

1b Environmental Assessments

Short summary of characteristics

Two types of environmental assessment are available:

- 1) An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a procedure designed to identify the potential environmental impacts of a project prior to development, for example, a motorway or factory.
- 2) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a method of considering the impacts of certain plans, programmes and policies on the environment, such as Transport Infrastructure Plans.

These are undertaken before authorisation for development is granted. The completion of these assessments can reduce the cost, time of implementation and associated design and risks, as well as increasing environmental, social and economic benefits. There is no strict format of an EIA and SEA. The general concept and requirements are outlined within the respective EU Directives. An EIA or SEA can therefore be adapted to fit a projects context, which inevitably results in the output of the tools varying between different EIAs and SEAs. This is generally dependent on the sensitivity of the geographical area that the project, programme, plan or policy is taking place in.

Stage that the tool is used

EIA and SEA are undertaken at the preparation stage. EIA is designed to be implemented on a project prior to its approval for development. An SEA must be carried out during the preparation of the plan, programme or policy prior to any municipality or government approval. This allows for redesign to reduce the predicted environmental impact identified through the use of the tools.

Output from the tool

The procedure for both assessments involves the production of an environmental report on the likely significant impacts, consultation taking into account the environmental report and the results of consultation in decision making and how the results of the environmental assessment have been taken into account.

Experiences of use

Environmental assessments generally only incorporate environmental issues. EU legislation determines whether an environmental assessment should take place, for this reason environmental assessments can often be considered time consuming rather than truly informative. Environmental assessments are usually undertaken by consultants external to the project, programme, plan or policy team to satisfy legislation rather than to truly inform the sustainability of a project. They are usually a one off procedure completed prior to development, which play no further role after completion of the environmental assessment report.