

**Name of Exercise:** Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Naissaar Island Development Plan

**Location:** Naissaar island, Viimsi municipality, Estonia

**Participation Exercise under which Article?** Article 7

**Purpose of Participation Exercise:**

*To conduct Strategic Environmental Assessment during the development of a comprehensive plan for a selected municipality. To invite public comments on the land use plan intended to maintain a protected area whilst allowing development of recreational infrastructure and restricted housing. To obtain experience in a SEA process that can be used to develop a SEA methodology taking into account the Estonian situation.*

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**Participation Techniques Used:**

The first stage involved determining the aim and objective of the planning exercise as well as of the SEA. This included collecting available source data, mapping the existing conditions and the development of a preliminary overview of the environmental conditions. On the basis of this work, the alternatives were defined, potential impacts were identified and scoping was performed.

In the next stage, prediction of the scope and significance of the potential impacts, as well as of the assessment of the impacts was undertaken. The process involved a comparison of the alternatives, taking into consideration the unwanted or negative environmental impacts of applying the alternatives in practice, and a comparison of the options for mitigating those impacts.

As a result of comparing the alternatives, the best solution was identified and developed into a planning proposal. At the development of the planning proposal, a more specific Environmental Assessment was conducted and recommendations were developed for monitoring the state of the environment. At the end of this process, the final SEA report was compiled which included the interim reports developed through the SEA stages as well as other relevant materials concerning the planning and SEA process.

During the SWOT analysis (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) the local government held a public meeting. The local government held public meetings during the assessment of the state of the environment report, the identification of factors that may have an impact, as well as the planning of the development alternatives. Public participation was recorded by using a matrix analysis. This common EIA method uses a table to illustrate the outcome of the public participation, by plotting the opinions of the public and different stakeholders against the specific environmental problems concerned. In this case, the matrix included entries as to whether particular impacts were considered to be positive or negative, and an indication of the significance (scale) of these factors related to the different development alternatives. The same techniques were used during the development of the planning proposal and final assessment. When the final proposal was adopted, the proposal and SEA report were put on public display for four weeks for comments.

**Who participated?**

A working group was formed consisting of representatives from one Finnish company (Maa ja Vesi OY), one Estonian company (AS Entec) and other consultants working closely together with the Ministries of Environment of Finland and Estonia and Viimsi municipality. In all stages, representatives of municipal and district authorities, the working group local land-owners, and other interested parties participated. In the later stages, the general public had the opportunity to comment on the draft proposal and final SEA report.

**What information was made available?**

The planning and SEA processes were described and made available. Information on the development alternatives, the draft planning proposal and a description of the possible impacts and mitigation measures were also made available to the public in the first stages of the procedure. After the initial stages, the draft final plan and final SEA report were made available to the public.

### **What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?**

The initial opinions of the different parties were heard and local problems and development possibilities on the territory were identified. Factors and activities as well as potential areas of impact were identified. Public comments on the development alternatives and their potential impact were considered thoroughly by the working group, making use of the matrix mentioned above to classify and 'visualise' the comments received.

Comparisons were made between the environmental impacts of the alternatives using the opinions of the environmental experts, the public, interested parties and officials. Comments and proposals by representatives of the public concerning mitigation measures were presented and discussed. Documentation of the most important topics as well as of positions influencing the progress and decision making throughout the process facilitated the compilation of the final SEA report. When the draft plan/proposal and final SEA report were made available for public comment, the comments presented during the four weeks period were analysed and incorporated into the plan.

### **Comments of participants in process:**

The county government supervisory authority determined that the conditions for participation of the public in the process had been sufficient and that public opinion and comments were considered in the making of the decision.

The competent authority overseeing the effectiveness of the process was very happy with the process. The implemented pilot project proved that the integration of SEA into the planning process is the only way to reach an optimal solution from the viewpoint of both the natural environment and society while using the minimum of resources.

Officials of the local government thought that the plan development process was very useful and informative. Resources were used effectively throughout the process. The fact that the environmental impact assessment was carried out in parallel to the development of the planning considerably facilitated the process of approval of the planning and decision making.

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### **REC view on participation exercise:**

The case benefited from international support, as it was a pilot project designed jointly by the governments of Finland and Estonia. SEA conducted in parallel to the development of comprehensive planning resulted in directing the planning process already on its course towards environmentally sound solutions, while taking into account the interests of different parties concerned with the planning territory. As a consequence, no considerable problems or seriously differing opinions arose in the final stage of the planning process — the implementation stage.

One of the most important and successful stages of the process was public involvement and participation. The timely and early informing of the public prevented conflicts from arising, allowed new solutions to be found and prompted the volunteering of information regarding the preferences of interested parties and inhabitants. Good organisation of the public involvement process made it possible to avoid the situation where changes were required in the planning implementation stage.

The effectiveness of the process was also enhanced by the division of the planning and SEA process into stages. Thus, it was easier to scope the topics to be considered, focus attention on the key problems and recommend alternative solutions. In intermediate stages it was possible to obtain information which assisted in the solution of identified problems and to analyse the potential impacts of decisions made in the course of the process.

### **Significant omissions from requirements of Article 7:**

None, based on the information available.