

THE SCOTTISH STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Summary

The Scottish Strategic Environmental Assessment Review was conducted between October 2010 and July 2011. The review was led by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) in association with Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. It is the first full appraisal of how effective SEA practice in Scotland is being in integrating environmental considerations into plans, programmes and strategies. It also considers how efficiently SEA is being applied and seeks ways to deliver better proportionality. The information in this poster is based on extracts from the Executive Summary of the review.

The full report is available on SEPA's website at: www.sepa.org.uk/planning/sea/scottish_sea_review.aspx. A limited number of printed copies of the Executive Summary are available at the conference. For further details, contact Neil Deasley: neil.deasley@sepa.org.uk / tel: 00 44 1738 448832.

Background

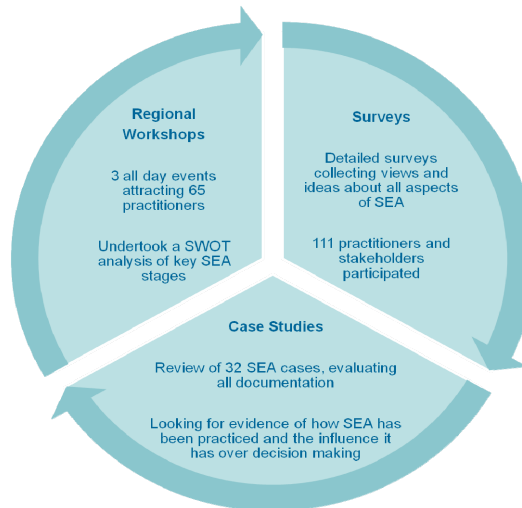
European Directive 2001/42/EC Directive was transposed into Scottish legislation in 2004. The Scottish Parliament passed the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act in 2005 which extended the application of SEA beyond the requirements of the Directive to cover all public plans, programmes and strategies (PPSs) where they are likely to lead to significant environmental effects. Some ten years on from the coming into force of the directive, and nearly six since the passing of Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act, this review is the first full consideration of the efficiency and effectiveness of SEA process and practice in Scotland.

Review objectives

Environmental protection and improvement - To identify whether SEA achieves effective environmental protection and improvement by influencing the preparation of plans, programmes and strategies

Better regulation - To identify opportunities to make SEA more efficient for Responsible Authorities and Consultation Authorities with the aim of streamlining the SEA process, reducing unnecessary burdens and eliminating duplication

RESEARCH METHOD



Extent findings are being taken into account in decision making?

What mitigation measures are being put in place?

Positive or negative? Enhancement?

Analysis

This research generated large volumes of data about practitioners' views and casework based evidence on every aspect of SEA as practiced in Scotland. From this, findings were able to be drawn about both the fundamental issues to be addressed and also about those detailed areas of practice where improvements could enable enhanced efficiency. A small sample of these data is presented below.

What topics? Are they significant?

What comments are consultees making?

What effects are being identified?

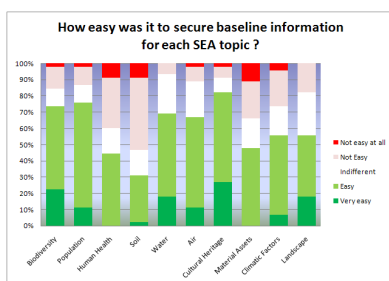
DATA EMERGING FROM THE CASE STUDIES, WORKSHOPS AND SURVEYS

Finding baseline data...

This graph shows how easy practitioners found it to secure baseline information for each SEA topic. Answers were on a five point scale from very easy to not easy at all.

"lack of appropriate data will hamper monitoring"

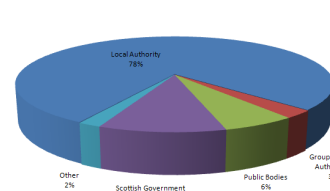
"... it was...difficult to decide what information to include within the environmental baseline given the strategic nature of the reasonable alternatives...the temptation was to stuff the ER with loads of baseline data just in case it was useful rather than sieving it down to only that which was likely to be significantly affected"



Activity by public body...

