

IEMA Environmental Assessment

Forum 24th April 2008:

**Objective led SEA –
Is there another way?**

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Outline

- Presentation (15 mins)
- Objective led SEA – advantages and challenges
 - Improvements in practice
 - Other approaches to SEA
- Round Table discussion (35 mins)
- Experience of SEA objectives
 - Moving SEA practice forward
- Review of discussion – 3 key findings (5 mins)

Environment Agency and SEA

Two sides to our SEA activities



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graph TD; A[Two sides to our SEA activities] --> B[EXTERNAL: Statutory Consultee  
Source of Information  
Source of Advice]; A --> C[INTERNAL: Plan Maker  
(Responsible Authority)];
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EXTERNAL:

Statutory Consultee

Source of Information

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INTERNAL:

- Plan Maker
(Responsible Authority)

What is Strategic Environmental Assessment?

tool for integrating environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of policies, plans and programmes



What is objective led SEA?

Use Scoping to identify a Plan's environmental context.

Use this context to define SEA objectives covering relevant environmental issues.

Develop environmental indicators and targets related to the objectives and create an assessment framework.

Assess the Plan's effects against the assessment framework.

Present the Plan's significant effects against the SEA objectives in the Environmental Report.

What are the advantages of Objective led SEA?

Make the potentially complex SEA process easier to:

- Understand (SMART is well known), and
- Rapidly disseminate, via training.

Provides a consistent and comparable approach.

Provides a broad base for assessment – Plan level effects are often less tangible than project effects.

Acts as a ‘catch-all’ to help provide proof of compliance

Allows assessment to be kept simple (matrix approach)

What are the challenges?

Objectives led assessment can lack focus.

The transparency of **likely significant effects on the environment** can be masked.

Some objectives cannot be achieved as SEA is decision support, not decision-making.

The current approach can inhibit improvements to future SEA practice.

Findings in the Plan-making process

Objective led significance findings:

Option H1 is likely to generate minor negative effects potentially detracting from the achievement of SEA Objective 1 (Conserve and Enhance Biodiversity).

Effects led significance findings:

Option H1 will lead to new development in the east of town, which is likely to reduce connectivity between locally important wildlife sites. This has the potential to affect the viability of a population of water voles (a B. species) that are present across these sites.

Improvements in SEA practice since July 2004

Assessment criteria / questions are frequently included allowing the SEA to focus on specific environmental effects.

Descriptions of actual environmental effects are appearing in ERs more frequently - as opposed to descriptions related to SEA objectives or tick boxes.

Techniques are occasionally used that move away from SEA objectives matrices (i.e. Causal-Chain Analysis, Sustainability Threshold Analysis).

But challenges remain...

Scoping consultation often focus attention on re-wording or extending SEA objectives, rather than relevant environmental issues.

Rs regularly focus on the Plan's affect on SEA objectives rather than its significant environmental effects.

Assessment frameworks are often re-applied to different plans without prioritising them to each Plan's likely effects.

Other approaches that could lead future SEA practice

SEA Process

Knowledge / relevance led SEA

Significance / effects led SEA

Causality led SEA

Opportunity led SEA

Underpinning SEA Practices

Commitment led SEA

Efficiency led SEA

Skills / Training led SEA

Round Table Discussion topics

Practical experience of SEA Objectives

Challenges and Solutions

What should be leading SEA?