

The impact of scoping on the quality of AEEs: case studies from New Zealand

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BACKGROUND

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was born out of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969 in the United States¹. It considers the possible impacts of a proposal prior to a decision being made on whether or not it should be given approval to proceed¹. The emergence of EIA as a key component of environmental management over the past few decades has been a true reflection of the increasing recognition of the nature, scale and implications of environmental change brought about by human actions². Overall, the main emphasis of EIA is on prevention of environmental degradation, in a systematic, holistic and multidisciplinary way³.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effect of scoping the key issues and possible impacts on public response to the AEE, using the Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE), and submissions received, for three New Zealand projects. Of critical importance to the quality of an AEE are the nature and scope of the assessment, the information about likely impacts on the environment, and the involvement of the public, among other essential principles. Without consideration for these principles, the quality of the assessment can be questioned as to how well it reflects the potential impacts of the proposed development.

LONG GULLY WIND FARM

This proposal in 2009 was for the construction, operation and maintenance of a Wind Farm and ancillary activities in Wellington. 25 turbines are proposed for the generation of electricity with the capacity of 12.5MW. These turbines would provide power to the equivalent of 5000- 6000 homes. There were 74 submissions in total for this proposal- 27 were in support, 38 were in opposition and 9 had a neutral view. This proposal was granted.

RUATANIWHA WATER STORAGE SCHEME

This proposal in 2013 was to build and operate a 90 million cubic metre storage reservoir and associated structures. The dam will be located in Central Hawke's Bay where it will supply water for irrigation to between 25,000 and 30,000 Ha of land. The project will also include a small (6.5MW) hydroelectric power station. There were 119 submission received for the storage scheme, 89 were in support for the development. This application was granted.

DUNEDIN HOTEL

This proposal in 2008 was for a hotel to be located at 41 Wharf Street, Dunedin. The proposal was to operate a licensed hotel with 215 bedrooms, restaurants and bars, and 164 self-contained apartments. There were a total of 507 submission received, 437 of which opposed the development. Dunedin City Council declined the proposal.

METHOD

This study used three case study EIAs (shown on the map) and the written public submissions received on each. Submissions were analysed to identify the extent to which the issues raised were also covered in the AEE. This was used to determine any trends in the issues and impacts raised to evaluate the effectiveness of the scoping process to consider potential impacts of the activity.

