
Author: Claire Pettit
Position: Senior Technical Advisor – CEAM
Organisation: The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
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Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool that is used to consider the likely significant environmental effects of a proposed development. EIA as an environmental management tool is used around the world in developed and developing nations. Whilst this e-brief focuses on EIA in the UK, the principles of EIA that it identifies are relevant to any EIA in any country. EIA is an iterative process. The key stages in the process include proposal identification, screening, scoping, impact assessment, mitigation, review, decision making and follow up. Good EIA is integrated into the project development process and is not seen as a barrier to development.

What is EIA?

EIA can be defined as “a systematic process to identify, predict and evaluate the environmental effects of proposed actions and projects.”¹ The EIA process is applied prior to major decisions and commitments being made and ideally is integrated into the project design process.

The role of EIA is to inform the decision maker of the significant environmental impacts that are likely to occur if the development proposal is granted consent. The IEMA's Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment identify a number of immediate and long term objectives of EIA.

“Immediate objectives of EIA are to:

- improve the environmental design of the proposal;
- check the environmental acceptability of the proposals compared to the capacity of the site and the receiving environment;
- ensure that resources are used appropriately and efficiently;
- identify appropriate measures for mitigating the potential impacts of the proposal; and
- facilitate informed decision making, including setting the environmental terms and conditions for implementing the proposal.

Long term objectives of EIA are to:

- avoid irreversible changes and serious damage to the environment;
- safeguard valuable resources, natural areas and ecosystem components;
- enhance the social aspects of proposals; and
- protect human health and safety.”²

Background to EIA

¹ Sadler, B., Fuller, K., et al (2002), *UNEP Environmental Impact Assessment Training Resource Manual*, 2nd Edition, UNEP, Geneva.

² Based upon Sadler & Fuller et al (2002) contained in Fuller, K. et al (2004), *Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment*, IEMA, Lincoln

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