

Chair's Report 2021

Another strange year in this Covid Age ("the Coronacene"?) but NZAIA has again tried to rise above the constraints of periodic lockdowns and uncertainties to keep the impact assessment flag flying.

We thought long and hard about the wisdom of trying to organise a conference this year, having missed out last year. In the end, we decided to go ahead but be prepared for various eventualities, including postponement. As things turned out, we were able to hold a face-to-face conference, with the additional benefit of a number of presentations from overseas made through Zoom. The theme was around social impact assessment but we wanted to emphasise the breadth of its application, hence the conference title: *Assessing social impacts for improved decision-making*. With over 60 participants, including our overseas speakers, this was a very successful event for us, and I'd like to thank the organising group for all their work, especially given the heightened uncertainties around holding such events. We had an excellent line up and very stimulating, thoughtful talks on both days. Our overseas speakers gave the conference valuable international perspectives: Sarah Bice used her experiences in Australia and elsewhere to discuss key trends improving the role of SIA in decision-making, while Richard Parsons, from the NSW State Government, previewed new SIA Guidelines recently produce in the State. A Canadian perspective was provided by Michael Benson and Marcus Eyre who used linear energy projects subject to Canada Energy Regulator approval processes to show how SIA prospects have been improved by the new Federal Impact Assessment Act. The presentations are on the website (<https://www.nzaia.org.nz/2021confpresentations.html>). The conference was marked by another initiative: on day two we ran two parallel workshops to provide professional development opportunities for participants. Jo Healey and Amelia Linzey used two practice examples to work through the role of the social impact specialist during the phases of a project going through the consenting process. Nick Taylor and Mike Mackay used two examples involving economic regeneration initiatives, and land and water planning to examine the role of SIA in strategic proposals, and what that involves in practice. Both workshops were well attended and have provided a model for future conferences.

This year has seen the production of two issues of *Impact Connector*, one looking at the role of risk assessment, especially in relation to natural hazards and disasters. The other addresses health impact assessment (HIA). Planning for both only began after the conference to avoid over committing the editors, so the two issues have been released rather later in the year than intended. But many thanks to Rajan Ghosh and Tom Burkitt (Risk assessment issue), Nick Taylor and Richard Morgan (HIA issue), and all to the contributors for producing the two issues, especially in these testing times. The risk assessment issue marks a change in usual practice as we take a look "over the fence" at a related process, what it involves, how it contributes to decision-making. The HIA issue is on more familiar territory in focusing on impact assessment, but also saw a small innovation in terms of the inclusion of two international contributions. There are exciting plans for future issues of *Impact Connector*, but we are always happy to hear from members, and the wider reading audience, about topics that would be of particular interest and value. Guest editors are also welcome: contact me if you are interested.

Our other major information service, the monthly e-news, has grown and developed into a very valuable resource that we all look forward to. As ever, we all need to acknowledge and thank Kate McNab for the great work she does in producing the e-news. I'd also like to point out that Kate manages the NZAIA website and has quietly been developing the resources posted on the site. There

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is now a wonderful information base about impact assessment in all its main forms, with links to valuable resources on the internet.

In terms of submission, NZAIA made two this year, both substantive. The first was on the Exposure Draft of the Natural and Built Environments Bill, 2021, prepared by Hamish Rennie, Sophal Chhun, Nick Taylor, Kate McNab, Hannah Staines and Richard Morgan. This was a fairly typical analysis of proposed legislation, looking at the implications for existing impact assessment processes, opportunities to introduce, expand or strengthen impact assessment provisions, etc. We also keep promoting strategic environmental assessment (SEA) as a valuable and long overlooked policy and plan supporting tool for this country. Sadly, the select committee's report back to Parliament does not show any real sign that our input has affected the direction of thinking with respect to the Bill, but we need to keep making our voice heard. The second submission was on the Freshwater Farm Plan regulations document, and Sophal Chhun and Keith Finlayson (both Core Group members) led this submission process and contributed the main ideas, to produce a very thoughtful, practical and substantive submission. Our collective thanks to all those contributing to both submissions.

All submissions are posted on our website. We are keen to enlist the assistance of our members in the identification of suitable opportunities to make submissions, and then to help develop those submissions. With significant changes to the RMA underway, no doubt there will be many more opportunities for NZAIA to make submissions. Please get in touch if you want to help or if you think NZAIA should be making its voice heard about something involving impact assessment in some way.

Last year, the Core Group initiated a strategic planning process, starting with a one day meeting in Christchurch, attended in person or by Zoom by nearly all CG members. It was very rewarding and set us up for this year. An overview of the outcomes from that meeting is on the AGM webpage, along with the outline programme we have used to organise efforts this year. The process of working through our four main areas—governance, policy, internal and external relations—continues but we are seeing the benefits, reflected in this year's AGM agenda. I'm very grateful for the Core Group's efforts with respect to strategic planning: it is in addition to our normal activities, which already compete with work, life and other calls on everyone's time, so many thanks team!

We have just renewed our MoU with IAIA: they have reviewed their relationship with the affiliates such as NZAIA, and now look for more of a partnership rather than the previous "top down" relationship. The purpose now states: *encourage ongoing collaboration and cooperation between the parties at the organizational level to meet the mission and goals of both parties.* We see this as a significant step forward, and means, for instance, we can look to work with IAIA in developing impact assessment in the wider Pacific region with our other partners, Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) (MoU currently being reviewed ahead of renewal), and the Impact Assessment Special Interest Group in EIANZ.

Finally, after another exhausting year, I'm very grateful to all CG members for the work they have put in to keep NZAIA moving forward, and especially to my two officer colleagues, Sophal Chhun (in his first year as Secretary and having a great impact!) and Andrew Crosland (Treasurer) for carrying out their official duties so professionally. I'd also to thank Hannah Staines, for her efforts managing memberships for us

Richard Morgan

Chair, NZAIA

24th November 2021