

28th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment
THE ART AND SCIENCE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT
IAIA08 Session Chair's Report

Session number and name: TF 2.1 The WA EIA process: Is it as good at protecting the environment as it is made out to be? What can we learn from other jurisdictions?

Day: Wednesday **Date:** May 7, 2008 **Time:** 0830-10.00 hrs **# Persons attending session:** ~200

Name(s) of Session Chair(s)
Ian LeProvost (ECA WA)

Contributors

- Prof John Glasson (Oxford Brookes University)
- Chris Tallentire (Conservation Council of WA)
- Dr Paul Vogel (WA EPA Chairman)
- Rob Sippe (PRM Pty/Ltd)
- Dr Bob Humphries (Water Corporation)
- Garry Middle (Appeals Convenor)

(a) Three current issues in application of assessment processes discussed in this session

1. The effectiveness of the WA EIA process at protecting the environment
2. The WA EIA process in an international perspective
3. What can WA learn from other jurisdictions

(b) One or more emerging trends

- Retirement of baby boomers and increased demand means significant lack of experienced EIA resources
- Reports have to get slimmer and focus only on key issues and required outcomes
- EIA will go fully electronic within next 10 years.
- Regional SEA becoming more common, but may not be delivering desired outcomes
- EIA becoming more strategic and more ambitious in attempt to address sustainability

(c) Issues relating to impact assessment effectiveness:

(i) dimensions of IA effectiveness (i.e. what are the characteristics of effective IA?)

- Independent and well resourced EPA
- Early and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
- Early identification of key issues;
- Committed and well resourced Proponents
- Experienced and appropriate consultants
- The presence of a compliance auditing and enforcement framework
- The presence of a well informed community and media

(ii) challenges/barriers to IA effectiveness

- Political direction/interference/stalling/neglect
- Development focused Government
- Inadequate resourcing by both Government and Proponents
- Inadequate engagement of stakeholders and poor identification of issues
- Lack of compliance auditing and enforcement capability
- Inexperienced, underfunded and uncommitted Proponents

- Inadequate level of Social Impact Assessment
- Complex nature of assessment process

(iii) how these barriers might be overcome

- Review process and streamline to focus on key issues and outcomes only
- Better communication of new process requirements
- Better funding of regulators
- Change political values by forming powerful alliances and promoting champions for the cause.
- Resourcing of communities to assist engagement process
- Charge Proponents a Fee for undergoing EIA process and clearly specify community expectations of Proponent
- Integrate EIA and sustainability assessment with regional planning

(d) Comments on the Art and Science of Impact Assessment (i.e. the relative importance and interplay between science and values/politics/subjectivity in impact assessment)

Both are equally important, but societal values hold the key, and whilst science can inform the process, it is politics that governs what is actually possible and achievable. Ignore the latter at your peril, because the appeals process can be very lengthy for contentious projects which do not have local community support.