

SEA EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING WORKSHOP

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1. Introduction

This short and informal document captures some of the knowledge shared by participants at the SEA effectiveness training workshop and some of the learnings captured during the event. These have been recorded and shared to foster further learning.

2. What is Effective SEA

In the first hands-on exercise, participants were asked to individually define what is “effective SEA” or to identify keywords that relate to “effective SEA” and put these on a post-it note. The notes were then sorted according to the seven SEA effectiveness dimensions (see related pictures below). No post-it notes covered normative effectiveness, knowledge and learning, or transactive effectiveness (costs and benefits). Main points defining what effective SEA is, from the participants post-it notes, for the other effectiveness dimensions were:

Context

- Expertise
- Training
- Case law

Procedural

- Up to date data
- Consideration of dynamic future baseline scenarios
- Range of reasonable alternatives
- Clear SEA statement and monitoring

Pluralist

- Interactive and user-friendly
- Broad base of consultation
- Two-way communication – collaboration!

Substantive

- Integration of SEA and plan
- SEA influences the plan
- Plan includes SEA mitigation measures



3. Current Issues Affecting Effectiveness and Potential Solutions

In the second exercise, each table was provided an effectiveness dimension and asked to identify issues and provide 'solutions' or ways to improve effectiveness in that dimension. The focus was on solutions rather than issues. Each group was asked to provide three key ways/aspects to improve SEA effectiveness. These were as follows:

Context

This group focused on solutions to improve capacity:

- Dedicated environmental assessment officer within local authorities
- Training of planners to oversee EIA, AA and SEA
- Record and communicate lessons learned, guidance and procedures/systems in place
- Improved visual aids for elected representatives to promote better engagement

Procedural

This group focused on solutions to enhance processes:

- Effective communication between client and consultant (agreed timelines)
- Transparency of data – making databases accessible
- 'Boundaries' for cumulative effects – how far do you go?

Pluralist

This group focused on solutions to enhance public consultation and engagement, including:

- Road map of how consultation outcomes have been included in the plan/programme
- Toolbox talk on SEA at the start of public consultation events

- Ask for positive suggestions in relation to SEA as part of public consultation
- Workshop elected members in relation to SEA implications in conjunction with executive at each stage of the process
- Workshop the youth – Comhairle na Nóg

Substantive

This group focused on solutions to improve the impact of SEA on the ground (i.e. changing plans and protecting the environment)

- Focus on planners to consider environmental issues and document these considerations
- Consistent and legible assessments
- Providing monitoring resources and indicators

Normative

This group focused on solutions to enhance integration of environmental considerations into planning decisions:

- Conveying the importance of complying with legislation, EU, Section 28 of the Guidelines to elected members
- Communicating what sustainable development means to the public and elected members.

Knowledge and learning

This group identified as the key issue: Poor information sharing/lessons learned following completion of SEA. The proposed solutions were:

- Greater focus on SEA in college/university
- Greater training/courses/workshops for practitioners
- Good incorporation of other emerging legislation/issues
- Better promotion and communication of information already published

Transactive

This group focused on identifying barriers to efficient SEA, which were listed as:

- Insufficient expertise
- No formal review/oversight of SEA Statements
- Inadequate management buy-in

4. Prioritising Strategic Recommendations

In this exercise, participants were asked to prioritise the proposed recommendations, to rank them, so that a particular focus is provided to these going forward. The table below lists all the strategic recommendations from the second review of SEA effectiveness in Ireland, and indicates the votes gathered on each. As it can be observed, a number of recommendations were considered a high priority. These have been extracted below for easy access:

- Develop **guidance on legal requirements for SEA Environmental Reports**, legal challenges, the length expected of a typical SEA report, and which parts of the SEA report will be expected to be longer/more robust/more challenged vs. shorter/less robust/less challenged. This could include

web-links or case studies of SEA reports that have been effective substantively/normatively but are short and concise.

