

Review of the Effectiveness of SEA – Regional Planning Guidelines

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Prepared for the Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Environmental Assessment SEA Unit by



Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a statutory body responsible for protecting the environment in Ireland. We regulate and police activities that might otherwise cause pollution. We ensure there is solid information on environmental trends so that necessary actions are taken. Our priorities are protecting the Irish environment and ensuring that development is sustainable.

The EPA is an independent public body established in July 1993 under the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992. Its sponsor in Government is the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

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We license the following to ensure that their emissions do not endanger human health or harm the environment:

- waste facilities (e.g., landfills, incinerators, waste transfer stations);
- large scale industrial activities (e.g., pharmaceutical manufacturing, cement manufacturing, power plants);
- intensive agriculture;
- the contained use and controlled release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs);
- large petrol storage facilities;
- waste water discharges.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

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- Overseeing local authorities' environmental protection responsibilities in the areas of – air, noise, waste, waste-water and water quality.
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- Independent reporting to inform decision making by national and local government.

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- Quantifying Ireland's emissions of greenhouse gases in the context of our Kyoto commitments.
- Implementing the Emissions Trading Directive, involving over 100 companies who are major generators of carbon dioxide in Ireland.

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- Co-ordinating research on environmental issues (including air and water quality, climate change, biodiversity, environmental technologies).

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- Assessing the impact of plans and programmes on the Irish environment (such as waste management and development plans).

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING, EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE

- Providing guidance to the public and to industry on various environmental topics (including licence applications, waste prevention and environmental regulations).
- Generating greater environmental awareness (through environmental television programmes and primary and secondary schools' resource packs).

PROACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Promoting waste prevention and minimisation projects through the co-ordination of the National Waste Prevention Programme, including input into the implementation of Producer Responsibility Initiatives.
- Enforcing Regulations such as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) and substances that deplete the ozone layer.
- Developing a National Hazardous Waste Management Plan to prevent and manage hazardous waste.

MANAGEMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE EPA

The organisation is managed by a full time Board, consisting of a Director General and four Directors.

The work of the EPA is carried out across four offices:

- Office of Climate, Licensing and Resource Use
- Office of Environmental Enforcement
- Office of Environmental Assessment
- Office of Communications and Corporate Services

The EPA is assisted by an Advisory Committee of twelve members who meet several times a year to discuss issues of concern and offer advice to the Board.

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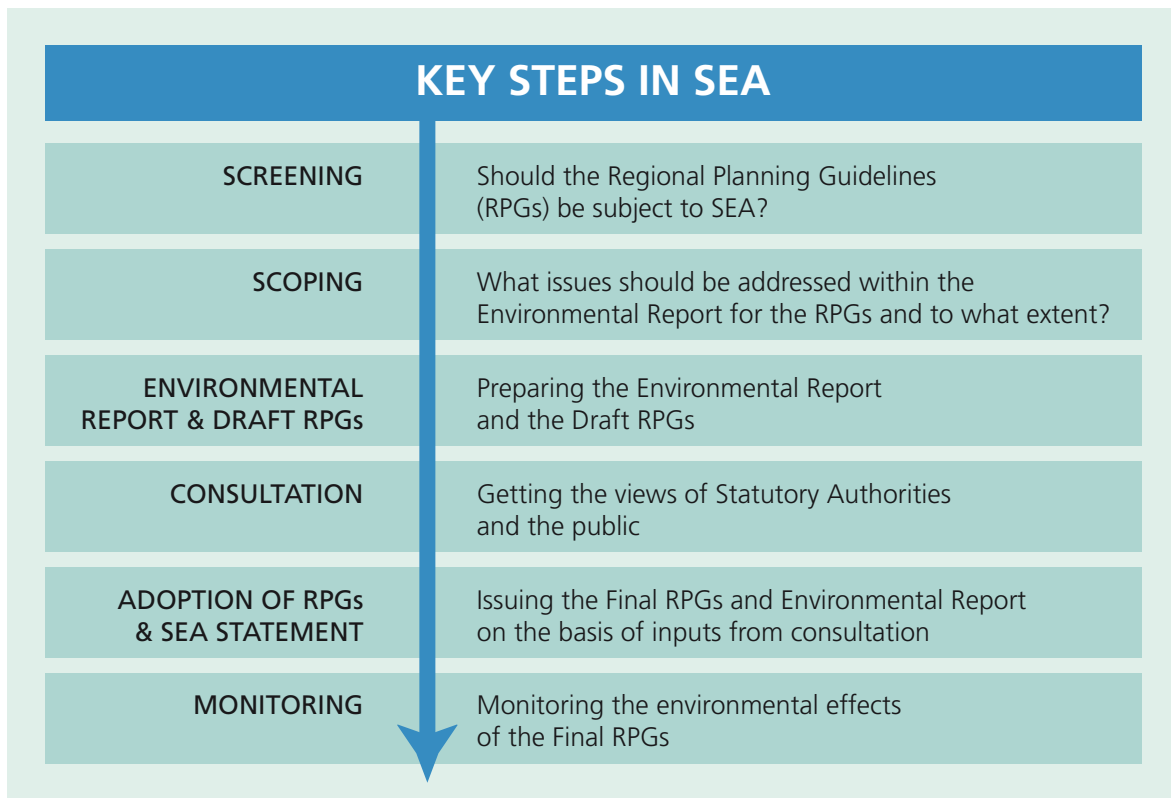
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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive came into force in 2001 and was transposed into Irish law in 2004. The Directive aims to provide a high level of protection of the environment, and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into plan preparation and adoption with a view to promoting sustainable development. There are a number of key steps in SEA which are outlined in **Figure 1** for ease of reference.

