

# Introduction to Environmental Impact Assessment

Principles and procedures, process, practice and prospects  
2nd edition

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## Preface to the first edition

There has been a remarkable and refreshing interest in environmental issues over the past few years. A major impetus was provided by the 1987 Report of the World Commission on the Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report); the Rio Summit in 1992 sought to accelerate the impetus. Much of the discussion on environmental issues and on sustainable development is about the better management of current activity in harmony with the environment. However, there will always be pressure for new development. How much better it would be to avoid or mitigate the potential harmful effects of future development on the environment at the planning stage. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) assesses the impacts of planned activity on the environment in advance, thereby allowing avoidance measures to be taken: prevention is better than cure.

Environmental impact assessment was first formally established in the USA in 1969. It has spread worldwide and received a significant boost in Europe with the introduction of an EC Directive on EIA in 1985. This was implemented in the UK in 1988. Subsequently there has been a rapid growth in EIA activity, and over three hundred environmental impact statements (EISS) are now produced in the UK each year. EIA is an approach in good currency. It is also an area where many of the practitioners have limited experience. This text provides a comprehensive introduction to the various dimensions of EIA. It has been written with the requirements of both undergraduate and postgraduate students in mind. It should also be of considerable value to those in practice—planners, developers and various interest groups. EIA is on a rapid “learning curve”; this text is offered as a point on the curve.

The book is structured into four parts. The first provides an introduction to the principles of EIA and an overview of its development and agency and legislative context. Part 2 provides a step-by-step discussion and critique of the EIA process. Part 3 examines current practice, broadly in the UK and in several other countries, and in more detail through selected UK case studies. Part 4 considers possible future developments. It is likely that much more of the EIA iceberg will become visible in the 1990s and beyond. An outline of important and associated developments in environmental auditing and in strategic environmental assessment concludes the text.

Although the book has a clear UK orientation, it does draw extensively on EIA experience worldwide, and it should be of interest to readers from many countries. The book seeks to highlight best practice and to offer enough insight to methods, and to supporting references, to provide valuable guidance to the practitioner. For information on detailed methods for assessment of impacts in particular topic areas (e.g. landscape, air quality, traffic impacts), the reader is referred to the complementary volume, *Methods of environmental impact assessment* (Morris & Therivel, 1995, London, UCL Press).

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## Preface

The aims and scope of this second edition are unchanged from those of the first edition. But, as noted in the first preface, EIA is on a rapid learning curve, and any commentary on the subject must be seen as part of an ongoing discussion. The worldwide spread of EIA procedures and practice is becoming increasingly comprehensive. In the European Union, there is now ten years' experience of the implementation of the pioneering EIA Directive, and an amended directive will become operational in 1999. There has also been considerable interest in the development of the EIA process, in extending the scope of activity, and also in assessing effectiveness. Reflecting such changes, this revised edition updates the commentary by introducing and developing a number of issues which are seen as of growing importance to both the student and practitioner of EIA.

The structure of the first edition has been retained, plus much of the original material, but variations and additions have been made to specific sections. In Part 1 (principles and procedures), a significant addition has been the incorporation of the amendment to the EC EIA Directive and consideration of the implications for EIA practice. In Part 2 (discussion of the EIA process), many elements have been updated, including screening, assessment of significance, participation, presentation, review and the overall management of the process.

We have made very substantial changes to Part 3 (overview of practice), drawing on the findings of several major international and UK reviews of EIA effectiveness. While there is general consensus on the utility of EIA, there is also concern about some weaknesses in the procedures and practice to date. The more detailed studies of UK practice for new settlements, roads and electricity supply have been updated, and the important area of waste disposal projects has been added. Major changes have also been made to the chapter on comparative practice, with more discussion of emerging EIA systems and the role of international funding institutions, such as the World Bank.

Part 4 of the book (prospects) has also been substantially revised to reflect some of the changing prospects for EIA including, for example, more consideration of cumulative impacts, socio-economic impacts, and public participation, plus possible shifts towards more integrated environmental assessment. Similarly, in the final chapter, there is a substantial update of the developing principles, procedures and practice of Strategic Environmental Assessment. Additions to the Appendices include the amended EC Directive, World Bank EIA procedures, environment impact statement review proformas. There is an expanded bibliography of key references.

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**Dedicated to our families**

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