

IAIA'04 Theme Forums



Theme Forums will bring together the various aspects of impact assessment; examine how they apply to various sectors and issues, and open discussion around the question: "Impact Assessment for Industrial Development - Whose Business Is It?" These forums will be integrative in nature and will tie together the various threads of impact assessment as they pertain to a specific sector or broad topic. For example, a Theme Forum dealing with impact assessment and the oil and gas industry might address biophysical, socio-economic, cultural and health issues; public participation; issues of particular relevance to Aboriginal or indigenous people; regulatory issues; follow-up; assessment of cumulative effects; and voluntary environmental initiatives.

Theme Forums will be offered in three parallel sessions. Each will deal with a key economic sector or with an important facet of impact assessment. More detailed exploration of aspects introduced in Theme Forums will take place in subsequent Concurrent Sessions.

The following are the Theme Forum topics:

- Achieving Sustainability: the Role of Impact Assessment;
- Application of Impact Assessment to Fisheries, Agriculture and Forestry;
- Impact Assessment and the Oil and Gas Industry;
- Impact Assessment and the Mining Industry;
- Impact Assessment and the Electricity Sector;
- Industry Perspectives on Biodiversity and Impact Assessment, and
- Integrated Assessment of International Trade.
- Impact Assessment and International Finance
- Voluntary Environmental Initiatives - Industry Achievements

Achieving Sustainability: the Role of Impact Assessment

Chaired by: Ashley Nixon, Canada

In order to be a meaningful and worthwhile endeavour, impact assessment should contribute significantly to worldwide efforts to secure a sustainable future for the human race. This will likely be one of the most important criteria upon which the historical relevance of impact assessment is judged by future generations.

This theme forum will examine the connection between impact assessment and sustainability, and will seek to identify whether and how impact assessment has made a difference. It will explore ways in which the effectiveness of impact assessment in achieving sustainability objectives could be enhanced. It will also look at the ways in which impact assessment and related tools (e.g., environmental management systems, triple bottom line accounting, adaptive management) are being used by organizations in the day-to-day conduct of their businesses. It will explore how these evolving tools can be most effectively used to achieve a sustainable future.

This theme forum will provide an important jumping off point for a wide range of topics that will be pursued in detail in subsequent concurrent sessions.

Application of Impact Assessment to Fisheries, Agriculture and Forestry

Chaired by: Pat Duffy, Canada

During the first thirty years of its existence, impact assessment has focused on physical projects. For the most part, fisheries, agriculture and forestry have not benefited from systematic impact assessment. These sectors have been largely excluded from impact assessment policies and practices in most national, provincial and state jurisdictions worldwide, including those of Canada. Moreover, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) does not have an EIA policy and procedure, although it is responsible for these three sectors in the UN system.

During the same period, soil, land and water, and the resources they support, have continued to be used inefficiently or have significantly deteriorated, while poverty and income disparities have grown.

Impact assessment could have played an important role in addressing the problems that have been encountered. Recent impact assessment work has demonstrated that this tool has important potential to predict and mitigate negative effects for projects and practices in the fisheries, agricultural and forestry sectors.

The theme forum and related concurrent sessions will:

- Take stock of the status quo of environmental protection and impact assessment in the three sectors. What has been achieved? What are the issues and the lessons learned?
- Provide examples of successful applications of impact assessment to the sectors, and of gaps and obstacles to a wider beneficial application of impact assessment.
- Make recommendations on the way forward to usefully broaden the application of impact assessment to fisheries, agriculture and forestry.

Impact Assessment and the Oil and Gas Sector

Chaired by: Todd Zimmerling, Canada; Katherine Preston, Canada

Sponsored by: Gartner Lee Limited and RWDI West Inc.

The oil and gas sector is a global leader in the application of impact assessment. Yet its detractors often claim that impact assessment processes are still not rigorous enough to prevent unsound projects. Its supporters, on the other hand, often protest that the sector is over-regulated and unfairly subjected to greater scrutiny than are other industrial sectors.

The discussions of impact assessment in the oil and gas sector will focus on two areas.

