

IEMA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORUM

24 APRIL 2008

Effectiveness in EA – a view from Government

**Roger Smithson
Communities and Local Government
Environmental Assessment Team**

Effective EA – what is it?

- **EIA and SEA – environmental safeguards or tick-box exercises?**
- **What do we mean by effectiveness of environmental assessment?**
- **How do we identify it? Can we measure it?**
- **How do we promote it?**
- **What causes ineffective EA, and how can it be countered?**

Purpose of the SEA Directive

SEA Directive, Art 1: Objectives (emphases added)

The objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of **protection of the environment** and to **contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes** with a view to **promoting sustainable development**, by **ensuring that**, in accordance with this Directive, **an environmental assessment is carried out** of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Purpose of the EIA Directive

No statement of objectives, but preamble states (among other things):

- [Various EC policies] stress that the best environmental policy consists in preventing the creation of pollution at source; affirm need to take effects on environment into account at the earliest possible stage in technical planning and decision-making...
- Development consents for [...] projects which are likely to have significant effects on the environment should be granted only after prior assessment of [these] effects has been carried out...

Guidance on SEA

All-UK “Practical Guide to the SEA Directive” (Sept 2005)
Basic guidance for any plan/programme – framework for other SEA guidance publications

ODPM (now DCLG): Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents (Nov 2005)
Integrates SEA into wider SA, mandatory under new English spatial planning system - closely based on Practical Guide

Separate guidance for planning in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Additional guidance on specific SEA topics and issues, e.g. types of effect

Guidance on EIA

- **Circular 2/99 and guidance to planners** to be replaced by mid-2008
- **Blue book** (EIA: a guide to procedures) being replaced
- Will also replace good practice guides on producing and reviewing Environmental Statements
- **CLG Website** links to legislation and guidance – also includes note to planning authorities on recent legal cases and how to avoid pitfalls
- **Report on scoping** (University of Manchester) - 67% of LPAs found scoping useful (confirming 2003 research)

Effectiveness of SEA?