- DHPLG to revise the 2004 DHPLG SEA Guidelines to clarify/reiterate that the SEA (and AA) mitigation must be integrated into the final plan, or else a valid explanation should be provided for why the recommended mitigation is not integrated. This should **include clarification and recommendations on how outcomes of SEA should be taken into account during finalisation of the plan.**
- Undertake a **review of the quality of a cross-section of SEA Statements.** This could be supported by the preparation of an SEA Statement checklist. It would help determine if they meet the overall statutory requirements as well as documenting overall how the plan/programme and SEA process were integrated. It would also facilitate ongoing review of SEA effectiveness. An SEA Statement quality check package could be included in the existing EPA's SEA Process Checklist (see recommendation below).
- Opportunities should be explored to link coordinated **CPD-accredited SEA training with EIA/AA/WFD/SFRA/Climate change adaptation planning** to generally upskill the environmental assessment understanding across public authorities.
- Encourage **research into quantification/monetisation of the benefits of SEA**, based on Irish SEA examples (e.g. ecosystem services values protected by protecting sensitive sites from development, health benefits from preventing air pollution, etc.).
- To provide a focal point to ensure that the benefits of monitoring are achieved, a **national monitoring body** or forum could be created. This would work with plan-making authorities to ensure monitoring takes place and any unforeseen adverse effects are addressed. While this is an aspirational recommendation that requires significant resources, a dedicated team looking at trends and engaging with planners during plan-making could play an important advisory role to build in mitigation and develop more sustainable plans/programmes by addressing environmental trends.
- **Implement a shared GIS platform**, supported by environmental information (from government sources, for both SEA and EIA) and a robust monitoring system that feeds data into this GIS platform to provide the basis for evidenced-based decision-making.

STRATEGIC GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SEA	
CONTEXT	Ranking order and number of times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each statutory consultee should have a dedicated and consolidated SEA webpage to support their role and facilitate links to key information, or a national SEA website/portal should be developed as a one stop shop for all information on SEA. 	2 3 5,5 6 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State the relevant transfers of functions between environmental authorities in the forthcoming revision of the SEA Guidelines, when updating the contact details for the present SEA environmental authorities. 	4 7,7 8,8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess available SEA staff/personnel resources in the environmental authorities' departments/agencies and local authority planning sections, to establish extent of resource gap to inform work force planning proposals. 	1 2 6,6 7 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some local authorities have employed Environmental Assessment Officers. This should ideally be mirrored in all Local and Regional Authorities. Several local authorities could have a joint Environmental Assessment Officer for resource efficiency. 	2 3 4 5 7 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatively, create a central permanent resource (i.e. a dedicated environmental assessment post or team) within the organisation that helps to streamline processes, enhance consultation, and ensure that organisational memory is not lost while also optimising resources. 	4,4,4 5,5 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure good communication and close collaboration between the SEA and plan-making teams. The disconnect between the plan-making and SEA teams/processes is a recurring issue in SEA practice. Addressing this can help tackle many current practice issues identified (e.g. reporting on consultation feedback, integration of mitigation measures, etc.). This includes the often-missed step prior to finalising the plan/programme: a dialogue between the plan-making and SEA teams with a view to cross checking, reinforcing and maximising environmental integration. 	1,1 3 4 5 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure monitoring and data gap filling budgets are, as appropriate, allocated for all plans and programmes which are subject to SEA. 	1,1 2,2 3

	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more frequent national-level monitoring data to facilitate a more up to date, reliable and accountable basis for environmental assessment and planning. While some indicators are updated regularly (e.g. water quality), the EPA's State of the Environment and indicators reporting is currently undertaken on a four-year cycle. Annual State of the Environment reports (or bulletins) would provide more timely and current information to both SEA and planning processes. These would complement (be based on) the statistics and indicators on Ireland's Environment webpage, and supplement a broader stock-take every four years. 	1 2 3,3 6,6
PROCEDURAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance on legal requirements for SEA Environmental Reports, legal challenges, the length expected of a typical SEA report, and which parts of the SEA report will be expected to be longer/more robust/more challenged vs. shorter/less robust/less challenged. This could include web-links or case studies of SEA reports that have been effective substantively/normatively but are short and concise. 	1,1,1,1,1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance on mitigation measures, including good practice examples, how to ensure that mitigation measures proposed in an SEA are incorporated into the plan, documenting mitigation measures in the SEA Statement, and how the mitigation measures identified in the SEA should be incorporated at the project level (tiering). 	2, 2,2 4,4,4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance on planning hierarchy-specific and sector-specific monitoring objectives, targets and indicators. 	2, 2,2 3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address key existing data gaps for relevant SEA themes (e.g. landscape, human health) by either collecting new information by relevant agencies/departments or by making existing information more widely accessible. Refer to the identified data gaps affecting SEA effectiveness when prioritising data collection (Table 10). 	2,2 3,3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use technology and innovation to encourage monitoring implementation and to tap into currently available but under-used sources of data gathering and sharing (web-based services, citizen science, remote sensing, etc.), support citizen science initiatives and empower the public by giving them a voice, and allow plan-making authorities to tap into local knowledge and data sources: 	3,3 5,5,5,5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include in the next EPA funding call a proposal to develop a monitoring app. This can link to specific monitoring requirements for a plan and territory (e.g. CDP, LAP). It will support citizen science initiatives and empower the public by giving them a voice, while plan-making authorities are tapping into local knowledge and data sources. This 	-

