

28<sup>th</sup> 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:** CS1.12 Enhancing impact assessment in the South Pacific

**Day:** Tuesday      **Date:** 6 May 2008      **Time:** 1600-1730      **# Persons attending session:** 30

**Name(s) of Session Chair(s)**

Lachlan Wilkinson

**Contributors** Tapa Suaesi, South Pacific Regional Environment Program

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

- potential for increased use of SEA
- building community participation and support for EIA
- making EIA effective, not just seen as a barrier to development

**(b) One or more emerging trends**

Use of strategic assessment as alternative to 'town planning' land use approaches where this conflicts with customary land ownership

**(c) Issues relating to impact assessment effectiveness:**

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

Community participation, flexible mechanisms for EIA processes to recognise different cultural/social/political characteristics of each country, integrated with land use planning systems.

**(ii) challenges/barriers to IA effectiveness**

Institutional weaknesses, weak policy and legal frameworks, lack of political will and poor governance, data gaps.

**(iii) how these barriers might be overcome**

Capacity building: increased sharing of information through networks, developing toolbox of guidelines and best practice examples, short-term exchange of staff between similar countries, semi-retired experienced professionals could volunteer their time, support for training opportunities such as attending IAIA conference.

**(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)**

While science is critical in impact assessment, the bigger challenge in Pacific Island Countries is the art of developing culturally appropriate approaches to EIA and building community and government support. The need for EIA in these countries can be clearly demonstrated by science but science alone will not 'sell' EIA.