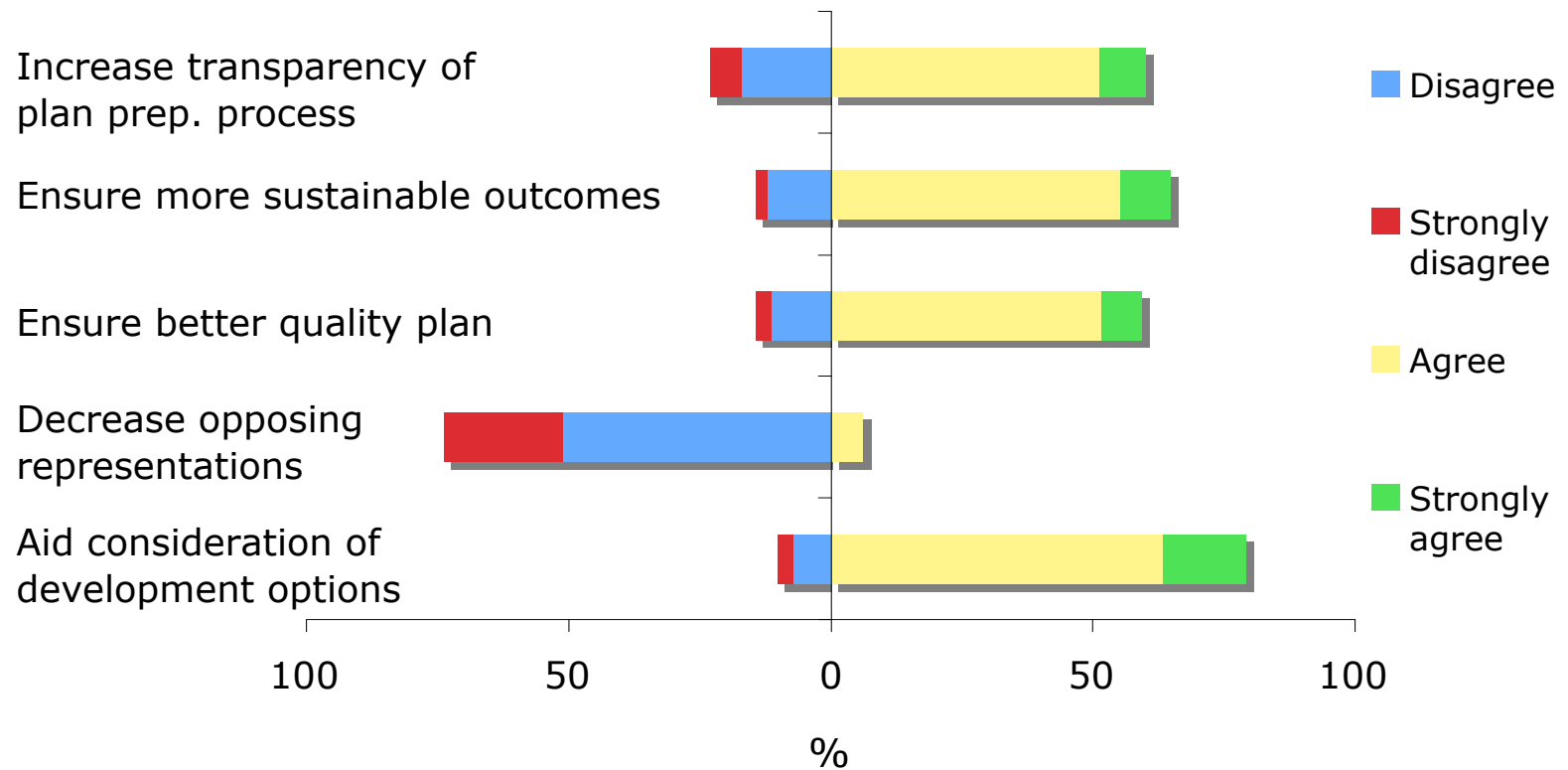
Therivel and Walsh (2005) *The SEA Directive in the UK: One Year On* (410 English and Welsh authorities surveyed – 201 replies):

- **SEA/SA improved plan's sustainability and planners' awareness of sustainability: 75% agreed**
- **SEA/SA made plan-making more transparent and improved planners' understanding of their plan: 50% agreed**
- **SEA was an effective use of time and resources: 47% agreed, 26% disagreed**

Of 130 authorities with enough experience of SEA/SA to comment:

- **18% said SEA had not led to any changes in the plan**
- **46% mentioned some modifications as a result of SEA**
- **37% said SEA had led to significant changes, e.g. revised objectives or new alternatives, or had an 'important' effect on the plan**

CLG “Spatial Plans in Practice” findings on Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating SEA)



Current CLG research

Towards a more efficient and effective use of SEA and Sustainability Appraisal in spatial planning – aims:

- **to help improve efficiency of application of SA/SEA processes**
- **to assess effectiveness of SA/SEA in influencing plan outcomes and increasing public involvement**
- **to improve consistency in methodology and approach through developing common baseline info, good practice case studies, highlighting synergies and methods of integration with other required forms of assessment**
- **to inform any changes to CLG guidance**

Contract let to Scott Wilson - report due in October

Effectiveness of EIA?

No recent studies of effectiveness in relation to overall aims of Directive – but...

- **Barker and Eddington Reports: time and resources for EIA**
- **European Commission DG Enterprise report on EIA Directive: similar concerns, more detail, international comparisons**
- **EC study found EIA valuable in preventing harmful impacts – helped to increase understanding of significance of potential impacts, improved awareness of need for sustainable development, improved public participation....**
- **But: numbers rising - costs and delays – issues of resources / capacity - fears of legal challenge - is EIA bad for business?**

Some questions for today....

Getting a handle – what is effectiveness in EA?

How effective are EIA and SEA now?

What are the problems? Who's unhappy?

What might solutions look like?

**What roles for Government, other stakeholders –
and IEMA?**