

EVALUATING PRO- PROJECT BIAS IN EIA

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BIAS

Bias = ‘a tendency to support or oppose a particular person or thing in an unfair way by allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment’.

DOES IT EXIST IN EIA?

‘... a common complaint about many EIA systems is that the decision-making is too closed and biased towards the proponent.’ Glasson (1999: p127):

EIA & RATIONALISM

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
 - objective study of the potential significant environmental impacts of a proposed project.
 - built on rationalist decision making model:

*Frame the problem → Define key objectives →
Establish alternatives → Identify consequences →
Clarify trade-offs*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIAS IN EIA

- Project Proponent Undertaking the EIA
- Scoping
- Evaluating Significance
- Report Presentation

LITERATURE SUGGESTS BIAS CAN FEATURE THROUGH:

- Unconscious decisions by proponent
- Unconscious bias on how EIA is carried out
- Conscious favourable presentation of EIA results in report

STUDY

- Where bias features in the EIA process
 - How it might be expressed
 - What is being done to tackle it
 - What needs to be done in the future?
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- Indices of bias applied to case study ES
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- Questionnaire → practitioners
 - 35 respondents : Planners (6), Statutory Consultees (2), Consultants (23), Other (4).



FINDINGS

INDICES OF BIAS → CASE STUDY

1. Promotion and justification of the project;
2. Ambiguous language and contradiction in impact prediction;
3. Little or no explanation of the criteria used in determining impact significance;
4. Proposed mitigation measures not adequately addressing impacts.

MISLEADING LANGUAGE

The environment provides the opportunity for the golf courses to be formed with minimal disturbance and engineering operations ... the development will firstly be carried out in such a way as to avoid disruption to the natural environment...

CONTRADICTION

Chapter 7- Overall .. A net reduction in biodiversity, ..probably .. Short-term and long-term

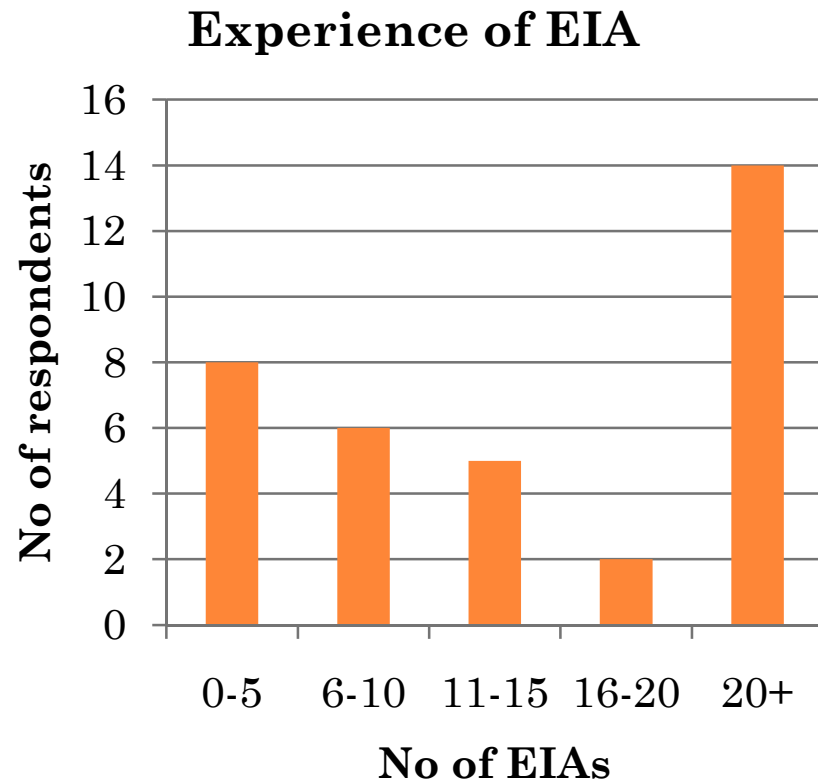
Chapter 16 – development judged to have positive impact on diversity of wildlife; suggests that biodiversity of site could be increased.

PROMOTING THE PROPONENT

The Trump Organisation works closely with all environmental bodies and is attracted to locations of outstanding natural beauty. Each and every Trump golf course compliments their natural surroundings and each site is protected and enhanced.