First, there will be an examination of actual project-specific experience in conducting impact assessments of various phases of oil and gas development. Offshore oil and gas exploration and development experience will be highlighted, and its relevance to proposed oil and gas development off the west coast of Canada will be explored. In addition, there will be an examination of impact assessment experience related to various other types of oil and gas activities, including seismic surveys, exploration, development, production, transport and commercialization. Case studies illustrating both Canadian and international experience will be featured.

Secondly, broader applications of impact assessment, like regional and strategic assessment and analysis of cumulative effects, will be explored. These discussions will draw heavily upon the experiences of such jurisdictions as Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Because of its broad scope, the theme forum will emphasize "lessons learned."

Impact Assessment and the Mining Industry

Chaired by: Luis E. Sánchez, Brazil; Alonso Zarzar, Peru; Susan Ross, Canada

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the mining industry has been important in dealing with mine impacts such as acid rock drainage, the use of toxic chemicals for mineral processing and large residual waste rock piles. These days impact assessment tools such as environmental management systems, adaptive environmental management, better public consultation and more effective environmental regulation have reduced mining impacts where they have been effectively used. Mine “design for closure” is a technique in growing demand and of obvious value for sustainability of mining operations.

The theme forum and related concurrent sessions will examine the application of these and other impact assessment tools in the mining industry applied over the life cycle of mining projects. The intent is to find those impact assessment tools that are most effective and efficient. Some of the issues to be discussed include:

- evolving standards and expectations for impact assessments of mining projects
- the balance between any rights of communities to reject new mining development and the potential for national economic impact
- designing for closure and closure planning for sustainable development subsequent to the exhaustion of the resource
- case studies that demonstrate successful innovation in mining impact assessment

Impact Assessment and the Electricity Sector

Chaired by: Peter Leonard, Canada
Sponsored by: Hydro-Québec

The electric industry has traditionally carried out assessments for its major hydroelectric, fossil fuel, and nuclear generation facilities. Major transmission lines have also required assessment.

In addition, “second generation” infrastructure and energy provision (hydro re-licensing in the United States, restructuring of the national transmission grids in the United Kingdom, and renewable energy systems such as wind and solar) are required to undergo environmental impact assessments or strategic environmental assessments.

The theme forum and its related concurrent sessions will address how such assessments have been carried out more efficiently and effectively. In addition, they will address how electric utilities have effectively used the many tools related to impact assessment.

The forum will demonstrate how such companies are integrating strategic environmental assessment (SEA), environmental impact assessment (EIA) and environmental management systems (EMSs) into their existing business strategies, and how stakeholders are participating in their business processes.

Industry Perspectives on Biodiversity and Impact Assessment

Chaired by: Helen Byron, United Kingdom; Heidi Klein, Canada

Biodiversity is climbing the business agenda around the world. From the extractive industries to resource-based industries and the financial and insurance sectors, biodiversity is becoming an increasingly important issue. Impact assessment has long been an industry tool, but has traditionally not provided the specific information and guidance necessary to identify and manage impacts—both positive and negative—on biodiversity. But the situation is changing—as industries and companies are recognising the importance of biodiversity and moving to ensure that it is integrated substantively into impact assessment processes.

This theme forum and related concurrent sessions will focus on the business case for biodiversity and highlight progress made through guidelines and practice in integrating biodiversity into corporate and industry impact assessment practices. They will also identify gaps and needs in these processes and practices.

In addition, lessons learned from the IAIA Biodiversity and Impact Assessment Capacity Building Project will be brought forward to build the understanding of the biodiversity and impact assessment work being done. This project has made significant progress in building the capacity of impact assessment practitioners in integrating biodiversity issues.

Integrated Assessment of International Trade

Chaired by: Clive George, United Kingdom; Bernice Goldsmith, Canada;
Thomas Gilmore, Canada

Since the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancun in September 2003, the impacts of international trade have received considerable public attention. Meanwhile, as the current round of WTO negotiations move towards a conclusion, many regional trade agreements are being forged or extended. A fuller understanding of the likely impacts of all these trade agreements, and of individual countries' trade policies, can both inform the public debate and contribute positively to the negotiations themselves.

Impact assessment of trade-related policies can provide important insights into the relationships between trade and poverty reduction, conservation of natural resources, biological diversity and the social and cultural aspects of development. It aims to provide developed, developing and transitional countries with tools and mechanisms which help to realise the potential economic gains of trade liberalisation, in a manner that is consistent with national and international sustainable development goals. It may similarly cast light on the relationships between trade rules and multilateral environmental agreements, and other aspects of global governance, highlighting areas where further international cooperation and technical assistance may be needed in pursuit of sustainable development goals.

