

IPH response to the Environmental Protection Agency Consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Process Checklist

10 Mar 2008

[Access the original consultation draft from the Environmental Protection Agency on Strategic Environmental Assessment Process Checklist.](#)

The full IPH response is below:

Introduction

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland is an all-island body which aims to improve health in Ireland by working to combat health inequalities and influence public policies in favour of health. The Institute promotes co-operation in research, training, information and policy in order to contribute to policies which tackle inequalities in health.

Over the past six years the Institute has worked closely with the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland to build capacity for Health Impact Assessment.

The Institute takes the view that health is determined by policies, plans and programmes in many sectors outside the health sector as well as being dependent on access to and availability of first class health services. The importance of other sectors is encapsulated in a social determinants of health perspective which recognises that health is largely shaped and influenced by the physical, social, economic and cultural environments in which people live, work and play. Figure 1 illustrates these multi-dimensional impacts on health and also serves to highlight the clear and inextricable links between health and sustainable development. Factors that impact on long-term sustainability will thus also impact on health.

Comments and observations

The Institute welcomes the development by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Process Checklist and appreciates the open consultation process which allows us to comment on this document. We see the SEA Process Checklist as an ideal opportunity to encourage a stronger health and health inequalities dimension in Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland and make the following observations to support this.

1. The Institute strongly urges that the EPA take this opportunity to encourage assessors to adopt a more comprehensive view of health, defined by the World Health Organisation as "...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity"(WHO 1946).
 - o Adopting a social determinants of health perspective would allow for a broader consideration of how the plan or programme may impact on the health of the population. Historically, the human health dimension in environmental assessments has focussed on the biophysical environmental determinants of health. While these are extremely important, this focus does not allow for sufficient consideration of influence on mental and social health, nor does it routinely and systematically include social, economic and cultural factors

2. The Institute further suggests that consideration is given to strengthening opportunities for assessors to take into account the differential impacts of plans or programmes on various sub-groups within the population, such as the elderly, those on low incomes etc.
 - o Vulnerable groups within the population may be more susceptible to negative health impacts of a proposal, thus compounding their existing likelihood of poorer health. Incorporating procedures which systematically recognize and address these differential impacts could play an important role in reducing health inequalities.

3. Finally, international practice suggests that the health sector should work closely with the environment sector in assessing health impacts as part of SEA. We urge the EPA to consider the Guidance document produced by the Department of Health in England (<http://www.dh.gov.uk/>) on as well as principles developed by the World Health Organisation (<http://www.who.int/hia>) for considering health in SEA.

Figure 1: The determinants of health and well-being (Barton & Grant 2006)

References

- Barton H, Grant M. (2006). The Determinants of Health and Well-being in our Neighbourhoods. The Health Impacts of the Built Environment, Institute of Public Health in Ireland 2006.
- Department of Health Draft Guidance on Health in Strategic Environmental Assessment. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_073261
- World Health Organisation (1946). Further information available at: <http://www.who.int/en/>
- World Health Organisation (2001). Regional Office for Europe. Health impact assessment as part of strategic environmental assessment. Further information available at: <http://www.who.int/hia/en/>

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