app could be modelled on the EPA's environmental concerns reporting app (See it? Say it!) and focus on a number of key indicators.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage plan-making authorities, and plan-makers in general, to post monitoring requirements in Ecobroker (https://ecobroker.ucd.ie/). Linking practice and science can facilitate monitoring implementation (by getting academics and researchers to undertake projects that facilitate data gathering and inform follow up processes and outcomes). 	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise monitoring initiatives that go beyond the minimum legal requirements, for instance through awards at the annual EPA Environment Ireland conference or relevant national planning conference. Awards could address excellence in monitoring and feedback; and excellence in innovative and effective mitigation measures (as documented through monitoring). This could be further enhanced by including good monitoring practice examples on the environmental authorities' websites. 	3 6,6,6,6,6
PLURALIST	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop guidance on effective and meaningful means of consultation with the public and statutory consultees (that moves away from information sessions and correspondence to more active forms of participation). 	1 2 3 4,4
SUBSTANTIVE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHPLG to revise the 2004 DEHLG SEA Guidelines to clarify/reiterate that the SEA (and AA) mitigation must be integrated into the final plan, or else a valid explanation should be provided for why the recommended mitigation is not integrated. This should include clarification and recommendations on how outcomes of SEA should be taken into account during finalisation of the plan. 	1,1,1,1,1,1,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage monitoring findings to be made publicly available and published on the plan-makers' website alongside the plan/programme and SEA related documentation, at least as part of plan/programme reviews. This would ensure that monitoring is properly undertaken and monitoring reports are prepared. For example, in the context of land-use planning, ensure that a monitoring report is published when the plan review is initiated (i.e. two years into plan implementation). While making it a requirement would involve amending the SEA Regulations, it could be fostered by including it as a best practice recommendation in the revision of the DHPLG 2004 SEA Guidelines. 	2,2,2,2,2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake monitoring meetings or workshops as part of the EPA championing role, in combination with the scoping or alternatives workshops that are currently carried out, during the preparation of a plan/programme. There is a need for better collaboration on monitoring to ensure buy-in by the plan maker and stakeholder. This would ensure consistency between authorities and a step-wise improvement of monitoring practice. 	3,3 4,4,4,4