Figure 1: The Key Steps in Strategic Environmental Assessment¹



Eleven years after the Directive (2001/42/EC) came into force and nearly eight years after the passing of Irish SEA Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 and 436), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has initiated this review to examine how effective the SEA process was in the preparation of the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) 2010–2022 in Ireland. This Study is part of a national study entitled ‘Review of Effectiveness of SEA in Ireland’ prepared on behalf of the EPA by RPS Consultants. The results of this

¹ Adapted from Enterprise Ireland (Enviro Centre) (2012) ‘The SEA Directive’ <http://www.envirocentre.ie> (Accessed 30th June, 2012).

RPG Study were incorporated into the national study, though it also has specific recommendations for the next review of the Regional Planning Guidelines.

SEA effectiveness can be direct: it can lead to changes in a plan that reduce the plan’s negative impacts and increase its benefits. It can also be indirect, for instance through better understanding of the environment and planning by planners and the public and improved participation in plan-making by the public.

Methodology

The research investigated both direct and indirect effectiveness by asking:

- Did the SEA process identify significant effects of implementing the RPGs?
- Did the SEA process inform and support effective integration of environmental concerns into the RPG-making process?
- What opportunities exist to improve the SEA process?
- How effective is SEA governance?

To answer these questions, 15 aspects of SEA were investigated:

<p>0. Screening stage²</p> <p>1. Scoping stage</p> <p>2. Consultation on Draft RPGs & Environment Report</p> <p>3. Description of RPGs and review of other plans</p> <p>4. Existing (baseline) environment*</p> <p>5. Objectives, indicators and targets*</p> <p>6. Alternatives*</p> <p>7. Likely significant effects of the RPGs*</p>	<p>8. Mitigation measures*</p> <p>9. Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary</p> <p>10. Amendments to the Draft RPGs following consultation</p> <p>11. SEA Statement</p> <p>12. Post-adoption including monitoring</p> <p>13. Appropriate Assessment</p> <p>14. Influence of SEA, integration with the RPGs</p> <p>15. SEA governance</p>
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* Part of the SEA Environmental Report.

2 SEA Screening was not required as part of the RPG Review process and most Regional Authorities chose to skip this step by proceeding directly to Scoping. Please note that the ‘Review of Effectiveness of Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland’ examines SEA Screening and is included in this study for completeness.

The research was informed by:

