



Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development

Reflecting on the Importance of
Maintaining the Environmental
Focus of Environmental
Assessment





Context

- Federal departments table sustainable development strategies (SDS) in Parliament every three years.
- SDSs recognize strategic environmental assessment (SEA) / environmental assessment (EA) as aids to decision making.
- EA requirements in Canada :
 - Policy, plan and program assessments required by *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals*.
 - Project assessments required by *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.
- Links among SDSs and SEA and EA are minimal.





Are EA and SEA “adequate” to promote sustainable development (SD)?

- The Cabinet Directive and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* highlight the importance of EA and SEA in the promotion of SD.
- EA/SEA are only one means to promote SD.
- Decision making in support of SD occurs once integrated economic, social and environmental analysis has been completed.
- Experience shows that EA and SEA have been successful in the promotion of SD.
- Practice is still evolving and improvement continuing.





Ensuring Due Regard for the Environment

- In most instances, good EA/SEA influences project/policy design allowing them to proceed in an environmentally sound manner.
- But, there is pressure on decision makers to focus on economic factors in decision making (jobs/growth).
- Full integration of economic, social and environmental factors at the analytical stage, before presentation to decision makers can be problematic.
- A legally-based EA process for projects ensures environmental impacts are clearly identified before decisions are made.
- This is particularly important in the transboundary context where economic and possibly social benefits accrue to one country, with potential environmental effects in another.





Public Involvement and Integration of Economic, Social and Environmental Factors in Support of Sustainable Development

- Active public involvement in EA/SEA processes means more complete integration of economic, social, environmental factors can occur prior to decision making.
- Independent EA panels under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* provide public conclusions and recommendations
- Process used for only the largest project proposals.
- Provides for considerable public involvement which, in essence, drives the process.
- Participants bring economic, social and environmental factors into deliberations.
- Historically, decision makers have paid close attention to the results.





Conclusion

- Sustainability is far broader than “environment”.
- EA and SEA should maintain their focus on evaluating “environmental” effects.
- More thorough integration of economic, social and environmental factors can occur prior to informed decision making if meaningful public involvement occurs.
- EA and SEA have a positive track record but are relatively recent tools (especially SEA) - practice is still evolving and improving.
- Maintaining flexibility, particularly for SEA, is important.

