

# Strategic Environmental Assessment: Conceptual Underpinning and Benefits

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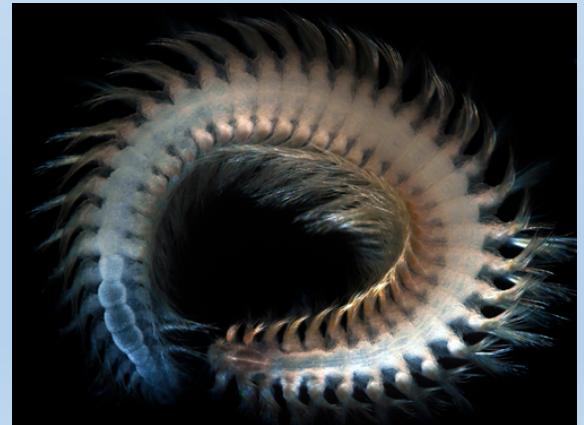
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# Presentation Outline

- What is SEA?
- Legal Basis for SEA
- Elements in SEA
- How is SEA related to EIA
- Why Conduct a SEA



# What is SEA?

- SEA is a proactive and comprehensive process which identifies and evaluates the significant environmental and sustainability implications of particular plans programmes and policies to ensure that they are fully considered and addressed at the earliest stages of decision making (Noble 2000, Verheem and Tonk, 2000)
- It typically involves the setting of an overarching environmental vision and objectives for a geographic region or sector and activities within that region or sector (Noble 2000)
- A broad range of alternative courses of action to achieve these objectives can be developed in the SEA and then assessed against criteria such as sustainability measures and acceptable levels of environmental change for particular species, habitats and ecosystems
- On the basis of this assessment, the most desirable courses of action can be selected and implemented in policies plans and programmes for that region or sector



# Legal Basis for SEA

- The legal basis for SEA in international law is still developing
- The principal international law instrument on SEA is the 2003 Kiev Protocol on SEA to the Espoo Convention on EIA in a Transboundary Context
- EU Directive on SEA is key example of its implementation in a regional context
- As with EIA, SEA can be viewed as one of the means or tools to implement well recognised international environmental law principles and approaches such as the precautionary principle, sustainable development and ecosystem based management



# Elements of SEA

- The Kiev Protocol describes some of the basic elements in an SEA process in its definition of SEA.
- These include:
  - Screening provisions which specify which policies, plans and programmes require an SEA
  - The evaluation of the likely environmental and health effects of a policy, plan or programme through the determination of the scope of an environmental report and its preparation
  - Undertaking public participation and consultation
  - Taking into account the environmental report and results of public consultation in policies plans and programmes



# Elements of SEA

- Elements in an SEA process tend to be less prescribed, more flexible and iterative than in an EIA process
- They can include a selection of analytical and participatory approaches designed to integrate environmental considerations into policies plans and programmes and evaluate the interlinkages with economic and social considerations (OECD, 2006)
- For example, tools to predict environmental and socio-economic effects, tools for ensuring full stakeholder engagement and tools for analysing and comparing options
- A further element in SEA is ongoing monitoring of the implementation of particular policies plans and programmes to determine and remediate any unforeseen adverse environmental or health effects



# SEA and EIA

EIA is more confined and concrete in focus determining the likely environmental impacts of a particular project activity or development

SEA is a more overarching and flexible concept than EIA allowing for a more comprehensive and forward looking assessment of environmental considerations at the policy, planning and programme level (Noble, 2000; Partidario, 2012)

While EIA is often location specific and limited in time, SEA processes broaden the spatial and temporal range of environmental assessment often being applied to whole sectors or broader geographic areas as an institutionalised part of decision making on a longer term basis



# SEA and EIA

- Ideally, SEA and EIA should be vertically integrated or tiered with environmental considerations being taken into account at the policy plan and programme level and then flowing down to the project level
- In descriptions of the relationship between SEA and EIA, EIAs are often described as being nested within a particular SEA
- In practice this doesn't often occur with EIAs for specific projects often occurring in the absence of a broader environmental vision or objectives for a particular region and its associated activities and industries eg Great Barrier Reef





# SEA and Marine Spatial Planning

- MSP has been defined by UNESCO as a “public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives that usually have been specified through a political process.”
- Ideally an SEA process would precede MSP for a particular coastal or marine region and provide overarching parameters for the planning process
- For example an ecosystem based approach endorsed in the SEA for a specific region or area could be one of the guiding principles for MSP in that region



# Benefits of SEA

- SEA can establish a sustainable policy context for future development of a particular region prior to resource exploitation and other activities
- It provides for the proper consideration of alternatives and cumulative impacts as well as engaging those stakeholders affected by proposed developments in a shared environmental economic and social vision for a region or area at an early stage in decision making
- SEAs can also establish important background information for project based EIAs such as the location of ecologically and biologically sensitive areas and patterns of multi-sectoral use



## Benefits of SEA

SEA provides a method of anticipating and avoiding cumulative adverse impacts on the environment that can arise from multiple activities occurring within one geographic area without any heed to their synergistic effects

SEA is particularly valuable when considering broader scale marine areas such as those in ABNJ where a range of activities can take place over longer time frames

SEAs also provide an opportunity to harmonise elements of best practice in environmental assessments across a region