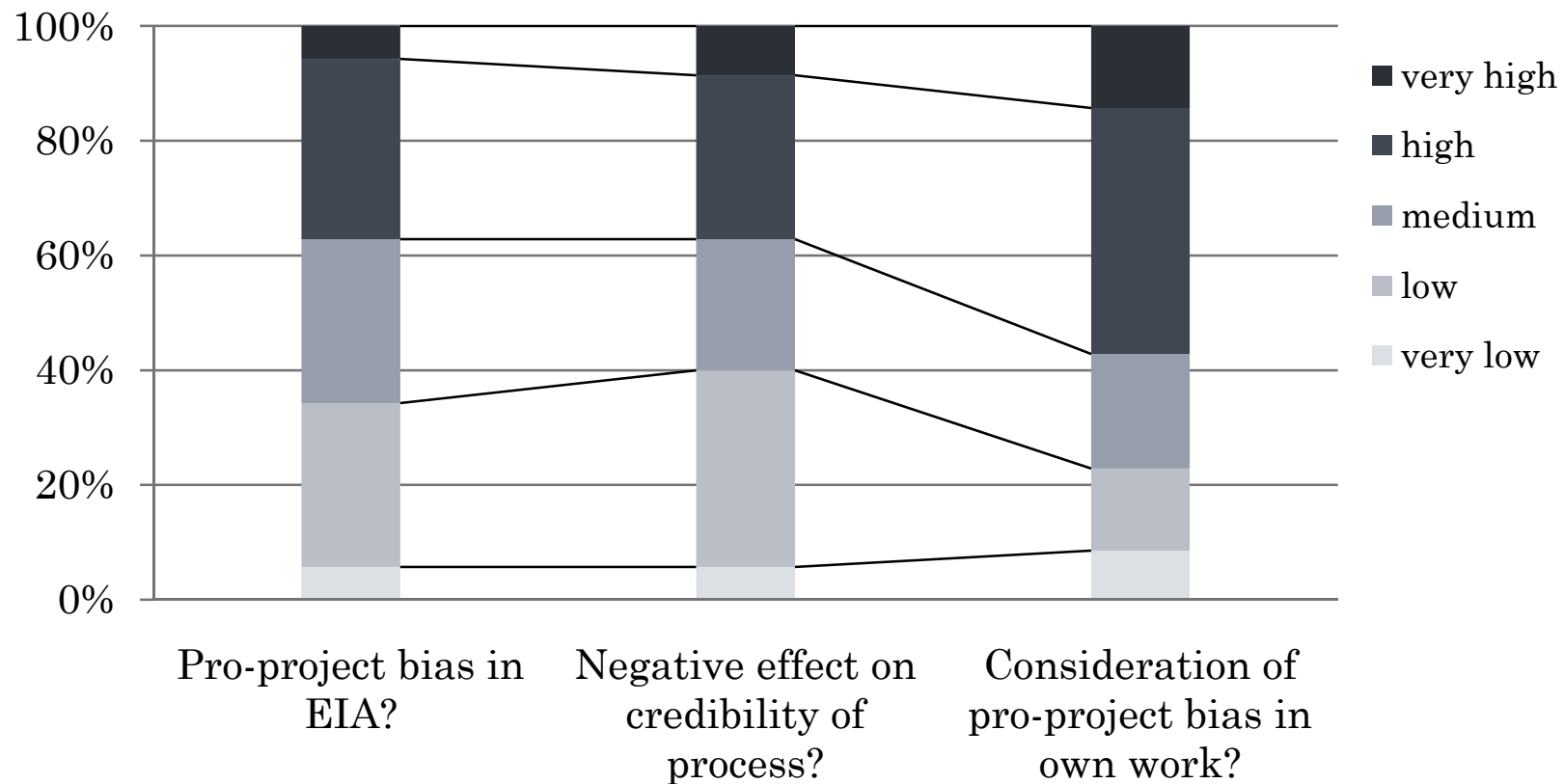
FINDINGS - QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondents



