

# Common Sense in Environmental Impact Assessment

*It is not as Common as it Should Be*



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# Common Sense in Environmental Impact Assessment



- **Issue scoping**
- **Cumulative effects assessment**
- **Impact assessment & significance**
- **Quality of ES**
- **EIA guidance**
- **Public participation**

*Ways to improve these practices by using common sense*

# Issue Scoping

- **Principle:** Focus on issues that affect project decision
- **Practice:** Deal with everything under the sun
- **Result:** Huge EIAs and stakeholders spend lots of time on matters of no consequence



# Cumulative Effects Assessment

- **Principle:** To guide decision makers regarding consequences of development
- **Practice:** Consultants want great detail (sometimes)
- **Result:** Broad picture is very clouded with inessential detail; or
- **Result:** CEA is not done at all



# Baseline Data Collection

- **Principle:** Need to understand how relevant ecosystems (or social systems) function
- **Practice:** Data collected for everything!
- **Result:** Insufficient understanding of relevant ecosystems and lots of data
- **Result:** Data can be useful in follow up studies but only after ecosystems are understood



# Follow Up Studies

- **Principle:** Get information needed to manage project
- **Practice:** Do academic studies to check on impact predictions
- **Result:** Poorer project management



# Impact Assessment & Significance

- **Principle:** Define anticipated impacts, and whether they are positive/negative, & significant
- **Practice:** Proponent required to reach an objective conclusion substantiated by logic, data or scientific reference
- **Result:** Often insufficient assessment, poor in context, which impacts likely, their intensity, severity, & importance to community/consultees
- **Result:** Often subjective approach - Everything is significant!



# The Quality of ES

- **Principle:** A clear concise summary of the risk assessment and decision-making process
- **Practice:** Statutory body / Proponent required to produce a formal record of the environmental information reasonably required
- **Result:** Long, tedious, compendiums of disjointed facts and figures backed up by spurious claims
- **Result:** Difficult for consultees and communities to objectively assess environmental risk





# Mitigation

- **Principle:** Measures which anticipate and seek to avoid, reduce or remediate likely significant adverse impact
- **Practice:** Objective assessment of the form, implementation phase and methodology for impact amelioration
- **Result:** Mitigation not designed in, but rather 'bolted on'
- **Result:** Compensation rather than mitigation



# Capacity Building or Guidance gone mad?

- **Principle:** Provide information on EIA methods / issues to proponents
- **Practice:** Dozens of guidance documents produced (e.g. 34 in Western Australia)
- **Result:** either scrupulous attention given to guidance (i.e. 'legalising' informal guidance) or ignored completely because too much to read!
- **Result:** loss of proponent flexibility & responsibility



# Public Participation? or... Public Placation & Proponent Provocation?

- **Principle:** Stakeholder involvement (consultation) is important
- **Practice:** proponent is required to respond to public concerns (Australian practice)
- **Result:** Spurious (or ignorant) public comments required to be responded to by proponents
- **Result:** No focus on significant issues, time delays and proponent frustration



# Conclusion

*Common sense is what you revert to when all other avenues have been explored! (Anon.)*

- EIA is a logical process, common sense demands that we follow it logically
- EIA does not have to be overly complicated – a good dose of common sense goes a long way!