



Chapter A1: A brief introduction to SEA

Resource Manual to Support
Application of the UNECE Protocol on
Strategic Environmental Assessment

draft 17-Apr-07

Protocol on SEA

A1.1 Contents of the Chapter

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- What is SEA?
- Benefits & costs of SEA
- Guiding principles for applying SEA
- Some broader considerations
 - SEA as a sustainability tool
 - Links between SEA & other assessment tools
 - SEA in more strategic decision-making

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A1.2 What is SEA?

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- Definitions of Strategic Environmental Assessment
- What is its purpose?
- What is its added value compared with EIA?



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- As generally understood:
 - SEA is a systematic & anticipatory process, undertaken to analyze environmental effects of proposed plans, programmes & other strategic actions and to integrate findings into decision-making
- In the Protocol on SEA:
 - SEA means the evaluation of likely environmental, including health, effects, which comprises determination of scope of an environmental report & its preparation, carrying-out of public participation & consultations, and taking into account of the environmental report & the results of the public participation & consultations in a plan or programme (art. 2, para. 6).



- To ensure environmental considerations inform & are integrated into strategic decision-making in support of environmentally sound & sustainable development
- Assists authorities responsible for plans & programmes (P/Ps), & decision-makers, to take into account:
 - Key environmental trends, potentials & constraints that may affect or be affected by P/P
 - Environmental objectives & indicators relevant to P/P
 - Likely significant environmental effects of proposed options & implementation of P/P
 - Measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate adverse effects & to enhance positive effects
 - Views & information from relevant authorities, the public & (when relevant) potentially affected States



A1.2.2 Added value of SEA compared with EIA

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- Opportunity to consider wider range of alternatives & options at this level compared with project stage
- Influencing type & location of development in sector / region, not just design / siting of individual project
- Enhanced capability to address cumulative & large-scale effects within time / space boundaries of P/Ps as opposed to project level
- Facilitating sustainable development through addressing consistency of P/P objectives & options with relevant strategies, policies & commitments
- Streamlining & strengthening project EIA by tiering process to SEA report & so avoiding questions (whether / where / what type of development) that have been decided already with environmental input

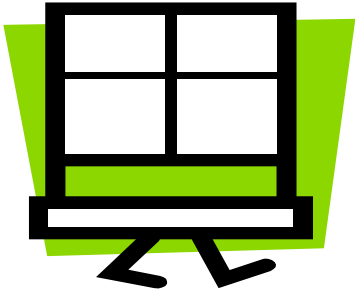
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A1.3 Benefits & costs of SEA

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- Benefits
- Costs



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A1.3.1 Benefits of SEA

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- Provide for high level of environmental protection
- Improve quality of P/P making
- Increase efficiency of decision-making
- Facilitate identification of new development opportunities
- Help prevent costly mistakes
- Strengthen governance
- Facilitate transboundary cooperation



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A1.3.2 Costs of SEA

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- SEA of regional & local land-use planning usually increased planning costs by 5-10% (EC study)
- Some good SEAs increased costs by less than 5%
- Costs depend on number & detail of alternatives

- Most require 70-80 person days to complete (UK study)
- But 'SEA was an effective use of time and resources'



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- Main costs during initial applications of SEA
 - appropriate approaches & tools tested & developed
 - basic data sets compiled
- Subsequent SEAs less costly
 - build on previous experience
 - may require only standard analytical work & process management
- Costs marginal compared with costs of P/P implementation



A1.4 Guiding principles for applying SEA

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- Undertaken by the authority responsible for P/P
- Applied as early as possible in decision-making process
- Focused on key issues
- Evaluates reasonable range of alternatives
- Provides appropriate opportunities for involvement of key stakeholders & the public
- Carried out with appropriate, cost-effective methods & techniques of analysis
- See also IAIA performance criteria (*Annex A1.2*)

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A1.5 Some broader considerations

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- SEA as a sustainability tool
- Links between SEA & other assessment tools
- SEA in more strategic decision-making



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- *Either*: address only or primarily **environmental** effects & concentrate on implementing what has been agreed to already in accordance with legal requirements & widely accepted principles of good practice?
- *Or*: make explicit, 'best effort' attempt to address **sustainability** implications in addition to environmental effects, while recognizing limitations?
 - Environmental sustainability **assurance**, e.g. through evaluation of impact significance within framework of:
 - precautionary principles
 - safe-minimum or threshold criteriaincluding provision to ensure residual impact is compensated or made good (a minority position)
 - Sustainability **assessment** / appraisal of environmental, economic & social effects (e.g. UK)



A1.5.2 Links between SEA & other assessment tools

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SEA	Social & economic assessments	Sustainability assessment
Environmental baseline	Economic & social baseline	Evaluation of sustainability of current development trends & patterns
environmental objectives	economic & social objectives	sustainability objectives & principles
Determination of relevant & evaluation of how considered in P/P formulation		
environmental impacts of proposed options & inputs into their optimization	economic & social impacts	Assessment of economic, social & environmental impacts, referring to relevant sustainability objectives & limits, suggesting win-win options or options optimizing trade-offs
Outline of measures for mitigation of significant adverse effects & their monitoring during implementation of P/P		

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- “Whether” & “how” are subjects of debate
- Practical & institutional barriers stand in way
 - How should SEA be applied to policymaking, given its iterative, flexible nature?
- Protocol encourages (does not oblige) Parties to ensure the environment integrated to extent appropriate in policy- & law-making & to consider Protocol’s principles & elements in doing so
- See *Chapter A6* and Sadler, B. (ed.) (2005), *Strategic Environmental Assessment at the Policy Level - Recent progress, current status and future prospects*