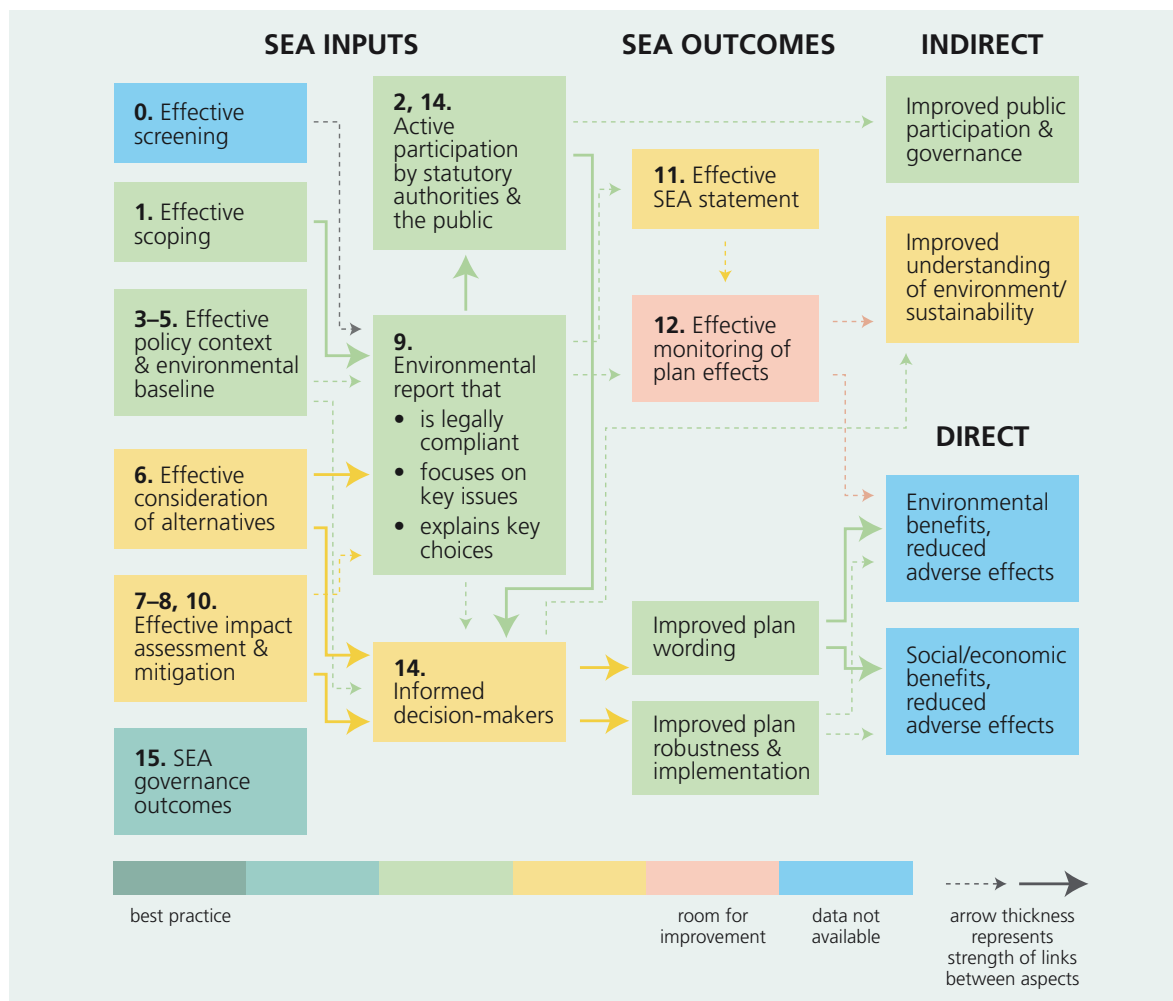
1. A detailed review of seven RPG SEA **Case Studies** which provided information about the quality of the SEA documentation and the underlying SEA process.
2. **Interviews** with Regional Authority staff involved with the case studies to shed further light on how the Environmental Reports were used to inform the making of the RPGs and their experiences with regard to SEA and how it is governed (i.e. the bodies that oversee the SEA process and make sure it is being carried out).

From this information, findings were drawn about the effectiveness of SEA in the RPG process and recommendations made about how SEA effectiveness could be improved in the next review of the RPGs.

Overall Findings – Effectiveness of the SEA Process

Figure 1 summarises how well different aspects of SEA were carried out in the RPG review process and the strength of links between inputs and outcomes of SEA.