These graphs shows the total number of plans, programmes or strategies subject to screening and/or SEA by Scotland's public bodies in the period 21 July 2004 to 31 December 2010. It also shows the total number of plans pre-screened out since the introduction of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

SEA Activity by Responsible Authority Type¹

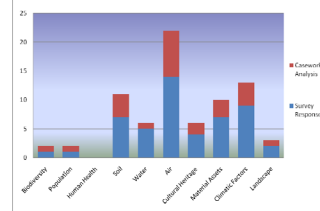


'Scoping out'...

This graph shows the number of times each SEA topic was scoped out of an assessment. Source: (1) Survey of practitioners who stated which SEA topics they scoped from their nominated plan. (2) Analysis of 32 case studies. Total sample size: 80 plans.

"...scoping was undertaken early in the strategy's development and was very beneficial in...raising awareness of potential environmental challenges and embedding the environment within decision making"

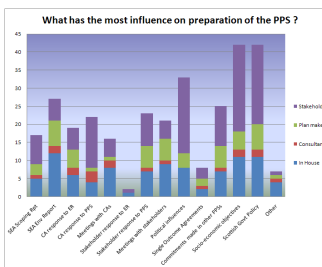
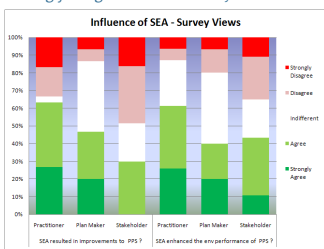
SEA Topics scoped from assessment



"...too much scoping in probably goes on, which could be reduced through guidance or greater confidence on keeping this focused on key issues"

Perceptions of influence...

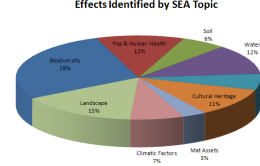
These graphs shows the different views expressed by practitioners, plan-makers and stakeholders about the level of influence SEA has on decision making. Answers were on a five point scale from strongly agree (with the statement) to strongly disagree. Source: All surveys.



"working through the SEA process internally allowed (us) to think through the different options and the impact on the environment. This...subsequently informed the plan"

"...the SEA...felt like an extension of our own policy discussions (on the content of the PPS)"

Percentage of Significant Adverse Environmental Effects Identified by SEA Topic



What is being affected?

This chart shows the range of SEA topics upon which significant adverse effects were considered likely. Source: Analysis of 32 case studies. Biodiversity was the highest (28% of all significant adverse effects identified), material assets was the lowest (3%).

High level findings

- SEA in Scotland is fundamentally sound
- SEA is embraced into the corporate culture of many authorities, viewed as an opportunity to improve policymaking
- Strong support for the extended reach of the Scottish SEA legislation
- It is, when practised well, making a difference
- Experience and expertise has developed quickly, with new ideas and approaches being deployed

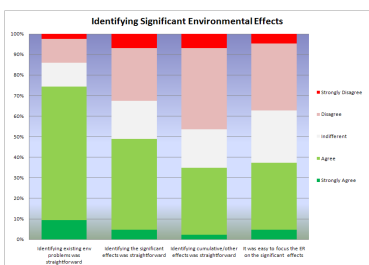
- Low levels of "buy-in" from senior decision makers needs to be addressed
- Need to focus our resources to cover most significant issues
- Scope for practical changes to improve efficiency
- Need to improve integration between SEA and plan-making in order to improve effectiveness
- Need to significantly improve clarity of SEA so that policymakers and stakeholders are clear what the big issues are and how they can be addressed

Is SEA making a difference in Scotland?

In short, yes it is, but there is room for improvement. Where SEA is undertaken well and particularly where there is good integration between the assessor, the plan-maker and senior decision-makers, then this review has found the SEA demonstrates a significant influence on the plan preparation process and the level of environmental consideration within a PPS. In this context, SEA is working as a plan shaper.

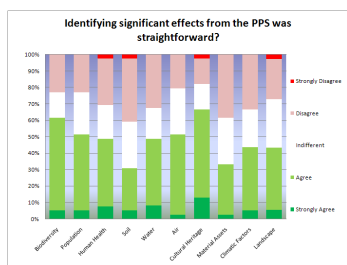
However, where SEA is undertaken as a separate process and/or after substantive policy decisions have been taken, it is having a much more limited influence. In this context, SEA is working as a fine tuner at best.

The challenge going forward is to ensure that SEA aims high and makes a real difference: a plan shaper and not a fine tuner.

