Impact assessment and planning: forging partnerships

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Introduction

Impact assessment, in various forms, is used widely in decision-making processes in Aotearoa New Zealand, at all levels of government.

RMA

- *AEE*s for resource consents, which may involve specialist social, ecological, cultural, health IAs as the need dictates
- s32 evaluation of "benefits and costs of the environmental, economic, social, and cultural effects of provisions…" for policies and plans at all levels

LGA: "likely impact of any decision on each aspect of well-being…"[social, economic, environmental, and cultural]

EEZ Act: *EIA*s of proposals

Conservation Act: *EIA*s for concessions

RIA at Cabinet level

Local authorities using *SIA* and *HIA* in relation to gambling and liquor licensing, speed limits, etc…..

Impact assessment…

…an evidence-based approach to assess the wider potential consequences—both beneficial and adverse—of proposed actions, beyond the intended outcomes, so that necessary changes can be made to avoid or mitigate any undesirable outcomes, before a decision is made to proceed with the action.

Conclusions

NZAIA believes:

- There will be mutual benefits from greater interaction between planners and other IA practitioners in responding to the challenges and issues outlined here.
- Greater interaction would help improve practices, generate new thinking, and overall contribute to more sustainable approaches to planning and managing our natural and social environments.
- Perhaps most important, it would help ensure the purpose and practice of impact assessment survive the forthcoming legislative changes, an aim we believe the whole community of IA practice should prioritise.

NZAIA "White Paper" on IA

In 2023 NZPI contacted NZAIA, among other organisations, as part of an initiative "to foster greater links with other stakeholders in New Zealand on key issues in resource management." During a virtual discussion between David Curtis (NZPI CEO) and several members of the NZAIA core group, it was suggested NZAIA produce a "white paper" about the value of impact assessment to planning processes. *We have used it to set out reasons for closer links between planners with IA interests and the wider IA community.*

Issue	Context	Questions
Unintended consequences	The core of IA. It should be an automatic response, for any proposal intended to alter the world around us, to ask questions about the potential for unintended consequences. But as yet this does not seem to be the case in this country	How might this change?
Integrated approaches	Asking questions about wider implications requires an integrated perspective across relevant sectors of the environment to ensure less obvious but potentially important consequences are identified.	How can we equip practitioners to adopt integrated approaches, and to operate in inter-disciplinary environments?
IA by design	Ideally IA is part of a developer's design toolkit, sitting alongside technical and economic tools, feeding into decisions about the initial concept, site selection, and process and operational considerations.	How can the licensing stage of IA be de-emphasised, and "upstreaming" be encouraged? What role can local government, and planners in particular, play?
Giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The status of Māori, as tangata whenua, as treaty partners and not merely stakeholders in assessment processes; and the role of mātauranga Māori — together these challenge conventional impact assessment practices developed to suit a different institutional setting.	How should CIAs relate to other components of a wider assessment process: inform them, be integrated with them, or be treated as a separate, essentially parallel assessment? To what extent might all impact assessments, including higher level policy and plan assessments, give expression to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and how might this be done?
Involving communities and other stakeholders	IA has to involve communities and other stakeholders: to draw on local knowledge, to make sure community concerns are recognised and addressed, and to capture the values of potentially affected parties. It is fundamental to negotiating a social licence for significant proposals.	How can we encourage better engagement by proponents, at earlier stages of the design process, to secure those social licenses?
Strategic assessment for policies and plans	Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) recognises that while policies and plans require similar interrogation for their wider implications and consequences, the approach cannot simply follow the project assessment model.	How do we facilitate better understanding of SEA? How do we engage with higher level policy and plan makers, and the politicians who make decisions about the proposals?
Cumulative effects	The assessment of cumulative impacts/ effects continues to challenge impact assessors in this country, as it does all around the world.	Are there lessons IA administrators and practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand can learn about cumulative effects from countries such as Canada?

Download the NZAIA white paper on IA and Planners from: https://www.nzaia.org.nz/