The need for streamlining EA in The Netherlands

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Introduction

Need for spatial planning in The Netherlands

**Topics:** energy transition, climate change, decreasing biodiversity, need for houses and infrastructure

**Issues:**
- High pressure on land use, conflicts of interest
- Environmental pressure: nature, air, noise, water, soil
Development of EA in The Netherlands

35 years of EA (in The Netherlands) for infrastructure projects:

- Dutch regulation in 1987
- Implementation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2006
- “Faster & Better” (2008)
- Modernisation of EIA (2010)
- “temporary” Crisis and Recovery Act (Chw, 2010)
- Environment & Planning Act (2024)
Saveguards for EA at the start

- Explicit
- Formally regulated scoping
- Alternative Most Favourable to the Environment (AMFE)
- Public consultation (twice)
- Independent review (twice)
- EIA at strategic level for plans and programmes
- EIA–system regularly evaluated
Environment & Planning Act (2024)

- New Act announced in 2010
- Purpose: simplify and merge the rules for spatial development and environmental protection
- Combines 40 acts
- Similar as Crisis and recovery Act (Chw), but with broader scope and field of application
- Reduction of safeguards
- Complicated and long implementation process -> 1-1-2024

Changes relevant for EA:
- Open screening process
- Release of some safeguards:
  - No distinction between simple, complex or Chw projects → all treated as simple projects
  - Involvement of EA-Commission (NCEA) is mandatory for SEA, but optional for projects
  - No notification of intent needed
Example of energy transition and EA

Focus on projects for the energy transition:

- High voltage cables for connecting wind farms at sea with hubs on land
- Interconnections between neighbouring countries (electricity)
- Pipelines for hydrogen, CO$_2$, etc.
- High voltage power lines on land
- Wind farms on land and at sea
Strategic plans, Programs and Projects

**Strategic plan:** “National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment” (2020)

- This vision has been assessed for its environmental impact with a SEA.

**Program:** “National policy program for spatial planning of national energy infrastructure”

- Specific programs for hydrogen and electricity transport will be developed.
  - The programs will be assessed as well (SEA).

**Projects**

- The projects will be accessed for its environmental impact (EIA)

- electricity cables, power lines, connections with wind farms at sea, wind farms on land, hydrogen pipelines and energy hubs
EA for energy projects

- We often prepare a combined SEA and EIA
- The SEA helps to find the best alternative from environmental perspective
- However that might not always be the preferred alternative
- For the decision making process EA is part of an **Integrated Impact Analysis**

**Integrated Impact Analysis:**
- Environmental impact
- Human aspects (stakeholder involvement)
- Technical feasibility
- Financial feasibility
Conclusions

• There is still a great need to speed up procedures, due to political pressure
• Many studies show that streamlining and simplification is not working (enough)
• Despite this there is frequently political pressure to implement these modifications
• On the other hand, decision makers (competent authorities) often have difficulty making decisions because they want to exclude all risks
• High dynamics of environmental regulations are also a threat to EA effectiveness itself
• EA has become a part of life in decision-making and is important for appraising environmental aspects
• However, EA is only a part of the decision-making process

Streamlining and simplification will always be an issue!
Let’s continue the conversation!
Post questions and comments in the IAIA23 app.