Scientific, community and indigenous knowledge in Australia

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The question

• Definition of ‘environment’ used in Australia generally includes biophysical, social and cultural aspects
• This suggests impact assessments should be informed by scientific, community and indigenous knowledge
• Are impact assessment regulators competent in using all three types of knowledge?
Method

• In-depth interviews with six senior assessment officers across Australia
• Over 100 years of collective experience
• Provided an individual and organisation-wide perspective
Question 1 – Use of knowledge

On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think each type of knowledge is currently considered in decision-making?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of knowledge</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 2 - Barriers

For those you have ranked lower, what do you see as the main barriers that prevent these types of knowledge being considered more effectively?

• The ‘world view’ of impact assessors
• Identifying the appropriate group to talk to
• Timing of consultation
• Confidentiality
• Community capacity and consultation fatigue
Question 3 – Overcoming barriers

How could those barriers be overcome?

• Training and capacity building
• Explicitly require engagement in scoping documents
• Promoting early engagement
• Requiring sign-off by indigenous groups
• Identify where scientific criteria can protect community and indigenous values
Question 4 – Assessment officer competency

In your experience, do government assessment officers have the training and experience to be able to effectively use each type of knowledge?

• Competent with scientific information
• Less competent in using community information
• Many lack training and experience to effectively use indigenous knowledge
Question 5 – Consultant competency

In your experience, do consultants preparing EISs have the training and experience to be able to effectively use each type of knowledge?

• Similar response to assessment officers
• Many lack skills to be asking the right questions on indigenous knowledge
Question 6: Addressing capability gaps

How could these capability gaps be best addressed?

• Training – undergraduate and workplace
• Possible role for professional associations in training
• Going out to communities
• Regulators encouraging upskilling by setting expectations
Key lessons

• Need a more deliberative and collaborative approach to impact assessment
• Importance of early and effective engagement
• Importance of free, prior and informed consent
• Training need for assessment officers and industry
• Further work needed – including seeking views from community and indigenous peoples
Let’s continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments via chat in the IAIA21 platform.

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