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a monitoring strategy at national level to collate, coordinate and improve the availability of (spatial) data from existing monitoring mechanisms (e.g. EPA, heritage, water), and provide centralised and relevant information across planning hierarchies and sectors. These data/information could be housed in a centralised environmental baseline data portal. This would be a rapid and systematic way to address ongoing monitoring limitations and a way to reduce costs of evidence gathering for next round of SEAs. 	2,2 3,3,3
NORMATIVE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include information in the EPA's SEA Pack (EPA, 2018) and SEA Process Checklist (EPA, 2008) about legal standards that SEAs should be testing against (e.g. air and water quality standards, integrity of SPAs/SACs, climate change targets); and include a criterion in the SEA Process Checklist about whether the impact assessment tests against legal standards. Standards should be referred to at the baseline environment, SEA framework/assessment, and monitoring stages. This would ideally be done in collaboration with DHPLG. 	2,2,2,2,2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a review of the quality of a cross-section of SEA Statements. This could be supported by the preparation of an SEA Statement checklist. It would help determine if they meet the overall statutory requirements as well as documenting overall how the plan/programme and SEA process were integrated. It would also facilitate ongoing review of SEA effectiveness. An SEA Statement quality check package could be included in the existing EPA's SEA Process Checklist (see recommendation below). 	1,1,1,1,1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the existing SEA Process Checklist (EPA, 2008b). This checklist could be used as a quality check framework once it is: revised to address not only the process but also reporting requirements; updated to include more recent and relevant good practice; and published (as the current version is still a consultation draft). This checklist would also benefit from a streamlined "rapid check" complementary section. 	3,3,3,3,3
KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities should be explored to link coordinated CPD-accredited SEA training with EIA/AA/WFD/SFRA/Climate change adaptation planning to generally upskill the environmental assessment understanding across public authorities. 	1,1,1,1 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an e-learning module on SEA, with relevant linkages to EIA/AA/WFD/SFRA. 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present findings of the second SEA effectiveness review at the Environment Ireland 2020 conference and other relevant conferences. 	2,2,2 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and capacity building on SEA Statements and monitoring for SEA practitioners/consultants and plan-makers, along with this new guidance (Appendix A). This would enhance current practice and promote proactive and practical monitoring commitments 	1,1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and run a training course on alternatives, based on the EPA's guidance on alternatives, to make statutory consultees and plan-makers more aware of good practice in identifying reasonable alternatives, assessing and comparing alternatives, and explaining the choice of preferred alternatives. This could be combined with other relevant aspects such as mitigation and monitoring, updated guidance documents, etc. 	1 2 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA Statements could include a section on key learnings and outcomes; describing, among other things, what the planning authority has learned about the SEA process. 	2
TRANSACTIVE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage research into quantification/monetisation of the benefits of SEA, based on Irish SEA examples (e.g. ecosystem services values protected by protecting sensitive sites from development, health benefits from preventing air pollution, etc.). 	1,1,1,1
ALL ASPECTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run a 1- or 2-day workshop on SEA effectiveness, and those aspects of the SEA process that promote various dimensions of effectiveness. This is planned as part of this second review of SEA effectiveness in Ireland and is expected to be held in Q1 of 2020. 	2,2 3,3,3,3,3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a focal point to ensure that the benefits of monitoring are achieved, a national monitoring body or forum could be created. This would work with plan-making authorities to ensure monitoring takes place and any unforeseen adverse effects are addressed. While this is an aspirational recommendation that requires significant resources, a dedicated team looking at trends and engaging with planners during plan-making could play an important advisory role to build in mitigation and develop more sustainable plans/programmes by addressing environmental trends. 	1,1,1 2,2,2,2 3,3 4,4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a shared GIS platform, supported by environmental information (from government sources, for both SEA and EIA) and a robust monitoring system that feeds data into this GIS platform to provide the basis for evidenced-based decision-making. 	1,1,1,1,1 2,2 3,3 4,4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an annual environmental award with other relevant departments such as DCCA, DCHG and DHPLG to reward good practice in SEA, EIA and AA. This will incentivise good practice and could be used to highlight key issues such as monitoring through targeted awards. 	2 3 4,4 5,5,5,5,5

Table 1. Ranking of strategic recommendations derived from the Second Review of SEA Effectiveness in Ireland (EPA, 2020).

5. How the Workshop has Influenced Attitudes as Identified by Participants

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked how the workshop had influenced attitudes. The following were identified:

- Greater awareness of the role for SEA as a tool to improve a plan
- Greater emphasis on participation
- Need for early integration with plan

Appendix A. Workshop Programme

SEA EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP		
9:30 – 10:00	Registration	
Refreshments		
10:00 – 10:10	Welcome Introduction to the Second Review of SEA Effectiveness project	Suzanne Wylde (EPA)
10:10 – 10:15	Workshop format and objectives	Ainhoa González
10:15 – 10:30	1. Individual views: What is an effective SEA?	All
10:30 – 10:45	Effectiveness dimensions of SEA	Ainhoa González
10:45 – 11:00	2. Think-pair-share: Current difficulties in Irish SEA practice	All
Tea break – bring tea to tables		
11:20 – 12:10	Good practice case studies How SEA has influenced the plan 3 key lessons learnt	Sheila Downes (Clare Co.Co. - CDP) Des Cox (EirGrid - Grid25 IP) Stephen Finn (OPW - CFRAM)
12:10 – 12:30	Strategic recommendations to improve Irish SEA practice	Antonia Gaughran
12:30 – 13:00	3. Open discussion: Are these recommendations appropriate and feasible?	All
Lunch break		
14:00 – 14:15	Costs and benefits of SEA	Craig Bullock
14:15 – 14:30	Opportunities to optimise benefits	Riki Therivel
14:30 – 15:15	4. Participative group exercise: Improving SEA effectiveness in practice	All
15:15 – 15:30	Rapporteurs: Feedback on group exercise	Group rapporteurs
15:30 – 15:50	Revised SEA Guidance: Supporting Effectiveness	Paul Scott (DHPLG)
15:50 – 16:20	SEA effectiveness take-aways Learnings from the day*	All
16:20 – 16:30	Turning ideas into action: The SEA Action Plan	Suzanne Wylde (EPA)
Closing		

