Environmental Statements (ES) have gone through a period of ‘weight gain’ over a number of years. The issue of exceptionally detailed and ‘fat’ ES’s is not a new one. This ‘obesity crisis’ has certainly not been aided by the introduction of a number of legislative changes potentially requiring more information to be included without subsequently focussing the information. The process of ‘putting the ES on a diet’ and encouraging leaner documentation (a proportionate, well defined, detailed and structured with little ‘fat’ and more defined ‘muscle growth’), has become a frequently debated topic in the wider EIA community.

Achieving proportionality and creating a leaner ES provides a multitude of benefits including: easier interpretation of likely significant issues by decision makers and stakeholders (the key objective of the process), closer adherence to the principles and objectives of the Directive (in terms of a focus on likely significant issues rather than all possible issues) and improved perception of EIA by developers (which in turn will help the EIA Community better deliver environmental protection / improvements).

The ES has many audiences all of which vary and have different expectations from the information contained within the ES. Producing a document that is leaner, proportionate, clear, concise, and focussed with appropriate detail for a variety of audiences is a challenge but one that is necessary and achievable.

CampbellReith took the opportunity to undertake a ‘teardown’ session as an initial step to considering how we can put our ES on a ‘diet’.

We took an ES and broke it down, interrogating the traits that the ES exhibits in terms of presentation and content which influence its length. As part of the tear-down, the following areas were identified as opportunities for proportionality:

- **Policy**
  - The policy chapter is one that takes up a number of pages within the ES with text that is often not beneficial to the interpretation of the significant environmental issues.
  - This does not invite the reader to explore and understand the policy as they find themselves divulging through information which is mostly irrelevant to them.
  - Policy is of course important but is better communicated within other planning documents such as the Planning Statement, so repetition is unnecessary.
  - The conclusion was reached that the policy Chapter can be cut out, instantly reducing a large chunk of the ES. Instead, local policy relevant to the site can be effectively referenced within each relevant topic chapter, which is more beneficial for the reader in terms of the relevance to the assessments.
• **Chapters and templates**
  - Although we have an efficient template, a revision of these templates with a new proportionate view could identify opportunities to reduce unnecessary text (such as avoiding repetition) and bring more focus to the technical chapters.
  - Review the front-end chapters and rationalise text within these, cutting out superfluous text and any repetition opportunities.
  - Ensuring that we only include baseline information that is relevant to the assessment of impacts, rather than additional information that might be ‘interesting’
  - An opportunity also exists for the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) to become more ‘non-technical’ and user friendly.
  - Using tables, graphics and cross-referencing more effectively in all areas of the ES to communicate ideas and summaries in a more efficient manner.
  - Altering the structure of the ES to allow for the incorporation of tables and graphics.
  - Clear guidance to the specialist EIA team and agreed terms of reference where possible to be completed by the internal team (with input as necessary) to ensure consistency within assessments at an early stage and helping to avoid repetition.

• **Scoping**
  - Continue to use effective scoping, including direct consultation with planning authorities and other regulators, to define the scope of the final ES appropriately to incorporate only those topics with likely significant effects

A topic discussed during the teardown with the team was the concept of digital EIA. Digitalising the ES allows all the information to still be widely accessible, with visual material resulting in a more user-friendly system for audiences.

The teardown has proven to be a valuable tool for putting the ES on a diet. Further sessions and progress will be made through internal meetings to discuss the outcomes and implement further actions. This is an evolving system, constantly changing and responding to a variety of external influences and factors. Once the initial steps have been completed, the approach will be reviewed to ensure that our ES’s are still compliant with the requirements of Regulations and the Quality Mark criteria.

*Rachel Cossins, Environmental Scientist, Campbell Reith Hill LLP, April 2019.*

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