Topics for discussion during the theme forum will include: North American and European approaches; the impacts of agricultural trade, forestry, etc.; the impacts of trade on biodiversity; relationships between trade agreements and multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs); and corporate responsibility (e.g., technology transfer, multinational operations and free trade zones).

Topics for discussion during the pursuant concurrent sessions include impact assessment case studies, sector case studies (agriculture, forestry, etc.), consultation and public involvement, capacity building and technical assistance, methodologies, quantitative and qualitative techniques

Impact Assessment and International Finance

Chaired by: Peter Neame, Canada; Arthur FitzGerald, Canada
Sponsored by: International Finance Corporation and Export Development Canada

Increasingly, international financial institutions are using the instrument of impact assessment (IA) to manage environmental and social risk on projects they finance. From the multilateral Development Finance Institutions, to export credit agencies, as well as in bi-lateral agreements, including those with OECD countries, impact assessment is becoming integral to prudent project financing.

With the recent promulgation of the Equator Principles, private sector commercial banks are joining up as well. Adoption of the Equator Principles commits a bank to:

- Screen and categorize projects for environmental and social risks.
- Assess social and environmental impacts accordingly.
- Manage potential impacts pro-actively and transparently.
- Covenant environmental and social requirements in loan documentation.

Now, the environmental and social review process established by the International Finance Corporation (IFC -- the private sector arm of the World Bank Group) is being applied to projects around the globe through private sector initiatives. The world has changed.

The Equator Principles work through a hierarchy of requirements, including:

- Environmental and social 'safeguard' policies.
- Specific, quantitative pollution limits (by industrial sector).
- A transparent public process for their application with impact assessment at the core of the process.

This Theme Forum will be one of the first international events to focus specifically on the use of impact assessment by the international finance community. It will be an important opportunity for international finance and impact assessment practitioners to meet, to share experiences, and to learn how these new initiatives are unfolding.

Topics in this Theme Forum will include the latest information on the application of the Equator Principles; the status and future of the OECD's "Common Approaches on the Environment," financial institution processes for implementing IA, integrating IA into financial decision-making, case studies on IA and international finance, the corporate reputational benefits of IA, and IA as a financial risk management tool.

Voluntary Environmental Initiatives - Industry Achievements

Chaired by: John Dauvergne, Canada

Over the past decade, Canadian industry has reduced its ecological footprint and improved the environmental sustainability of its operations. When a company or sector commits to environmental sustainability, it typically commits to adopting best practices and exceeding regulatory standards. As well, it usually concerns itself with the ends of legislation and public policy, ends such as preventing pollution, protecting biodiversity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Corporate goals and behaviour are impacted and companies seek out cost-effective risk reduction and win-win opportunities that simultaneously improve environmental and competitive performance.

Impact assessment leading to the mitigation of adverse environmental effects tends to be linked to formal processes and legislation. However, it is becoming apparent that most of the real improvement in industry's environmental performance is the result of initiatives undertaken voluntarily. This Theme Forum and related concurrent sessions will look at what has been achieved voluntarily through such frameworks and initiatives as Responsible Care (chemicals), Sustainable Forest Management (forest products), Towards Sustainable Mining (mining and metals), Environmental Commitment and Responsibility (electricity) and similar initiatives underway in countries other than Canada. It will look at voluntary industry-government partnerships like the Canadian Industry Program for Energy Conservation (CIPEC) and the U.S. Green Lights Programme. It will examine what drives industry's participation in these programmes and review what has been achieved.

A number of important questions will be addressed:

- Are some sectors evolving environmentally responsible governance frameworks and moving toward self-regulation as a means of ensuring continued access to resources?

- How successful have various sustainability initiatives and approaches been in engaging large industry and small and medium-sized enterprises, believed to account for about 60% of business pollution and waste?
- How can public policy better support development of voluntary sustainability initiatives?
- How can voluntary sustainability initiatives and frameworks be applied internationally in market economies (Responsible Care programs are now being implemented in more than 40 countries)?