Appendix B. Photographs of the Day

Embrace SEA as the tool to make a difference



...because the costs of SEA are short-term but its benefits will last over time and can be very large, and contribute to a Sustainable future

Engage all relevant stakeholders early



...because proactively consulting all groups helps to ensure that you have a full range of information needed to develop a good plan, informs the public and reduces public opposition at project level.

Proactively integrate the SEA findings in the plan and tell how

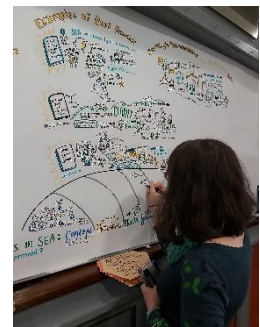
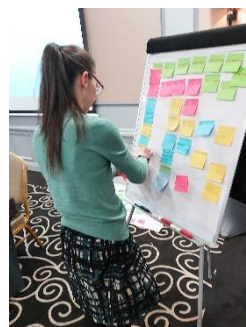
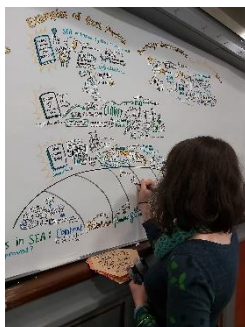


...because SEA effectiveness goes beyond legal compliance and a better environment...it includes better understanding by planners and the public about their local environment, avoidance of future risks and more transparent decisions.

Be open to alternatives and mitigation



...because these are the main stages at which the SEA influences the plan and can improve the environment... if the SEA doesn't change the plan (and all plans can be improved) then many/most of its benefits are not achieved.



Include monitoring commitment and resources in the plan

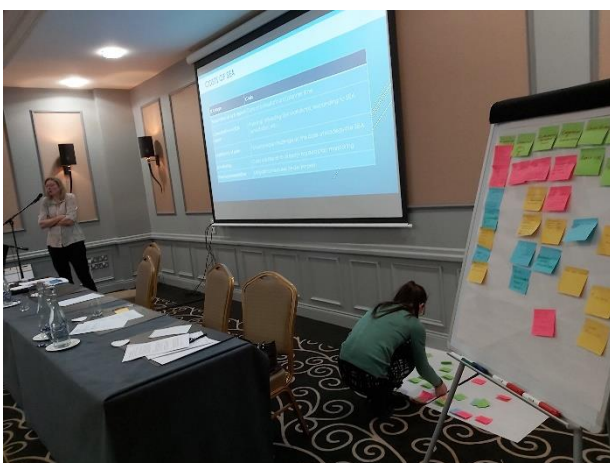


...because monitoring results can reveal the "real" effects of implementing a plan, identify and address unforeseen effects, and allow data gaps to be filled reducing uncertainties and better informing future planning decisions.

Capture the learning that has occurred in the process and pass it on



...because knowledge exchange and awareness raising can be highly effective at refocusing planning teams to proactively consider environmental matters.



Appendix C. Participating Organisations

There were 51 participants on the day representing the following organisations:

And Board Pleanala
AOS Planning
ARUP
CAAS
Clare County Council
Cork County Council
Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Dept. of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Donegal County Council
Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly
EirGrid
Environmental Protection Agency
Ervia
Faillte Ireland
Fingal County Council
Inland Fisheries Ireland
Jacobs Engineering
John Spain and Associates
Kerry County Council
Kilkenny County Council
Laois County Council
Limerick County Council
Mary Tubridy and Associates
National Transport Authority
Offaly County Council
Office of the Planning Regulator
Roughan O'Donovan
RPS Group
TOBIN & Co
Wexford County Council