

# **Characteristics and conditions for rigorous, reflexive and inclusive SIA:**

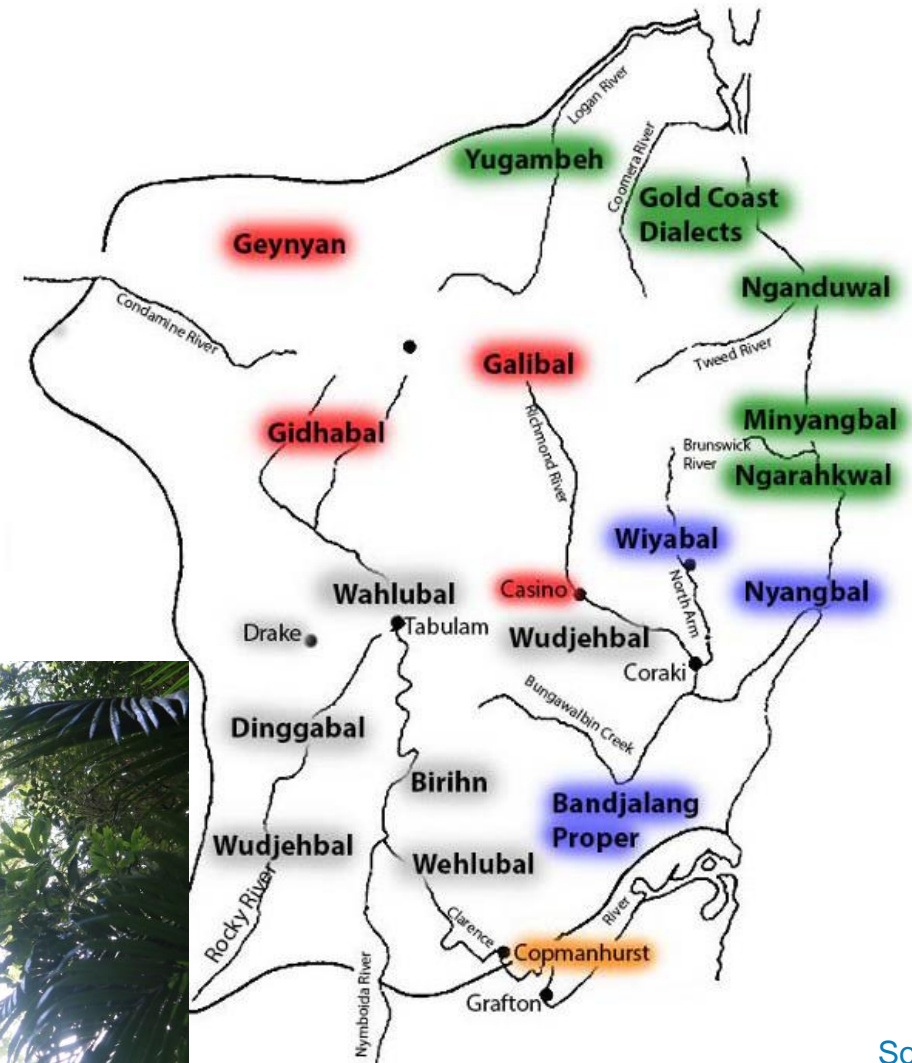
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**Developing and implementing SIA guidelines in NSW, Australia**

NZAIA conference, 21-22 April 2021

# Acknowledgement of Country

Traditional custodians of the Lismore region, NSW:  
**Widjabul wyabal** people of the **Bundjalung** nation.  
Includes SE Queensland and NE NSW.



Source:

<https://bundjalung.dalang.com.au/language/dictionary>

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

# Outline

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1. Recent evolution of SIA in New South Wales
2. The 2020 guideline – key features and challenges
3. Implementing the guideline – common pitfalls
4. Implications – what characterises ‘good’ SIA (at practical and institutional levels)?
5. Future directions (for discussion...)

# 1. Recent evolution of SIA in New South Wales



“What do we want?

*Decision-making that  
considers social  
impacts!*

When do we want it?

**NOW!”**



Pre-2017

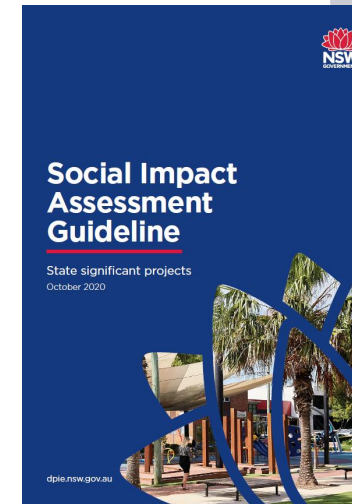
2017-2020

2021-

*Environmental Planning  
& Assessment Act 1979*  
requires social impacts  
to be considered.  
BUT  
No guidance on how to  
do so.



Formally applied to  
extractive industries  
only, but used more  
broadly in practice.



Applies to all  
development types.

# Rocky Hill

A proposed coal mine in the Gloucester Valley, NSW.

NSW Land and Environment Court: “*net negative social impacts are justification for refusing the project.*”

Significant social impacts include: ‘distributive equity’, ‘sense of place’, and ‘connection to country’.

Clarifies the social dimension of biophysical impacts: ‘*The noise impacts of the mine, although not a ground in itself to refuse the development application..., nevertheless do contribute to adverse social impacts that are a ground for refusal.*’

Chief Judge Preston used the 2017 guideline to assess likely impacts.



