The Enigmatic Pursuit of Significance

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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, nonconstructive 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



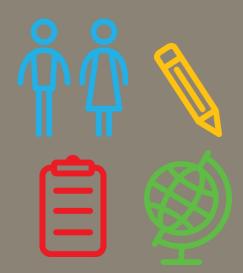
 Re-focus the EIA on the character of effects, planned mitigation and follow-up, and concerns of the public



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

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