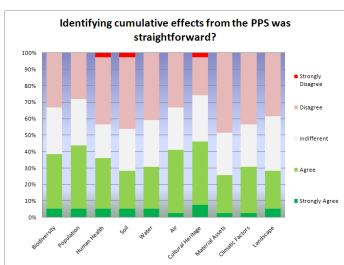


Significant effects & mitigation...

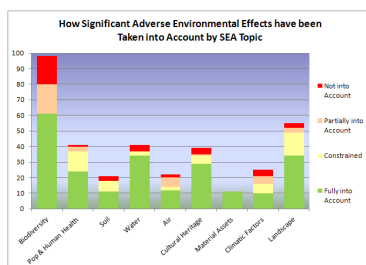
These tables show how straightforward practitioners found identifying significant and cumulative effects in relation to each of the SEA topic.



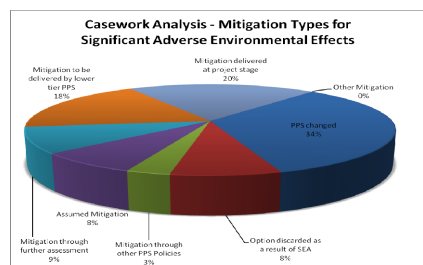
"sometimes there is too much time spent describing the baseline and not enough analysis of how the baseline may be impacted by the plan"



"... [for cumulative effects] it was difficult to come to any conclusions or recommendations, especially where there is overlap with national policy"



"[on timing]...identifying significant effects from a plan that was not formed was...difficult as it would be down to how it was developed from the Main Issues Report stage"



"...the elements of the plan where it was difficult to identify impacts were generally situations where infrastructure would result from policies but no further details were available (re: location). This made it difficult to determine significance of effect on specific receptors".

DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS

Elements of a good SEA

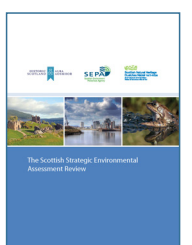
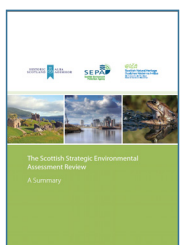
In addition to the recommendations, we also developed a series of key points which we consider, when combined, make SEA more proportionate and influential:

- It is commenced as early as possible in the PPS preparation process.
- It is a fully integrated part of the policy making process.
- Key issues are identified early and generate early and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- PPS development is continually challenged by the SEA and improvements are continuously made through iteration.
- The key findings of the assessment are clear and policy-makers are fully aware of them and how to address them at a point when they can still make changes to the PPS.
- The measures to address potential adverse effects are clearly identified and a programme for their implementation set out.
- SEA is used to stimulate the identification of new, environmentally sustainable, alternatives.
- The key findings and recommendations from the SEA are included in the PPS content.
- A SEA co-ordinator or team can provide continuous support or undertake the SEA in-house, and are often able to develop more continuous dialogue with stakeholders and CAs that builds on the organisation's collective experience.
- Both plan-makers and senior decision-makers recognise the requirements of the 2005 Act, but also believe that SEA can provide benefits for their policy.

Summary of recommendations

- Promoting the Value of SEA**
Significantly raising the understanding and profile of SEA among plan-makers and decision takers.
- Improving Efficiency and Proportionality**
By reducing duplication, streamlining processes and eliminating work that does not add value.
- Improving Scoping and the Evidence Base**
Scoping assessments to focus on the most important issues of concern.
- Giving SEA a Voice in Decision Making**
Integrate plan-making and SEA to enable more efficient, proportionate and influential assessments.
- Greater Clarity**
Prepare clearer documents that easily identify the main effects and how they should be addressed.

- Mitigation and Enhancement**
Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring mitigation measures are identified and implemented and on using SEA to identify enhancement opportunities.
- Guidance and Support**
Develop opportunities for new guidance, to share good practice and to engage in a continuous dialogue with stakeholders throughout the assessment.
- Climate Change**
SEA should play an enhanced role in helping Scottish public bodies to deliver Scotland's ambitious climate change targets.
- A More Engaging Process**
Stakeholder involvement should be earlier and improved, with new opportunities and approaches provided.
- Continued Development**
Further work required to strengthen post adoption processes and to develop a quality audit process.



Acknowledgements

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