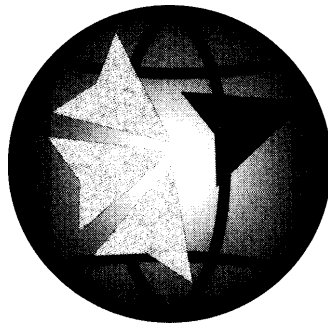


International Study
of the Effectiveness
of Environmental
Assessment



INFORMATION BULLETIN
No. 1
March 1994



Government of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada

Federal Environmental
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Bureau fédéral d'examen
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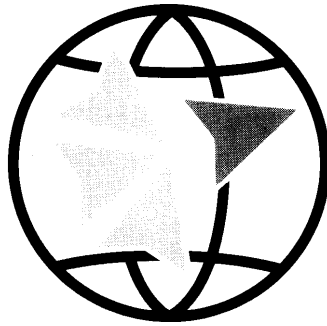


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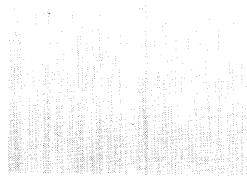
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**This information bulletin
describes the objectives and approaches
of the International Study of the Effectiveness
of Environmental Assessment and invites
the participation of interested individuals
and organizations.**



RECENT PROGRESS, NEW DEMANDS

Why is the effectiveness study being undertaken?

Environmental assessment (EA) has reached both a milestone and a crossroads in its evolution. After one quarter century of practice, the value of EA as a process for integrating environmental considerations into all levels of planning and decision-making is now widely recognized. Yet, its potential remains to be fully realized. In addition, new demands are being imposed in EA as a result of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or the Earth Summit.

25 Years of Environmental Assessment The formal application of EA to development planning was first introduced in the United States in late 1969 under the National *Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*. Since then, many other countries and international organizations have adopted and adapted EA, and significant advances have occurred in methods and procedures. Today, Principle 17 of the Rio Declaration agreed to at the Earth Summit calls for all countries to undertake EA as “a national instrument”.

“Environmental impact assessment, as a national instrument shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have significant adverse impact on the environment and are subject to a decision of a competent national authority”.

Principle 17, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development



Ideally, the extension of EA should reflect the collective experience gained so far in applying this practice.

A Post Earth Summit Perspective The conventions and conclusions reached at the Earth Summit also include various recommendations for strengthening the effectiveness of EA as a process that supports decision-making for sustainable development. Numerous studies have drawn attention to problems with the role, scope and application of EA as currently institutionalized. These criticisms take on added force and urgency in the context of current rates and scales of ecological damage and social dislocation, and of the reforms put forward in Agenda 21, the global programme of action agreed to at the Earth Summit. A concerted and coordinated response is required from local, national and international organizations and others with an interest and involvement in the EA process.



RESPONDING TO THE THE CHALLENGE

What kinds of initiatives are being planned?

Canada's Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office (FEARO) and the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) have agreed to cooperate in promoting and advancing the practice of EA, which is broadly defined to include all areas of impact analysis.

Two immediate, concrete initiatives are being undertaken:

- **The International Summit on Environmental Assessment** The summit will bring together, for the first time, heads of national agencies and international organizations with a direct interest and responsibility for EA. It will be held in Quebec City, June 12-14, 1994, immediately prior to the IAIA '94 annual conference on "Twenty-five Years of Impact Assessment: Looking Back and Projecting into the Future". The summit will provide an opportunity for senior officials to exchange information and views on current issues, emerging trends, and future directions in the field, and to review measures for international cooperation to advance the practice of EA.
- **The International Study of the Effectiveness of Environmental Assessment** The study is a two-year review and evaluation of the "state of the art" of contemporary practice. Preliminary results from the study will help to focus and inform discussion at the summit. The outcome of the summit will in turn provide further direction to the study. As well, the IAIA '94 conference will make an important contribution to the study.



TAKING STOCK OF THE ASSETS AND LIMITATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

What is the purpose and scope of the effectiveness study?

The theme of the study is “**Evaluating Practice to Improve Performance**”. It focuses on the status of EA in different countries and organizations, and its strengths, weaknesses and relationships to the challenges of Agenda 21. The study will draw primarily on the results of experience and case examples of sound practice to identify lessons for the future.

