

Opening address

Di Buchan

National Convenor

Tena koe and welcome to the 14th National Conference on the New Zealand Association for Impact Assessment.

I begin by giving a special thanks to our sponsors. NZAIA is a relatively small organization and without sponsorship we would not be able to run these conferences – certainly not in such a salubrious venue! The two principal sponsors for this event are the public Health Advisory Committee and the Ministry of Civil Defence and emergency management. Generous staff time and this venue have been donated by the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences and additional financial support has been given by Victoria University and the Ministry of Social development. On behalf of NZAIA I think you all very much.

Secondly, I would like to thank our presenters who have all given up their valuable time to prepare and present their papers at no charge. The organizing committee has been surprised and delighted with the willingness and enthusiasm with which our requests to contribute have been greeted. It goes without saying that without the presenters there would be no conference.

The decision to hold this year's conference in Wellington gave us the opportunity to have a focus that would appeal to those working at a policy level in central government as well as those who are working in the broad range of fields in which impact assessment is applied. Consequently, this conference has attracted people from central and local government, NGOs, universities and consultancy companies. It has been interesting to note that, presumably as a consequence of our wide variety of topics, we have an almost 40% turnover on those registering for each of the two days. I am confident that the programme is sufficiently varied, and the speakers of such a high standard, that each one of you will take away from this conference new knowledge that you will be able to apply directly to your work.

Impact assessment is a process by which we try to predict the consequences of an activity, identify ways to reduce any adverse effects and maximize the benefits, and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the activity in order to ensure that the best outcome is achieved. To assess and measure impacts we draw on our experiences of previous events and from our knowledge of the interactive elements of the environment and the society within which we are operating. We gather the information needed for that analysis from a variety of sources:

- ◆ The physical and social sciences;
- ◆ The knowledge and experience of experts and stakeholders;
- ◆ An analysis of historic and contemporary records;
- ◆ And from organisations and affected communities.

We use impact assessment methods when we engage in planning to reduce the adverse effects of natural hazards, plan major projects (for example infrastructure

and energy projects) and when we develop policy that is based on evidence of need and effectiveness.

But to realise its value as a tool for prediction and planning, impact assessment methods need to be *applied*, and applied *appropriately*.

In recent years we have seen a flurry of provisions in legislation and policy aimed at ensuring that impact assessment is employed in the decision-making process. This includes:

- ◆ the Resource Management Act with its assessment of effects provisions;
- ◆ the Land Transport Management Act with its triple-bottom line approach to planning transport infrastructure;
- ◆ the Local Government Act with its requirements for local councils to have a policy on significance, and to develop indicators to monitor community outcomes;
- ◆ and the gambling legislation which requires local councils to make decisions based on consequences.

There are also recommendations emanating from the State Services Commission's "Review of the Centre" exercise, aimed at fostering the practice of evidence based policy. And the emergence of the Ministry of Social Development as a more holistic response to identifying and addressing social needs. The creation of such an agency was something that the Association of Social Assessment (the forerunner of NZAIA) lobbied for throughout the 1990s and we watch with interest the development of its impact assessment and evaluation capacity.

Over the next two days we are in for a roller-coaster ride over all of these topics. I am looking forward to it.

I will now hand the proceedings over to Graham Leonard from the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences who is going to chair our first session on climate change and hazard management.