FINDINGS - QUESTIONNAIRE

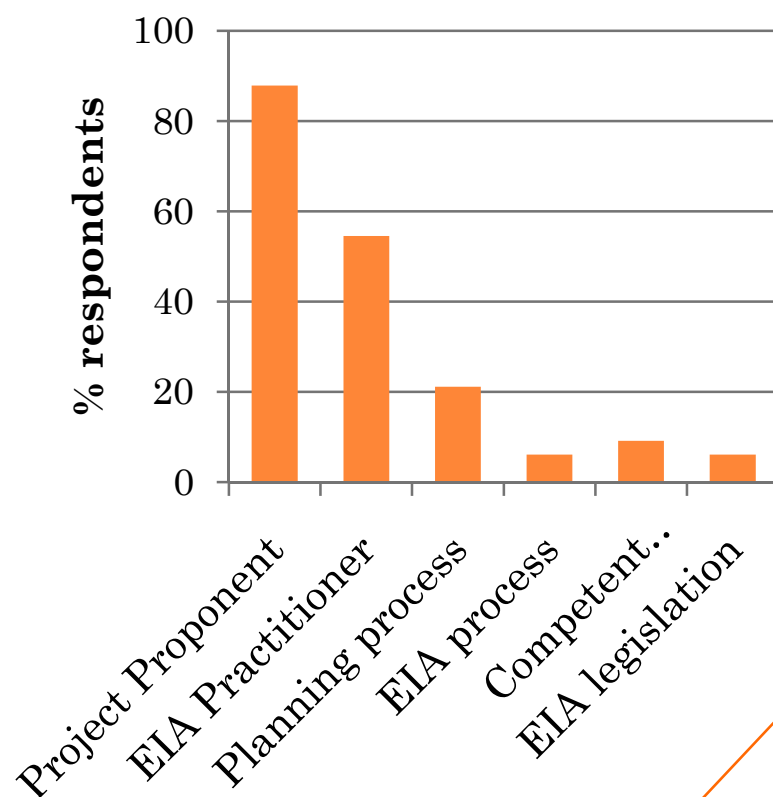
Perceptions of Bias



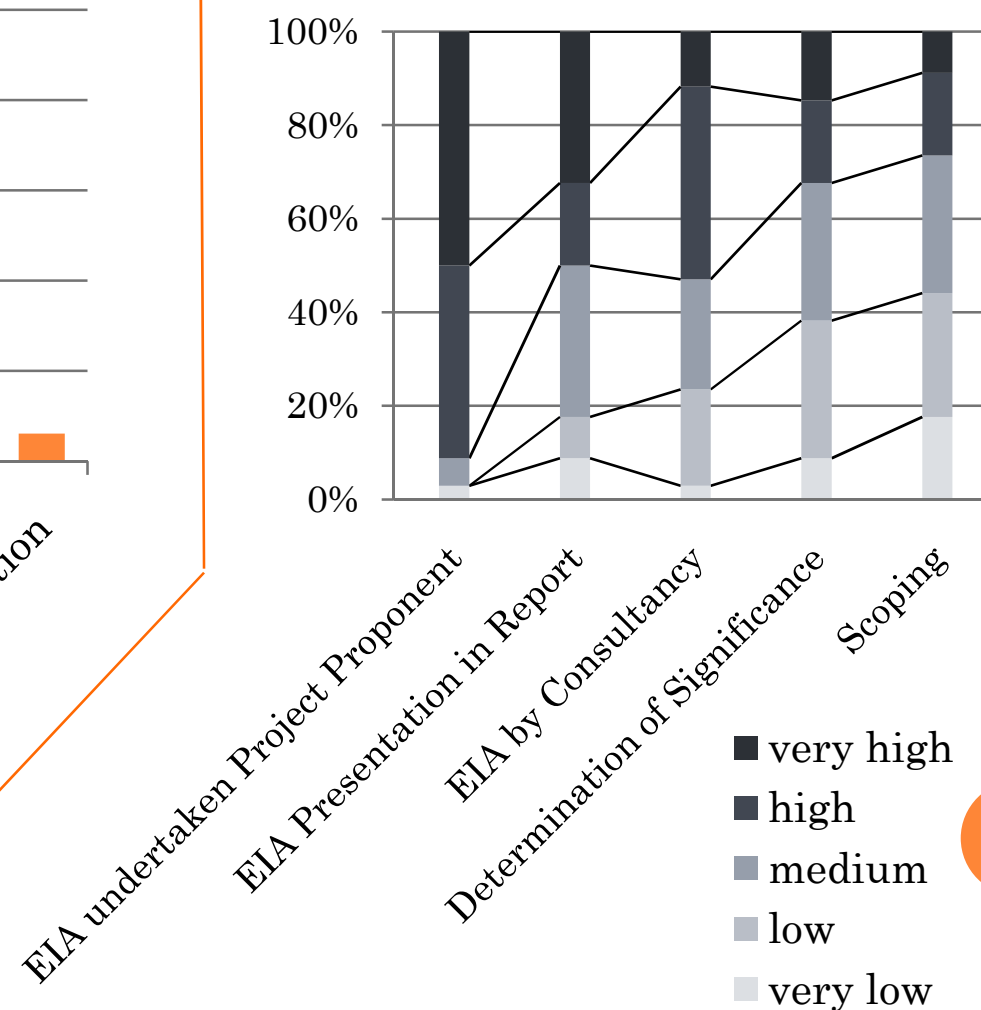
FINDINGS - QUESTIONNAIRE

Causes of Bias

Main Causes of Pro-Project Bias in EIA



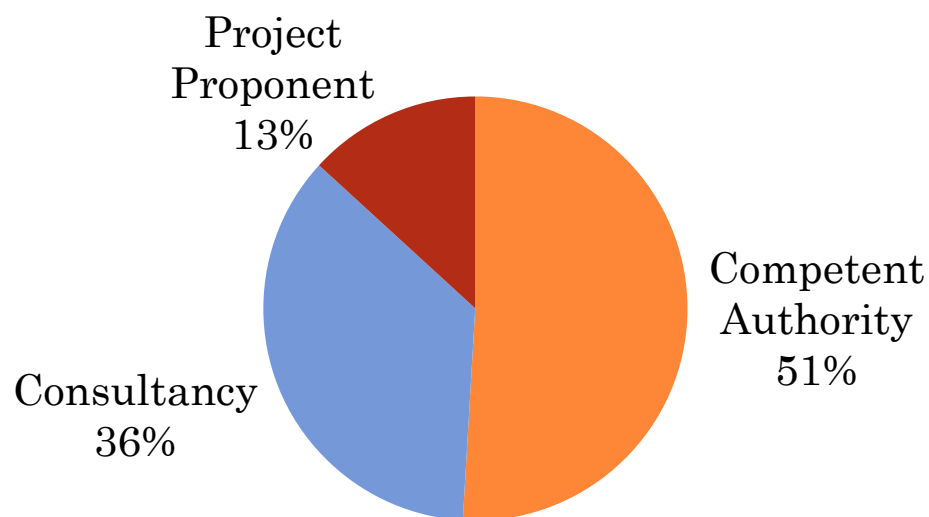
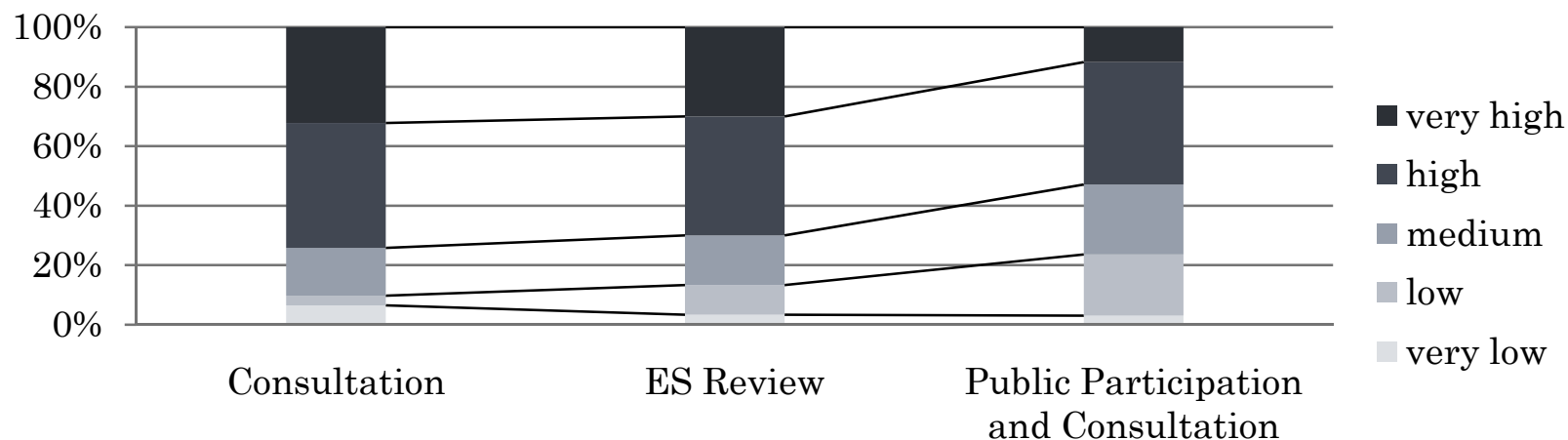
Potential for Pro-Project Bias in EIA



FINDINGS - QUESTIONNAIRE

Dealing with Bias

Importance in Remedying Pro-Project Bias



Responsibility for detecting and acting on bias

CONCLUSIONS

- Perception of Pro-Project Bias
 - Not a major problem
 - Considered and attempts to minimise
 - Perception it exists, lack of confidence in reports
- Pro-Project Bias in EIA
 - Proponent main source – although others
 - Pressure on practitioners
 - Promotion of project in reports
 - Some downplaying of negative impacts
- Remedying Pro-Project Bias in EIA
 - Current methods not adequate
 - ES Review most effective
 - Current approaches to professional and ethical working not widely recognised
 - Education - Institutions

NEXT STEPS

○ Questions

- What other forms of bias exist?
- Is bias a feature of particular impact types? Or particular project types?
- Are certain stakeholders more prone to promoting bias? Developers? Their consultants? Public groups? NGOs?

○ The Future

- Explore in more depth looking at differences between types of practitioners/stakeholders, sectors, impacts, and countries.