Energina Hypothetical revised draft conclusions

* Understanding technology in terms of options (as is a normal part of project EIA) is important, but it may be necessary to step back and take a broader view (eg sustainability assessment, SEA).
* Need to include vision in the process – with genuine and effective community participation.
* What should be included in the IA process? How to choose? How to balance the notion of political leadership/ direction with participative community engagement?
* For policy development, ahead of devising project solutions, SEA is the better tool. But it is best used to enable participative, evidence-based policy development, which demands great courage from leaders (the paradox of leadership, to seek advice on the answers rather than being the source of the answers, as perhaps both leaders and followers are conditioned to expect?).
* To think broader, IA should be owned by the community not by proponent, yet project EIA is of its nature proponent-driven. Even the parameters of project EIA need to be drawn more broadly, with stronger community input.
* Important to consider local conditions, e.g. what is important for the local community, in the local setting. A good (technological) option in one place may be a poor choice elsewhere eg due to local biodiversity, landscape, heritage or social values. Less easily measurable factors like community values also need to be part of the equation.
* Scoping is a challenge, especially when boundaries are drawn too tightly and key issues are ruled out of scope.
* Fundamental decisions require solutions with depth, not just rearrangement of resources or superficial “fixes” without due regard for consequences.
* New technology is not always the solution - better management of existing systems might achieve the gains that are needed (eg demand management as a first step in reducing emissions). Small actions from a large number of people can make a big difference – consider the alternative of dispersed rather than centralised actions (eg rooftop solar panels instead of power station, household water tanks instead of new dam or desalination plant)
* Sustainability is still hard to define and understand, but still critical. Resilience thinking is a way of looking at sustainability.
* Transparency is important for a credible assessment process.
* How trustworthy are experts? How can experts with vested interests be objective?
* Even though “experts” were not “trusted”, the “community” still looked to them for guidance not only in their expert areas, but in terms of finding a process to compare the options.
* With all the clear flaws in the Energina process (community with limited information, lack of visionary leadership, experts with vested interests), it still drew disturbing parallels with real-life experience.