The study has four objectives:

- to review current issues, emerging trends and future directions in EA;
- to examine the relevance of EA to decision-making in selected countries and agencies;
- to document what works well and what does not in existing approaches; and
- to recommend measures for improving the application and conduct of EA.

By definition, the study is concerned with “the art of the possible” in EA; with what can be achieved in practice rather than what should be done in theory. As such, the study is directed towards administrators, practitioners and others who are *directly* responsible for developing or applying EA laws, policies and guidelines. It will address the challenges and concerns they face in their work, and how they can meet the demands being made on the EA process by Agenda 21.



STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

What approach is being taken?

The study will be organized into four phases, each corresponding to the objectives outlined above:

- Phase I: Background review of current issues, emerging trends and future directions
(June 1993 – June 1994)
- Phase II: Evolution of the contributions of EA to decision-making in selected countries
(January 1994 – December 1994)
- Phase III: Identification of enabling conditions and case examples of “best practice” for the main procedural steps and components of EA
(March 1994 -June 1995)
- Phase IV: Preparation of conclusions and recommendations
(June 1995).

A proposed framework for evaluating the effectiveness of EA is available from the secretariat for the study. This is a consultative document, developed in collaboration with interested organizations and individuals. It will be finalized after the summit and IAIA '94. For present purposes, the following nine themes are being used to focus discussion and contributions to the first phase of the study.



THEMES FOR PHASE I OF EA EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

- 1. Guiding Values and Principles**
- 2. Sustainability Concepts and Principles**
- 3. Strategic Environmental Assessment**
- 4. Cumulative and Large-scale Effects**
- 5. Integrated Approaches to Impact Assessment**
- 6. Public Participation and Dispute Settlement**
- 7. Monitoring and Follow-up**
- 8. Process Integrity and Harmonization**
- 9. Relationship of EA with Decision-making Processes**

A collaborative approach to information gathering is being taken. It is being organized under three tracks:

1. Workshops, seminars, conferences and bilateral meetings with national and international agencies;
2. Surveys of countries, national and international organizations and practitioners, administrators and researchers to gather information and views on current issues, emerging trends and future directions; and
3. Research, evaluations and case studies of direct relevance to the study objectives and themes.



STUDY RESULTS AND PRODUCTS

What are the benefits and deliverables of the study?

All organizations and individual practitioners have something to contribute and something to gain from their participation in the study. Benefits will derive from sharing information and exchanging views. The results of the study should be also helpful in process development. The responsibility for this course of action rests with agencies and individuals.

The information gathered through the study should be a valuable asset. As resources permit, organizers of the study intend to produce a number of products for study sponsors and subscribers. These will include

- **a publication series**, including information bulletins and background papers; and
- **an electronic database**, containing current information about EA practice.



PROGRESS TO DATE

What has happened and who is involved?

Many countries and international organizations have accepted and confirmed their participation in the effectiveness study. Linkages with a range of non-government organizations concerned with EA in industrial and developing countries are being established. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), for example, is directly supporting the study. UNEP is also coordinating with the study its initiative of strengthening EA in developing countries. Existing bilateral and multilateral environmental agreements between Canada and several other countries have also been linked to the effectiveness study.

A number of countries and organizations are sponsoring and supporting the EA effectiveness study, including

- Australia
 - Canada
 - Denmark
 - Finland
 - Hong Kong
 - The Netherlands
 - New Zealand
 - Norway
 - Sweden
 - United States of America
-
- Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office (FEARO)
 - International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA)
 - United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)
 - United Kingdom Institute for Environmental Assessment (UKIEA)
 - Centre for Environmental Management and Planning (CEMP)
 - International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
 - World Health Organization (WHO)
 - International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bilateral and multilateral workshops between Canada (FEARO) and

- Hong Kong
(March 7-9, 1994)
- Australia and New Zealand
(March 21-25, 1994)
- The Netherlands
(April 7-8, 1994)
- Nordic Countries
(April 11-12, 1994)
- The United States of America
(May 1994)

Special workshops and seminars

- Future directions for EA,
(CEMP, April 14-15, 1994)
- New dimensions in EA practice
(IAIA '94, June 14-18, 1994)
- Regional seminars on EA
(UNEP, Fall 1994)

International Summit on Environmental Assessment

- Quebec, Canada
(June 12-14, 1994)



FURTHER INFORMATION

Please direct inquiries to

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