Gloucester Valley, NSW

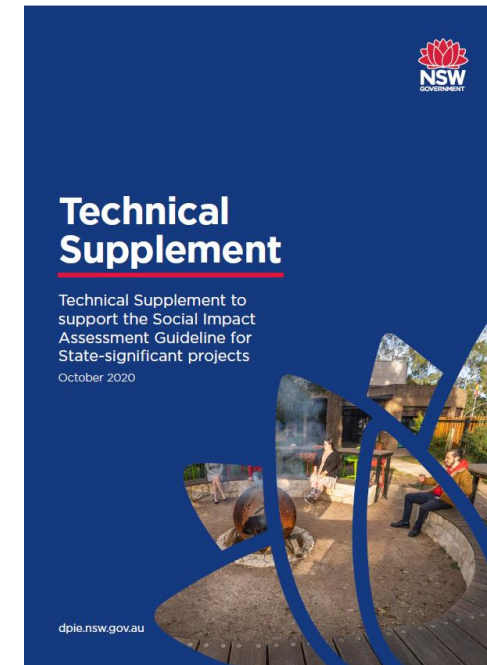
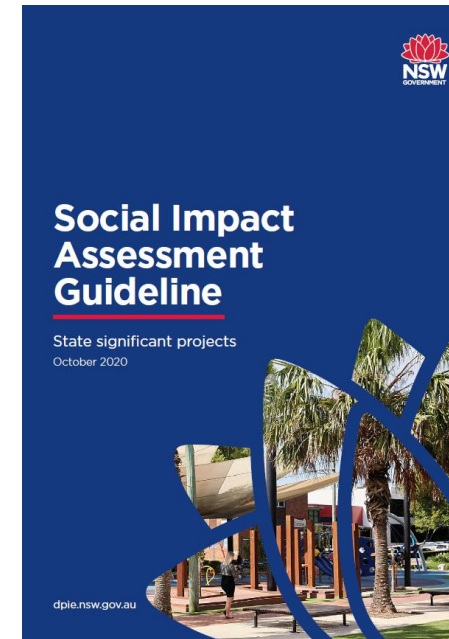


## 2. The new guideline – key features and challenges

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# New guideline – what's in it?

1. Main document + Technical Supplement
2. Further resources coming:
  - scoping tool
  - practice notes
3. Builds on:
  - IAIA 2015 guidance
  - NSW 2017 guideline
  - recent practice experience





# Some challenges with developing the guideline

Challenge	Response
Making it relevant for multiple industries	Developed examples of 'typical' social impacts for different development types.
Balancing quality with document size	Page limits (but then, appendices...)
Scalability/proportionality	Scoping worksheet (in development)
Overcoming perceptions of 'red tape' and the 'can of worms' theory	Clearly articulating the benefits – both instrumental/rational and normative/moral



### 3. Implementing the guideline – common pitfalls

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- Conflating engagement/consultation with social research
- Overlooking distributive equity
- Universalising differences in experience, or averaging over a population
- Lack of impartiality / unsubstantiated claims
- Overlooking intangible cultural heritage (not just ‘stones & bones’)
- Assuming jobs = social benefits (and ignoring adverse impacts of influx, e.g. impacts on women’s safety)
- Monitoring framework? Yes please!

No, you're not 'giving me a voice'...

**...there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'.  
There are only the deliberately silenced,  
or the preferably unheard.**

**— Arundhati Roy**

Whether to include people in decision-making  
is a question of power – and the extent to  
which we are prepared to share it.

# Pause to reflect...

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Do these pitfalls resonate  
with your experiences?





## 4. Implications – practical foundations for ‘good’ SIA?

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- Reflexive and precautionary approach, not assertive
- Actively seeking diversity, divergence, and dissenting views/perspectives
- Rigorous - multiple methods & data sources
- Practising principles of procedural fairness, transparency & impartiality
  - i.e. “when stakeholders have genuine opportunities for their views to be heard and respected through the assessment process, when the assessment considers all views and interests openly and without favour or bias, and when stakeholders’ views can materially influence the characterisation of impacts and the co-design of mitigation and enhancement measures” (Parsons & Luke, 2020).

# Institutional foundations for good SIA

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- A planning system that provides practical guidance
- Departmental support, leadership, expertise, and capacity
- A supporting legislative and regulatory framework (Qld/NSW)
- Professional independence – but what does this look like in practice?
  - e.g. professional practice/ethics frameworks, plus:

NSW Government, 2020. *Seeking Approval from the Department for the Appointment of Independent Experts: Post Approval Guidance for Infrastructure Projects.*

= better decision-making because we can have confidence in the SIA's findings

## 5. Future directions for SIA? (open discussion)

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1. Focus on post-approval: outcomes, implementation, and monitoring – *will all inform better decision-making*
2. Designing projects to address inequalities in health, social, and spatial outcomes
3. SIA for policy evaluation
4. Splashing around in the murky, relativist waters of contested opinions and post-truth...

## Some recent papers:

- Parsons, R. & Luke, H. 2020. Comparing reflexive and assertive approaches to social licence and social impact assessment, *The Extractive Industries and Society*.
- Parsons, R. 2019. Forces for change in social impact assessment, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*.
- Parsons, R., Everingham, J.-A. & Kemp, D. 2018. Developing social impact assessment guidelines in a pre-existing policy context, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 37(2), 114-123.
- Parsons, R. & Moffat, K. 2014. Integrating impact and relational dimensions of social licence and social impact assessment, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32(4), 273-282.

# Richard Parsons

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[richard.parsons@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:richard.parsons@planning.nsw.gov.au)

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment