



IAIA 21

VIRTUAL EVENT

#iaia21

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?

Type of knowledge	Range	Average
Scientific	7-9	8.2
Community	5-7	6.6
Indigenous	1-9	5.1

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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