

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: Opening Plenary

Day: Tuesday **Date:** 6 May 2008 **Time:** 8.30-10.30
Persons attending session: About 500

Name(s) of Session Chair(s): Angus Morrison-Saunders

Contributors: Ian Lowe and Robin Bidwell

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

1. Steps towards a sustainable future
2. Scientific Knowledge and impact assessment
3. The process of impact assessment

(b) One or more emerging trends

A value based approach to impact assessment has been emerging. Increasingly, ecological sensitivity, quality of life and human solidarity is emphasized (against the past approach of delineation of nature, quantity of life and individualism).

(c) Issues relating to impact assessment effectiveness:

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

- Understanding of the stakeholders - community/NGOs (by the proponent)
- Understanding of the total process and agreements

(ii) challenges/barriers to IA effectiveness

- Difficult social and political context
- Local vs. international priorities
- Opposition from civil society organisations

(iii) how these barriers might be overcome

- The proponent has to keep an open mind
- Focus on long-term risk management
- Conduct free, prior and open public consultation
- Participatory processes must be followed when there is a need to make hard choices

(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)

Assuming that we are looking at the whole truth and nothing else is not correct. We have identified only 10-15% of species that exist on this earth. So how can we have a complete 'scientific' analysis on the basis of available information? This leaves immense scope for value based impact assessment.

There are also structural issues like 'who' commissions the impact assessment, and who conducts the reviews? Interest of these stakeholders definitely affects the scientific process.

Finally, 'Decisions inevitably reflect values'. Hence there is a need of consciously integrating the value aspects of impact assessment when following the scientific methodology.