

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: CS5.1 Alternatives, Decision-making and Impact Assessment

Day: Thursday **Date:** 8 May 2008 **Time:** 11-12 **# Persons attending session:** 25

Name(s) of Session Chair(s)

Eric Markus; Kaarina Stiff

Contributors

Eric Markus, Kaarina Stiff, Cassandra Wesolowski

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

- Handling of alternatives
- Connection and co-ordination with decision-making process(es)
- The function of IA in tiered decision-making processes

(b) One or more emerging trends

- Increased awareness and understanding of the whole decision-making process and setting (e.g. in project planning, transport planning), not just the IA process
- Realization that IA can't stand on its own – it has to be woven into the context in which it takes place, including the political decision-making process
- The need to balance stakeholder interests

(c) Issues relating to impact assessment effectiveness:

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

In the context of alternatives, IA is most effective when there is a genuine desire to use the IA process to develop the project.

(ii) challenges/barriers to IA effectiveness

Key challenges are the often missing connections between IA and decision-making processes, and the need to 'manage expectations', when stakeholders expect too much from IA in a political decision-making process.

(iii) how these barriers might be overcome

Improving the understanding of the different processes and linkages, both for IA practitioners and for others (planners, decision-makers, etc); continue to promote IA as a key piece of the broader decision-making context.

(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)

It is important to acknowledge the need for both the details and facts (the "science") and the bigger picture, i.e. the context in which a project or a plan is set (the "art" or politics). The connection and interplay between art and science are fundamental questions that need discussion and debate. An awareness of the differences and tensions between them seem to be vital for an 'efficient' or 'effective' IA.