

**Strategic Environmental Assessment:
Integration into plan-making
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Scope of presentation

- Why is SEA being introduced?
- What does SEA consist of?
- How is SEA to be integrated into the plan-making process?
- Key messages

Background to SEA

- Directive 2001/42/EC consists of 15 articles and 2 annexes (reproduced in the guidelines)
- Objective is *“To contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”* [Art. 1]
- Experience with implementing EIA Directives has highlighted the need for a higher level assessment of the environmental impacts of plans which shape EIA projects

Key elements of SEA

- Preparation of an environmental report which systematically identifies and evaluates the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan
- Consulting the public and designated environmental authorities about the draft plan and the environmental report
- Taking account of both the report and the outcome of consultations before deciding to adopt the plan
- Making known the decision and how SEA influenced the outcome

Adding SEA to planning law

- 2000 Act anticipated the Directive
- New planning Regulations will require SEA for all regional planning guidelines / development plans / local area plans likely to have significant environmental impacts
- Regulations will also set out the procedural requirements for SEA, including designation of environmental authorities (including the EPA and the DEHLG)

When SEA applies

- Directive will apply to plans whose formal preparation or review commences after 21 July 2004 and which are likely to have significant environmental effects
- Apart from RPGs, SEA will be mandatory for:
 - City and County development plans
 - Urban development plans and local area plans, where the population of the area is 10,000 or more

Screening

- “*Screening*” is the process for deciding whether a particular plan (other than those for which SEA is mandatory) would be likely to have significant environmental effects
- Environmental authorities must be consulted
- Regard must be had to the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive
- Essential to document the screening process, especially if the outcome is that SEA is not needed

**Screening:
Annex II criteria**

- Characteristics of the plan: e.g. the scale of development envisaged over the life of the plan; the degree to which the plan sets out to promote sustainable development
- Characteristics of the effects of implementing the plan and of the area: e.g. the magnitude and reversibility of the effects; the vulnerability of the area to development pressures. Size of the area alone is not sufficient to rule out SEA
- All of the criteria must be considered initially, before deciding which are most relevant in a particular case

Scoping

- “*Scoping*” is the procedure whereby the range of environmental issues and the level of detail to be included in the environmental report are decided, in consultation with the environmental authorities
- The environmental authorities need to be given appropriate information (e.g. an issues paper and perhaps the current plan) if scoping is to be meaningful

**Scoping:
What is relevant information?**

- Only the information specified in Annex I that is reasonably required should be included in the environmental report
- Scoping should take into account:
 - Current knowledge (new research is not envisaged) and methods of assessment
 - Contents and level of detail in the draft plan
 - Whether assessment is appropriate at higher or lower levels in the plan-making / decision process

Environmental reports

- The report is at the heart of the SEA process
- It must be compiled at a formative stage in the preparation or review of a plan, so that environmental issues are taken into account
- It must contain the kind of information specified in Art. 5 and Annex I of the Directive
- Ideally, it should form part of the plan (if it is too long, a summary should be included)

Environmental report: mandatory contents

- Outline of the contents and main aims of the plan
- Baseline description / any existing environmental problems in the area
- List of relevant environmental protection objectives
- Likely significant environmental effects + proposed mitigation measures
- Reasons for choosing preferred alternative strategy
- Description of proposed monitoring measures
- Non-technical summary

Baseline description of the current physical environment

- Purpose is to provide a baseline against which effects of implementing the plan can be measured against a “do nothing” scenario
- Guidelines suggest possible data sources; environmental authorities can also help
- It is particularly important to identify (a) elements which are vulnerable to change; and (b) any existing environmental problems (e.g. water pollution) in the area
- Quantitative data is preferable, in order to measure any future changes

Environmental protection objectives

- Guidelines contain indicative list, based on international / European / national policies, from which those relevant to the particular plan should be selected
- Aim is to promote sustainable development, by systematically checking development objectives against protection objectives

Assessing likely effects on the environment

- Assessment should be carried out by the team as a whole, preferably with some external specialist advice
- While a matrix is a commonly-used method, it is not sufficient on its own. Conclusions should be drawn, and mitigation measures proposed where appropriate
- SEA has the capacity to assess cumulative effects

Alternatives

- The purpose of SEA is to facilitate selection of the most sustainable option, so that development projects based on the plan will also be sustainable
- Real alternative strategies should be compared (e.g. compact v. dispersed forms of settlement)
- Strategic alternatives are more likely at higher (e.g. regional) levels; lower level plans will be constrained by those above them in the plan hierarchy

Consultations

- Environmental authorities and the public must be given an opportunity to comment on the draft plan + environmental report before any final decision is made on the plan
- Transboundary consultations will be most likely in the context of regional planning guidelines / development plans in the Border Region

Monitoring

- Unlike with EIA, the SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of implementing the plan should be monitored
- Aim is to identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take remedial action if required
- Again, existing data sources (e.g. EPA) can be used
- Indicators can be used to measure changes in the environment, e.g. recorded loss of biodiversity
- Monitoring results should contribute to the next review of the plan

Benefits of SEA

- SEA is mandatory, so turn it to advantage
- SEA facilitates identification and analysis of alternative strategies, thus improving the quality of the plan-making process
- It should contribute to more sustainable development by screening out less acceptable alternatives at an early stage
- Process will raise awareness of environmental issues
- SEA will encourage greater use of measurable targets in the monitoring process

Key messages

- Vital to fully integrate SEA in the overall management of the development plan review (see draft development plan guidelines also)
- Important to get SEA process right:
 - ✓ Build on existing experience with EIA and statements of environmental effects of development plans / LAPs
 - ✓ Get as much help as possible from in-house specialists, environmental authorities, and consultants
 - ✓ Document the process
 - ✓ Share SEA experience