views of all those affected by or interested in the proposal and/or its environmental impacts.

EIA should address, as necessary and appropriate:

- all relevant environmental impacts, including land use, social, cultural, economic, health and safety effects;
- cumulative effects and area-wide, ecosystem-level and global changes that may occur as a result of the interaction of the proposal with other past, current or foreseeable activities;
- alternatives to the proposal, including design, location, demand and activity alternatives;
- mitigation measures for each of the main impacts identified; and
- sustainability considerations, including the effects of depletion of non-renewable resources, of exceeding the regenerative and assimilative capacity of renewable resources and of reduction of biological diversity, taking account of relevant international agreements and commitments.

EIA operating principles

EIA should result in:

- systematic identification of the views and inputs of those consulted, including the balance of opinion on major issues and areas of agreement and disagreement;
- comparison of the impacts of the main alternatives considered with an environmental justification for the preferred option;
- best estimate prediction and evaluation of the potentially significant residual effects that cannot be mitigated;
- feasible, cost-effective measures to mitigate the main impacts identified (often called an environmental management plan);
- preparation of an EIA report that presents this information in form that is clear, understandable and relevant for decision-making, noting any important qualifications for the predictions made and mitigation measures proposed; and
- resolution of problems and conflicts during the EIA process to the extent this is possible

EIA should provide the basis for:

- informed decision-making and project approvals, in which the terms and conditions are clearly specified and implemented;
- design of environmentally sound and acceptable projects that meet health and environmental standards and resource management objectives;
- appropriate follow-up, including monitoring, management and auditing, to check for unforeseen impacts or mitigation measures that do not work as intended; and
- future improvements in EIA process and practice, drawing on the information from follow up activities.

Source: Sadler, 1996; amended for this Manual.