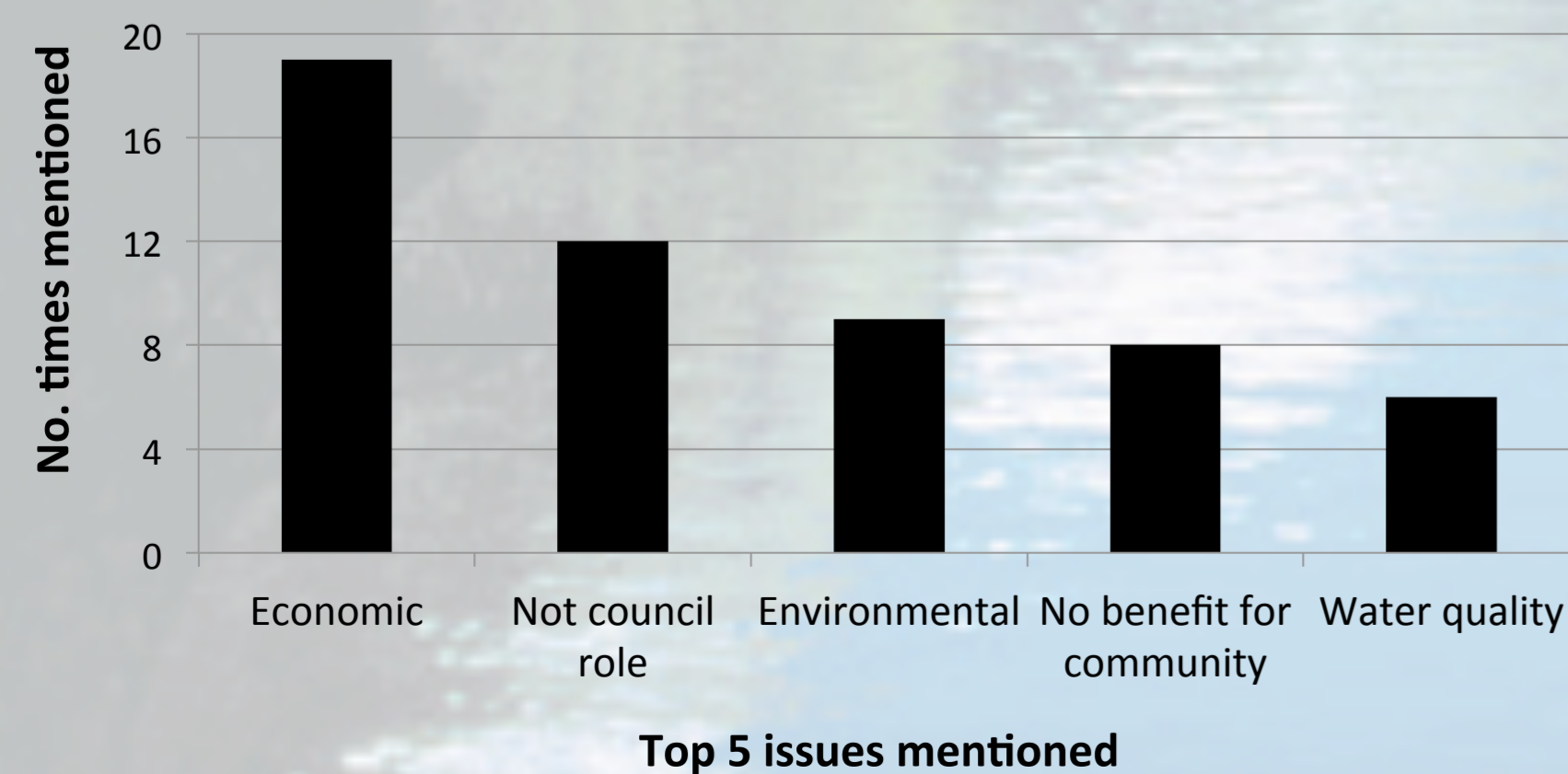
FINDINGS

Of the three case studies, the Dunedin Hotel AEE was chosen as it did not seem to have had any scoping process and no other significant consultation with the wider public and stakeholders. The proposal was marked by a large number of submissions, which raised obvious and significant issues not dealt with, or minimised in the AEE. The consent application was turned down.

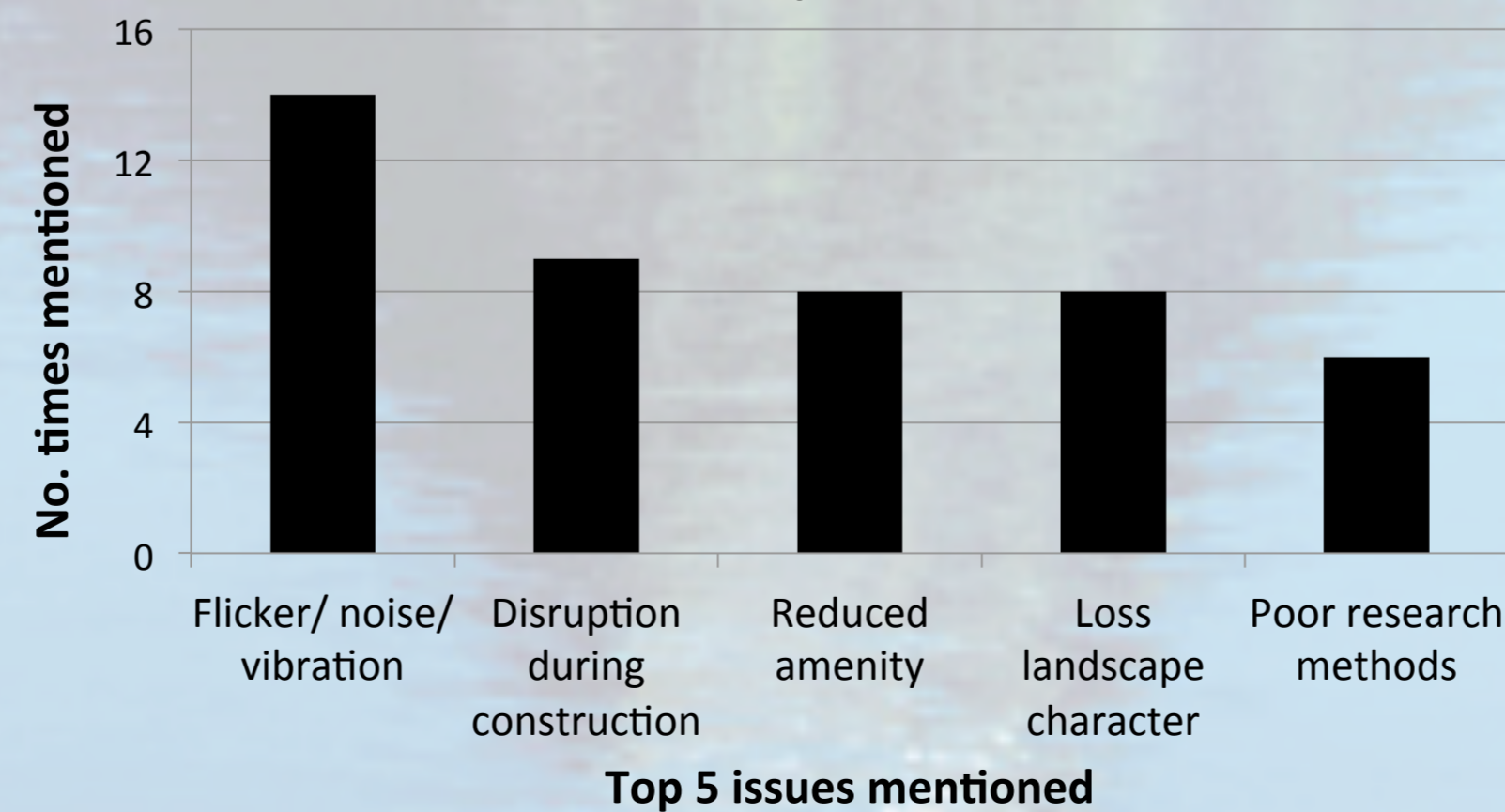
By comparison, the Long Gully wind farm and Ruataniwha water storage proposals were successful in achieving resource consents, and this success could be attributed in part to the inclusion of a scoping process. The public were involved in considering the range of impacts the respective proposals will have on the environment. Issues raised in the submissions tended to be outside the scope of the AEE or had been covered in the impact assessment.

This study provides support for the idea that effective scoping in impact assessment can bring positive outcomes. In particular, it can reduce opposition through consideration of public views and wider impacts on the environment.

Top issues raised in Ruataniwha Water Storage Development



Top issues raised in Long Gully Wind Farm Development



Top issues raised in Dunedin Hotel Development