Figure 2: Effectiveness of SEA Inputs and Outcomes in the RPGs



Inputs

1. During SEA Scoping, the major regional environmental problems should be identified first, i.e. what should go into the Environmental Report. Following this, agreement should be reached on what does not need to go in (though this can be difficult as RPGs can affect many aspects of the environment).
2. The Statutory (SEA) Environmental Authorities³ were very helpful and provided useful advice and information during consultation on the RPGs; however, public involvement in SEA was very limited.
- 3–5. All Environmental Reports provided a good description of the RPGs, policy context, and an environmental baseline, although there were gaps in available data.
6. The consideration of SEA alternatives (i.e. development options) was limited in some cases as some planners felt that certain decisions made in higher-level planning policy documents and previous RPGs must be followed, which left little scope for new alternatives. Planning legislation requires RPGs to be consistent with the National Spatial Strategy.
- 7–8. All impact assessment (including cumulative, synergistic, etc. and the interrelationships between the impacts) and mitigation could be improved.
9. The quality of the Environmental Reports was high, but they often do not focus tightly enough on key issues; and often they do not explain clearly why certain choices were made or how SEA mitigation measures were integrated into the RPGs.
10. Amendments to the RPGs were all considered in SEA though the reports could have been made available for public viewing.
11. One RPGs SEA Statement was not prepared at the time of this review. There is a legal requirement to prepare such documents and they are a very useful record of the SEA process.
12. Monitoring of the environmental impacts of implementing the Regional Planning Guidelines has not begun (at least one year and eight months following their adoption).
13. Appropriate Assessment (AA) (under the Habitats Directive) and SEA should be more effectively integrated or linked.
14. Greater 'buy-in' to the benefits of SEA by decision makers is needed in some cases. SEA should not be treated as a parallel exercise but should be integrated with the RPG-making process.
15. SEA governance is generally strong, but there could be stronger legal emphasis on the need to complete SEA Statements. Statutory Environmental Authorities could prepare guidance notes on various aspects of SEA as similar errors are being repeated.

Outcomes

Planners suggest that SEA significantly improved the RPG process and made the RPGs more environmentally robust, with environmental resources being considered in greater detail than would have been the case (in the absence of the SEA Directive).

³ During the RPG review process the Statutory Environmental Authorities were the EPA, DEHLG, DCENR and NIEA.

Monitoring of the RPGs must be carried out regularly to ensure that SEA leads to environmental, social or economic improvements and prevents environmental, social or economic harm.

Overall the SEA process was an effective means of integrating environmental considerations into the RPGs to provide a high level protection of the environment.

SEA helped to identify the significant effects on the environment and integrate environmental concerns into the RPGs.

SEA governance is broadly effective. However, there are clear aspects of the process that need to be improved.

The quality of the SEA *inputs* in Ireland varies from ‘very good’ (e.g. scoping) to leaving ‘room for improvement’ (e.g. mitigation and monitoring), as shown in Table 1 below. Understanding of the quality of SEA outcomes is hampered by lack of buy-in from decision-makers and a lack of monitoring. Table 1 summarises the findings of the case study review.

