

The Enigmatic Pursuit of Significance

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1 Introduction

Although central to decision-making, significance determination is “enigmatic” as it not defined in legislation, guidance is non-prescriptive, and practice diverse

- *Often, determinations of significance in EIA are the focus of outrage and incensed, non-constructive debate*

2 Determining Significance in Canada

If likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects, the project must be referred to federal Cabinet to determine whether those effects are justified in the circumstances?



- Ministerial and Cabinet decisions are political and subjective

3 The Trouble with Significance in EIA

Interveners often dedicate extraordinary effort to debate a determination of not significant

- Focus on significance inappropriate and a distraction that is not helpful for EIA
- Significance relates to judging the acceptability of a project—is it in the public interest and justified?



So What to do?

There is a case to suggest that the determination of significance should be removed from purview of the participants in EIA and given back to decision-makers



- Re-focus the EIA on the character of effects, planned mitigation and follow-up, and concerns of the public

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

It is recommended that significance under *CEAA 2012* be a decision-making conclusion by the Minister

- Re-focus participants on planning better projects



5 Questions?

Thank you

Jeff Barnes