



Canadian Environmental
Assessment Agency

Agence canadienne
d'évaluation environnementale



Grounding SEA in a Regional Context: An Emerging Federal Perspective

Environmental Assessment at a Crossroads
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Canada 



SEA dilemma – Making it real!

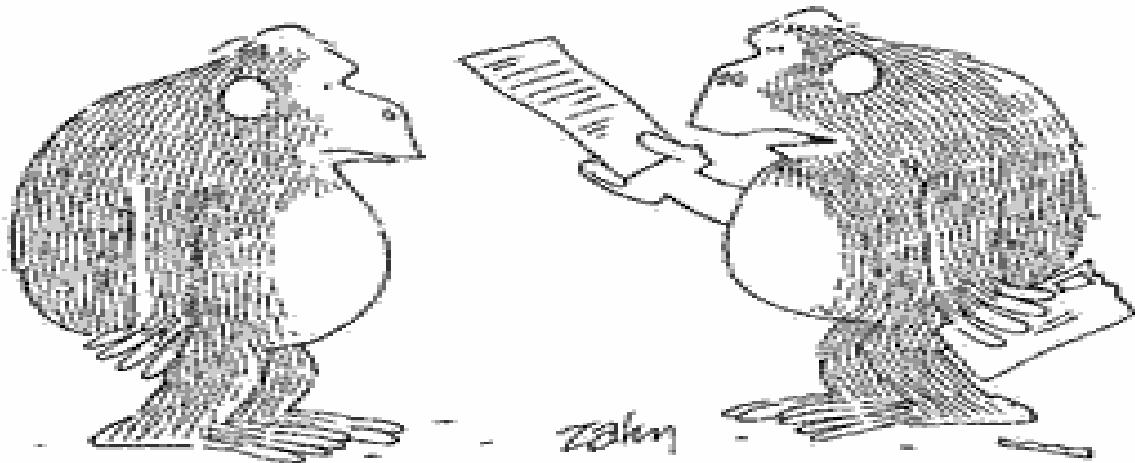


SEA is a process that aims to integrate environmental and sustainability considerations in strategic decision making. It has the potential to make the world a greener and more liveable place. It also has the potential to be a dreary and resource-intensive formality, applied in a grudging minimalist fashion by people who just hate having to do it, adding still further to some great useless administrative burden paid for by hapless taxpayers.

Therivel, R. 2004. *Strategic Environmental Assessment in Action*



Are we trying to do too much with SEA?



"It's from the government—we'll have to file an environmental-impact statement before we can evolve."



Getting more bang for the buck...

- Current Directive applies broadly to all policies, plans and programs requiring Cabinet or ministerial approval
 - As a result the end goal is unclear and the expected outcomes are poorly defined
- There are ways we can better focus our efforts:
 - Identifying areas of policy where SEA can have the greatest influence – narrowing the scope of application
 - Leveraging the *Federal Sustainable Development Act* and emerging Federal Sustainable Development Strategy
 - Applying SEA principles in a regional and/or sectoral context



“EA Isolation Paradigm”

Silos of Environmental Assessment (Noble 2009)



Project Environmental Impact Assessment

- *predicting impacts of individual projects*
- *“doing more harm than good”*



Regional Cumulative Effects Studies

- *measuring & monitoring environmental effects*
- *“disconnected”*



Strategic Environmental Assessment

- *futures-oriented - policies, plans and programs*
- *“promise and dismay”*



What's driving the interest in regionally-based approaches?



- Limited capacity of project EA to address cumulative effects – preventing *death by a thousand cuts*
- Pressure to ensure that development decisions are set within a broader environmental framework and to orient project EAs and approvals accordingly
- Need to ensure the environmental sustainability of regional planning and program decisions
- Fragmentation of the environmental management framework
- Desire of Aboriginal groups to be more fully engaged in development planning



We've known this for some time, so what's the impetus for change now?

- Regulatory improvement and reform agenda
- Results-based management – greater emphasis on outcomes
- Audit and evaluation of strategic environmental assessment
- Focus on integrated management
- Legislative review of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*



Prospects for change...? There's room for cautious optimism!



- Regulatory Advisory Committee work on SEA
- Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment has developed principles and guidance for RSEA
http://www.ccme.ca/assets/pdf/rsea_in_canada_principles_and_guidance_1428.pdf
- Senior-level recognition of a need to better define the 'collective' federal interest in environmental management
- Pilot regional-scale EAs
 - Beaufort Basin
 - Lower Athabasca Regional Plan
- Legislative Review of CEAA



CCME – Advancing a common understanding of RSEA



Definition

- *A process designed to systematically assess the potential environmental effects, including cumulative effects, of alternative strategic initiatives, policies, plans, or programs for a particular region.*

Objective

- *To inform the preparation of a preferred development strategy and environmental management framework for a region*



CCME - Characteristics of RSEA

■ Common principles

- Objectives-led and issues-driven (regional valued ecosystem components)
- Multi-stakeholder and collaborative
- Multi-scale and multi-tiered
- Cumulative-effects oriented
- Adaptive

Regional SEA	Regional EA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Alternatives-focused and futures-oriented ❑ Informs regional development planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Extension of project-based EA techniques to multiple activities on a common landscape or within a common system ❑ Supports regional development plan



CCME – Methodological approach

Pre-assessment

1. Develop and reference framework
2. Scope regional baseline issues and key indicators
3. Identify regional trends and stressors

Assessment

4. Formulate strategic alternatives and related scenarios
5. Assess cumulative effects of proposed alternatives
6. Identify the preferred option

Post-assessment

7. Identify mitigation needs
8. Develop follow-up and monitoring programs
9. Implement strategy and monitor



Follow-up & Review





Beaufort Regional EA (BREA)

Purpose

Proactively assemble regionally-relevant information on key issues in preparation for renewed investment in oil and gas activities in the Beaufort Basin

Outcomes

Examine 'recurrent' and 'regional-scale' issues and provide reliable baseline information in support of better informed, more streamlined project EAs and regulatory decisions



What's unique about BREA

While BREA may not be entirely “strategic”, it is:

- *Multistakeholder-led*
 - Inuvialuit, industry, governments
- *Issues-driven*
 - Focused on key issues and outstanding questions
- *Proactive*
 - Dealing with regional issues in advance of project applications
- *Integrative*
 - “Upstream” and “downstream” linkages



Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP)



Purpose

Provide the development context for the oilsands, setting environmental thresholds to be used for managing cumulative effects

Outcomes (federal perspective)

Regional plans reflect federal interests

- Attainment and maintenance of environmental objectives
- Meaningful attention to cumulative effects
- More focused project reviews/assessments
- Fewer regulatory impediments



What's unique about the LARP?

In contrast to BREAs, LARP is a truly “strategic” exercise

- *Futures-oriented*

- Models alternative development scenarios and contrast relative risks

- *Integrative*

- Bridges land-use planning, RSEA and cumulative effects management

- *Collaborative*

- Seeks to align federal and provincial interests



RSEA is not without its challenges



- Governance
 - Overcoming fragmentation and incrementalism
 - Proliferation of committees and stakeholder fatigue
 - Culture shift – shared leadership/multistakeholder paradigm
 - Who pays for REA? Who's accountable?
- Science-policy alignment and risk management
 - How much science is enough?
 - Instilling confidence in information captured at a regional-scale
- Timing
 - Finding the right “policy windows”
 - Getting out ahead of project applications
- Resources
 - Information collection, analysis and dissemination doesn't come cheap
 - Proving the value-added of RSEA (regulatory efficiency AND reduced social cost)