

PURPOSE

- *This set of criteria aims to provide general guidance on how to build effective new SEA processes and evaluate the effectiveness of existing SEA processes.*

BACKGROUND

- *SEA has recently become a "hot" issue, and IAIA sought to provide a professional product on the subject to assist our members. This set of criteria was developed by Rob Verheem of the Netherlands EIA Commission in consultation with members of the IAIA SEA Section and through discussion at special workshops held in 1998, 1999, and 2000 during the IAIA annual conferences.*

CONSULTATION PROCESS

- *This document is the result of an ongoing discussion over a three-year period by members of the IAIA Section, both over the Internet and at several IAIA annual conferences. The SEA performance criteria have been used and tested in practice by a number of IAIA members and were endorsed by the IAIA Board of Directors in November 2001.*

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STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT Performance Criteria

A good-quality Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process informs planners, decision makers and affected public on the sustainability of strategic decisions, facilitates the search for the best alternative and ensures a democratic decision making process. This enhances the credibility of decisions and leads to more cost- and time-effective EA at the project level. For this purpose, a good-quality SEA process:

Is integrated

- Ensures an appropriate environmental assessment of all strategic decisions relevant for the achievement of sustainable development.
- Addresses the interrelationships of biophysical, social and economic aspects.
- Is tiered to policies in relevant sectors and (transboundary) regions and, where appropriate, to project EIA and decision making.

Is sustainability-led

- Facilitates identification of development options and alternative proposals that are more sustainable¹.

Is focused

- Provides sufficient, reliable and usable information for development planning and decision making.
- Concentrates on key issues of sustainable development.
- Is customized to the characteristics of the decision making process.
- Is cost- and time-effective.

Is accountable

- Is the responsibility of the leading agencies for the strategic decision to be taken.
- Is carried out with professionalism, rigor, fairness, impartiality and balance.
- Is subject to independent checks and verification
- Documents and justifies how sustainability issues were taken into account in decision making.

Is participative

- Informs and involves interested and affected public and government bodies throughout the decision making process.
- Explicitly addresses their inputs and concerns in documentation and decision making.
- Has clear, easily-understood information requirements and ensures sufficient access to all relevant information.

Is iterative

- Ensures availability of the assessment results early enough to influence the decision making process and inspire future planning.
- Provides sufficient information on the actual impacts of implementing a strategic decision, to judge whether this decision should be amended and to provide a basis for future decisions.

¹ i.e., that contributes to the overall sustainable development strategy as laid down in Rio 1992 and defined in the specific policies or values of a country