

GOVERNMENT URGED TO CAPITALISE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT'S POTENTIAL AS A TOOL FOR HELPING DELIVER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Two of the UK's leading professional organisations in the field of environmental assessment have come together to offer their help to the government to ensure that proposed changes to the planning system capitalise on the value that environmental assessment can bring to the environment, society and the economy.

The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and the Ireland & UK Branch of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA Ireland & UK) have concerns about the potential effect of the Government's Planning White Paper. Proposals included in the White Paper, which was released earlier this week on Monday 21st, have the potential to reduce the scope and effectiveness of both Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Both EIA and SEA are tools, required by European law, that contribute to informed decision making and the planning of more environmentally sustainable development.

IEMA Chief Executive Russell Foster said "*The Institute welcomes a consultation on this white paper but cautioned that Government needs to further consider the environmental and sustainability safeguards proposed within the Planning White Paper to ensure major infrastructure decisions are sound.*"

"*They must be based not only on current environmental, social and economic issues, but also on those that are likely to have increased importance to future generations, which will have to live with the consequences of such development.*" he concluded.

IEMA and IAIA (Ireland & UK Branch) encourage the Government to rise to the challenge of providing new infrastructure that meets the UK's economic development needs without generating disproportionate and lasting adverse impacts on the environment and society. Both organisations argue that to do this, the Government must:

- 1. Work with Environmental Assessment professionals** – IEMA and IAIA members are central to the development process in the vast majority of major infrastructure projects, through EIA, and the spatial planning system, through SEA. Changes proposed in the Planning White Paper, if not duly considered, have the potential to lead to greater costs and impacts on communities and the environment. The Environmental Assessment Profession is keen to work with Government to ensure that a planning system is developed that can deliver a sustainable future for all.
- 2. Develop clearer and more effective environmental safeguards** – Further consideration of safeguards in the Planning White Paper are needed to ensure it does not lead to an influx of inappropriate infrastructure development, which has long term negative environmental, social and economic consequences.

Adam Boyden, the IAIA UK and Ireland Branch's chairman said; "*As a profession we want to work with the Government to ensure that these crucial changes to the planning system result in a planning system that will lead to a sustainable future.*"

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For more information on the IEMA visit www.iema.net and for details about IAIA (Ireland & UK), go to www.iaia.org

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Notes:

1. The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) is a non-for-profit membership organisation established to promote best practice standards in environmental management, auditing and assessment. The Institute offers ongoing support to environmental professionals and aims to promote sustainability through improved environmental practice and performance. With over 11,000 individual and corporate members, the IEMA is now a leading international membership-based organization, dedicated to the promotion of sustainable development and to the professional development of individuals involved in the environmental occupation across many industrial sectors. For more information on the IEMA, its events, services, products, membership, training and publications, please visit www.iema.net.

2. The IAIA is the leading global networking organisation on impact assessment for sustainable decision-making, providing an international forum for communicating information on best practice and innovation. It is truly a multi-disciplinary organisation covering the many aspects of impact assessment, and has 1450 members in more than 120 countries, including private and public sector planners and managers, consultants and policy analysts, university and college lecturers, researchers and students. In 2005, a regional Branch for Ireland and the United Kingdom was created, which aims to promote interaction between impact assessment researchers at leading Irish and UK universities with professionals in the field.

3. For more information on IAIA and the UK and Ireland Branch please see www.iaia.org and www.iaia.org/modx/index.php?id=354 or email ie_uk@iaia.org.

4. Adam Boyden, Chair of the IAIA UK and Ireland Branch is an Associate at Nicholas Pearson Associates (see www.npaconsult.co.uk).

5. IEMA and the IAIA UK and Ireland Branch produced a joint response to the Barker Review of Land Use Planning, many of whose recommendations the Planning White Paper takes forward (see www.iaia.org/modx/index.php?id=354). A similar joint response will be produced in relation to the Planning White Paper.

6. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are assessments required by European law, which identify and evaluate the significant environmental effects of plans and projects, providing decision-makers and the public with the environmental information needed to make sustainable development decisions.

7. The legal basis for EIA lies in European Community Directive 85/337/EEC (as amended by Directive 97/11/EC and 2003/35/EC) 'on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment'. Since the requirements of the first EIA Directive were implemented into UK law in 1988, EIA has become the most important environmental management tool for predicting and managing the environmental effects of new development. In 2005, approximately 700 Environmental Statements (the document prepared by developers to accompany their applications) were prepared and submitted to accompany applications for planning permission and other development consents in the UK.

8. SEA was introduced by Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment', and implemented in regulations across the UK in 2004, in order to ensure that the potentially damaging environmental effects of strategic planning decisions are identified and taken into account earlier at the plan-making stage where they provide the policy framework for planning and other consent applications, rather than only at the project approval stage.

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