Table 1: Summary of Case Study Findings

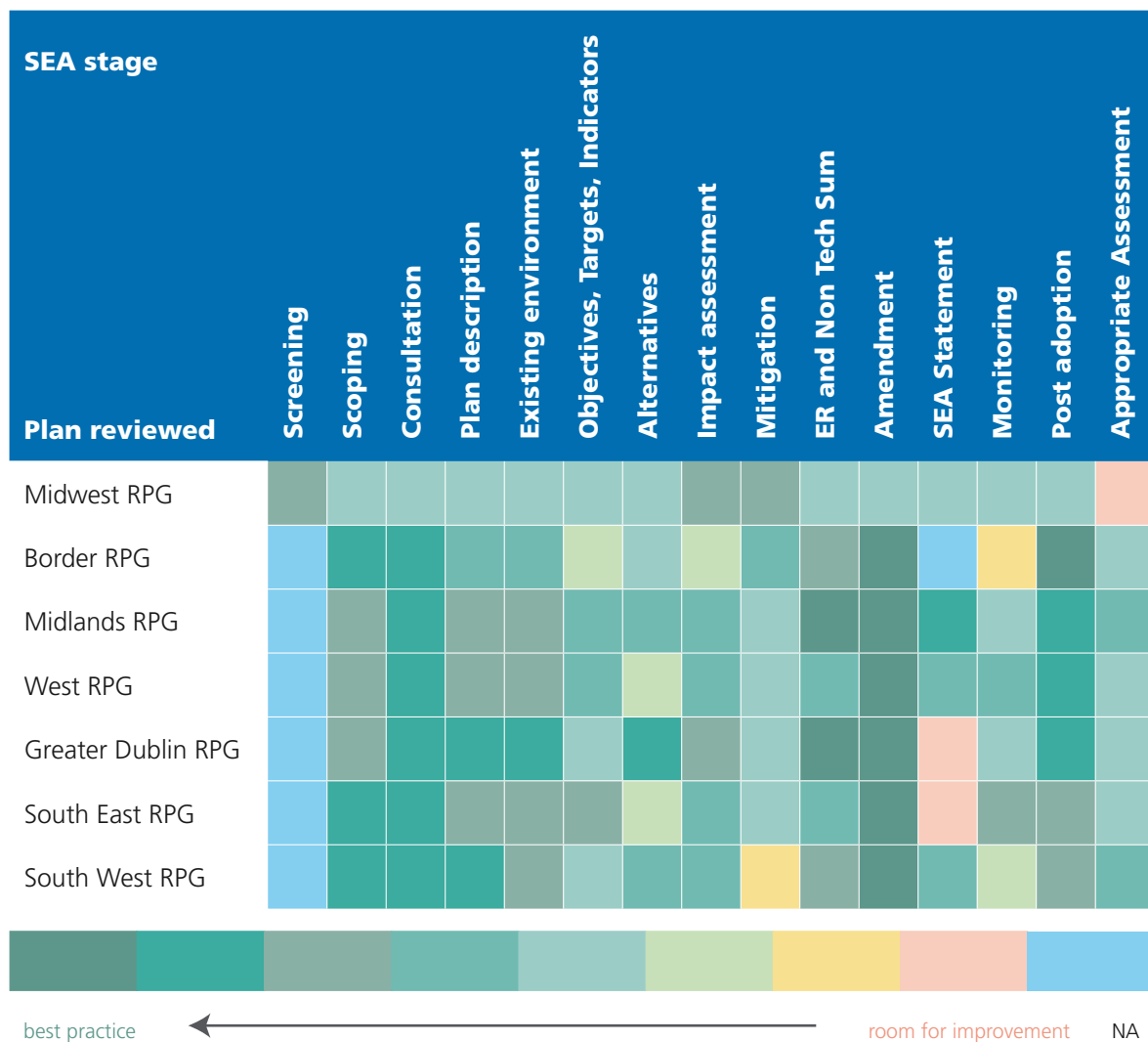







Table 2 discusses the key strengths and weaknesses of SEA in the RPG process.




Table 2: Strengths and Weaknesses of SEA Inputs

SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Scoping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consultation periods open for 8+ weeks (4 more than required) ■ Good consultation seeking to engage with the public and a wide range of organisations – workshops/meetings were held with statutory authorities ■ RPG Reports complement SEA Reporting stages (i.e. pre-draft RPG Issues Paper & Scoping Paper) ■ RPG Report on consultation (Director's Report) can include SEA responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AA and SEA scoping are not integrated or informing each other ■ SEA Scoping Report is not obligatory ■ Difficult to scope out issues at a regional level ■ Difficult to determine the level of detail in the Environmental Report at a regional level, especially as AA can be very specific
2. Consultation on Draft RPGs & ER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consultation periods open for 10+ weeks (6 more than required) ■ Good involvement of SEA Statutory Environmental Authorities ■ Meaningful consultation with the public and a wide range of organisations ■ Consultations resulted in numerous alterations to the RPGs (robustness) ■ RPG Reports complement SEA Reporting stages (i.e. Draft RPGs and SEA Environmental Report) ■ RPG Report on consultation (Director's Report) includes responses on SEA ■ New 'Best Practice Guidance Note' on Transboundary consultation developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Failure to document Scoping responses and link with key outputs from SEA Environmental Report






SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
3. Description of RPGs & review of other plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptions of RPGs and other plans are generally good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide variation in number of influencing plans and programmes referenced Key plans and programmes were not listed under separate headings (such as 'water', 'landscape', etc.) Conflicts between higher level plan objectives or objectives that the RPGs must follow/be consistent with, were not documented This section was not always clearly linked to the 'environmental objectives'
4. Existing environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some good examples of constraint/sensitivity mapping Baseline information is a 'state of the environment report' for each region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource-intensive Environmental information is not concise 'Significant gaps' in environmental information not documented or addressed 'Evolution of the environment in the absence of the RPGs' was not addressed for each SEA topic (e.g. cultural heritage, material assets, etc.) or at all Mapping techniques (e.g. modelling) not explained; some maps are too small No mapping facilities or lack of a centralised, consistent and easily accessible database Scoping issues not addressed in the Environmental Report
5. Objectives, indicators and targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives linked with higher level plans, etc. but are tailored to meet requirements of RPG SEA Objectives, indicators and targets (O/I/T) linked to each other and linked to environmental problems identified in the 'Existing Environment' O/I/T categorised by topic (e.g. human health, climate, etc.) Most Environmental Reports contain a manageable number of indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to set limits/thresholds for intervention or to set dates to meet targets Regional Authority (RA) remit is limited – indicators are often parameters that the RA do not have authority over Rigorous assessment of I/T (e.g. types of indicators used) and likely success of addressing environmental issues was not carried out






SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
6. Alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA widens the scope of alternatives considered ■ GIS constraints/sensitivity mapping is a useful support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generation of reasonable/realistic alternatives is a big challenge ■ Influence of planning policy hierarchy/political decisions limits choices available ■ Some alternatives are based on previous RPG alternatives, that is, they were not devised in the SEA or were retrospectively included in the SEA Environmental Report ■ Limited assessment of alternatives and no detailed analysis of the chosen alternative ■ Environmental Report did not outline reasons for the inception of the alternatives ■ Early days for mapping models and more testing is required ■ 'Do-nothing option' or 'business as usual' option was not used ■ Failure to utilise Appropriate Assessment in the development and assessment of alternatives may have potential impacts on Natura 2000 network (SACs and SPAs) ■ Limitations of each alternative was not discussed (e.g. infrastructural availability) ■ Unrealistic alternatives cannot be implemented
7. Likely significant effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Constraints mapping is a useful tool ■ Environmental objectives are used to assess the plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Failure to assess all categories of effects (in particular cumulative, synergistic, secondary, permanent and temporary effects) and interrelationships between effects ■ Failure to explain how impacts were predicted ■ Uncertainties as to the 'likely significant effects' on the environment of a strategic or indicative policy or objective in the RPGs ■ Poor presentation of Matrix Assessment (i.e. RPG objectives compared to SEA objectives) or poor discussion of same ■ 'Likely significant effects' not distinguished from other baseline environmental pressures
8. Mitigation measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Proposed mitigation measures were specific to potential effects of implementing the RPGs ■ The wording of policies/objectives provides strong commitments to protect environmental vulnerabilities identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mitigation measures often not incorporated into the final RPGs or it is unclear how SEA/AA influenced the RPGs ■ Potential residual (outstanding) impacts which may arise are not explored





SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
9. Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ GIS and constraints maps are particularly useful ■ Non-Technical Summary (NTS) is a key means of ensuring that decision makers and non-environmental stakeholders are aware of SEA findings ■ NTS are concise ■ Evidence-based information supported better decision making in the RPGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Long SEA Environmental Reports are discouraging to read ■ Non-Technical Summary (NTS) must refer to technical SEA headings but ambiguous language was also used, the text should be simplified ■ No use of mapping in the NTS or it is of insufficient size/scale ■ No references in the Environmental Report, no map licence details or no legends
10. Amendments to the RPGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alterations/Amendments were screened through SEA/AA ■ Indicates that consultations were taken seriously and enhanced the RPGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Documentation and transparency of amendment stage needs improvement ■ As significant changes were not proposed to any of the RPGs, the Statutory Environmental Authorities or the public were not consulted at this stage
11. SEA Statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA process very transparent once an SEA Statement has been prepared correctly and outlines the role that consultation played 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of formal requirement for the Statutory Environmental Authorities (SAs) to review SEA Statements; preparation of SEA Statements is not policed and contents are inconsistent ■ Lack of guidance on requirements ■ No Draft SEA Statement available for public consultation ■ SEA Statement not summarising the key decisions taken by the SEA/AA and RPG teams ■ Lack of mapping in SEA Statements



SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
12. Post-RPG adoption including monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good links between potential effects, mitigation and proposed monitoring in most cases ■ Monitoring programmes can be altered if required ■ Monitoring is based on existing monitoring arrangements ■ Monitoring will inform the next review of the RPGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitoring of the RPGs has not begun ■ Guidance on how to create a monitoring programme is required as there is a lack of clarity on what is required from SEA monitoring (responsibility for monitoring, coordination, implementation, frequency of reporting (including presentation), monitoring ‘unforeseen impacts’ and trigger levels for intervention based on monitoring ■ Lack of national monitoring standards for land use plans ■ No one is responsible for checking that mitigation measures are being implemented ■ No requirement to report to the SAs or the public ■ No agreement with other authorities to carry out new monitoring procedures to suit new indicators proposed by Regional Authority ■ RPG and SEA monitoring proposals not combined
13. Appropriate Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AA Screening and/or AA Stage 2 carried out by Regional Authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA and AA are poorly integrated from the beginning of the RPG review ■ AA was not used in the development of SEA alternatives ■ RPGs drafted prior to the release of DEHLG/ NPWS Guidelines on AA in Ireland
14. Influence of SEA, integration with plan-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA has had a positive influence and improved the RPGs ■ SEA is identifying and addressing significant effects; it helps to avoid environmentally damaging development or mitigates significant effects. Therefore it provides a basis for better planning decisions ■ Beginning the SEA process early positively influenced the RPGs ■ SEA raised awareness/ understanding of environmental considerations and has provided a learning outcome for planners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AA and SEA are separate processes and should be combined ■ SEA/AA/Flood Risk Assessment and RPGs were not well integrated ■ Difficulties in identifying which changes to the RPGs resulted from the SEA process ■ SEA is resource-intensive – Regional Authorities relied on Local Authority staff within their region or consultants to carry out work ■ Quality of the content of SEA Reports should be improved, with a focus on the effective integration of the SEA outcomes into the RPGs ■ Need a concerted effort to engage decision makers (Elected Members), regional and Local Authority management staff throughout the process ■ Environmental issues must be properly identified



SEA Stages	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>14. (continued)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA makes planners address other Directives such as the Water Framework, Habitats and Floods Directives ■ EPA is a key information resource and had a significant influence on SEAs and RPGs ■ Cost- and resource-effective where qualified project manager is in place ■ Consultation (SEA & RPG) benefited the RPG review process at all stages ■ Awareness of valuable information within Local Authority departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEA is not a simple exercise and is challenging given the statutory time constraints in the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended ■ SEA/AA integration in the RPG document can result in disjointed final documents (e.g. with caveats at the end of policies)
<p>15. SEA governance</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SAs are appropriate for the process with the EPA providing a critical role ■ Best engagement of Statutory Authorities was witnessed in the early–mid stages of the RPG review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A perception that SEA (especially when compared to AA) does not have much legislative weight and so can be ignored ■ No single body is responsible for governing the process (i.e. EPA, DECLG, etc. have an informative role) ■ No provisions for review and/or enforcement of SEA Statements or monitoring ■ Unclear whether all SAs are equipped to respond to SEA consultation and to engage with the process (e.g. with dedicated staff) ■ No independent body tasked with conducting reviews of SEA procedures to enhance their effectiveness



What Influence Did the SEA Process Have in Identifying the Significant Effects of Implementing the RPGs?

SEA enhanced the understanding and awareness of environmental issues in the Regional Authority areas and it enhanced the RPG review process by contributing to the creation of more robust and sustainable documents than would otherwise have been the case. Regional Authorities identified the environmental pressures/problems within their region and took these issues into consideration when preparing the RPGs.

Meaningful consultation during the RPG Review process led to successful identification of significant environmental effects of implementing the RPGs though the 'significant effects' must be distinguishable from all other environmental problems identified in the SEA Environmental Report. Difficulties arose with the identification of all types of 'significant effects' (e.g. short-term impacts, permanent impacts, collective impacts (cumulative), etc.) and the interactions (interrelationships) between the effects (e.g. water pollution impacts on fish stocks as well as drinking water supplies for human consumption). There was no clear indication of how the types of effects were predicted.

Some of the Regional Authorities used computer modelling techniques to help with the analysis of significant effects on the environment. When compiling information on the state of the environment, the Regional Authorities struggled with out-of-date information and limited access to data which was relevant or which could be used for creating maps.

The Regional Authorities also found it difficult to describe the likely state of the environment (evolution of the environment) if the RPGs were not implemented.

Policies in the RPGs can be strategic and indicative/not specific (e.g. support economic development), so Regional Authorities found it difficult to state exactly what significant environmental effects could happen. While not an ideal method the RPGs included notes (caveats) in order to prevent impacts occurring. The caveats require lower level plans (Development Plans or Local Area Plans) or development projects to further examine the likely significant effects on the environment.

