Environmental impact assessment (EIA)
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Environmental Impact Assessment

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1 Description

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a procedure that ensures that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the decisions are made (see http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/home.htm). EIA is one of the older and most institutionalised procedures, and refers primarily to the environmental assessment of project level interventions. It is the one framework that is most firmly embedded in national legislation. In the EU, EIA is obliged through directive 85/337/EEC of 1985, which was amended in 2003 (Directive 2003/35/EC).

EIAs are carried out for projects. Whether or not the project itself is needed, is not addressed by an EIA. The Strategic environmental assessment process can be used instead.

2 Methodology

During an EIA procedure environmental consequences of projects are identified and assessed before authorisation is given to the project. The assessment could lead to making modifications to the project, for example to mitigate or reduce the expected environmental impacts. Public involvement is a key element of the EIA procedure. The public is informed of the decision afterwards.

3 Process

The process involves an analysis of the likely effects on the environment, recording those effects in a report, undertaking a public consultation exercise on the report, taking into account the comments and the report when making the final decision and informing the public about that decision afterwards (see http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/home.htm). IAIA/EIA (1999) describes the following steps as being part of an EIA process: screening, scoping, examination of alternatives, impact analysis, mitigation and impact management, evaluation of significance, preparation of environmental impact statement (EIS) report, review of the EIS, decision making and follow up. Note that not all these steps are specifically mentioned in (or obligatory on the basis of) the EU EIA directive (Sheate et al, 2005).

- Screening is the process of determining whether an EIA is required for a specific project.
- Scoping is identifying the impacts that are likely to be important (establishing a ToR for the EIA).
- Examination of alternatives is the process of determining the environmentally most desired policy option.
- Impact analysis is the process of identifying and predicting the effects of the proposal.
- Mitigation and impact management is the process to establish measures (or mechanisms) to minimise negative effects.
- Evaluation of significance is the process of evaluation if the impacts that cannot be mitigated are acceptable as compared to the benefits stemming from the proposal.
- Environmental impact statement (EIS) report needs no further explanation.
- Review of the EIS is the process of assessing the quality of the report.
- Decision making is approving or rejecting the proposal (although arguably not occurring within the EIA process).
- Follow up is the process of monitoring impacts and effectiveness of mitigation measures as well as reflecting on the EIA to strengthen future applications.
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4 Review

4.1 Experiences

EIA in the EU was introduced in 1985. Since then, many EIAs have been carried out. Various evaluations of the system have been made (see also http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/eia–support.htm). A great number of useful references to EIA–related publications can be found at http://www.iaia.org/Non_Members/Activity_Resources/Key_Citations/environm.doc. Furthermore, there is a scientific journal dedicated to EIA: http://www.elsevier.com/locate/eiar.

4.2 Links and combinations

The tool EIA describes the process of carrying out an environmental impact assessment. As such, the tool provides the framework for applying all kinds of assessment tools, such as cost–benefit analysis, multi–criteria analysis and various participatory tools.

4.3 Strengths and weaknesses

[To be checked by EIA expert!] The strength of EIA is that the procedure ensures that environmental impacts are being considered at some point in the decision making process. An important weakness of EIA, however, is that decisions are often taken above EIA level. The impact of carrying out an EIA on the decision with respect to the project, or on the project’s design itself, is therefore difficult to determine.

4.4 References