Did the SEA Process Inform and Support Effective Integration?

Interviewees considered that the SEA process ensured that environmental concerns were integrated into the text and policies of the RPGs and this created better documents which should result in better planning decisions in the long run.

The study revealed that SEA should begin as soon as the review of the RPGs begins. RPG and SEA/AA teams who prepare the documents must work closely together. If the teams work closely together, the reports will be focused on the key environmental problems and will be able to identify how they should be taken into account in the RPGs. AA was a relatively new procedure which must be considered in the SEA and the RPGs; however, limited experience with it meant that these documents were not well linked to each other.

Planners involved in the RPG and SEA processes are much more aware of the need to integrate environmental concerns into all aspects of their work and they became aware of the valuable environmental data which is collected by various sections of the Local Authorities (e.g. water services, heritage) in the regions.

SEA is a very valuable tool but it represented a huge challenge for all the Regional Authorities. A significant amount of time was invested by RPG/SEA/AA teams, Regional Authority staff, Local Authority staff, decision-makers (Elected Members), statutory authorities, etc. The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended imposes time restrictions on reporting on certain aspects of the RPGs. While all Regional Authorities sought to integrate environmental considerations into the RPGs, the limited time within which to gather all the necessary information on SEA and integrate it into the RPGs may have impacted on the quality of the reports and the overall success of actually integrating the changes into the RPGs. It was difficult in some cases to identify what specific changes were made to the RPGs as a result of the SEA process.

Consultation is a key part of both the RPG and SEA processes. It was particularly useful to have key RPG/SEA reports available for public consultation at the same time (e.g. Draft RPGs & Environmental Report). During these stages the statutory (SEA) environmental authorities gave Regional Authorities help, advice and information to guide them through the RPG and SEA processes. It is considered that the outcomes of consultation significantly improved the RPGs.

The study revealed that the decision makers (Elected Members) should be well informed of the benefits of SEA and how the outcomes of SEA have shaped the RPGs, throughout the RPG review process. The Non-Technical Summary should be clear and concise and it is particularly important to promote SEA and explain the process to decision makers and members of the public.

How Effective is SEA Governance?

For the purposes of the RPG Review, SEA was carried out in accordance with Irish SEA Regulations S.I. 436 (2004) and it is clear that this legislation influenced the preparation of the RPGs. SEA legislation seeks to ensure that transparent, evidence-based decisions are made during the preparation of the RPG which protect the environment.

The study revealed that the restrictions of SEA legislation are not considered as powerful as other environmental assessments such as AA (Habitats Directive), so environmental problems noted in the SEA could be ignored by decision-makers if they chose to do so. While this did not occur in the RPG review process, the meaning and intention of SEA (from the SEA Directive) must be clarified.

Best practice guidance notes on several aspects of the SEA process are required, to improve how these are presented and considered. The legislation is much stronger in the earlier stage of SEA (e.g. Scoping/ Environmental Report) with much less focus on the latter reporting stages (SEA Statement and Monitoring). While minor changes to legislation could assist in addressing this, no major changes are required. Instead existing guidance should be updated, new best practice notes developed or training and awareness provided.

The statutory (SEA) environmental authorities' role is very useful to plan-making authorities and their input greatly improves the outcomes of SEA; however, not all statutory environmental authorities may have dedicated staff for the SEA process and there was a distinctive overlap in many of the issues raised in submissions received by the Regional Authorities. Statutory authorities should be sufficiently resourced to engage with the plan-making process at every stage.

What Opportunities Exist to Improve the SEA Process? Key Recommendations

This study revealed that there is potential to improve the SEA process, which has been progressing well over the past eight years in Ireland. Key recommendations are listed below, with priority recommendations highlighted in blue.

Guidance

- A1** Prepare a series of best practice guidance notes (development of alternatives, SEA Statements, monitoring, determining significant effects, mitigation techniques, evolution of the environment in the absence of a plan, etc.)
- A2** Prepare guidance for plan makers on the integration of SEA and AA and plan-making, and guidance on how to document changes to the plan as a consequence of SEA/AA
- A3** Prepare detailed guidance on cumulative effect assessment, in combination effects assessment and how to link SEA and AA in the assessment process

Training and Awareness

- B1** Develop and provide SEA and AA training modules to promote integration between SEA and AA
- B2** Develop and provide targeted SEA training for decision makers (public representatives), senior management staff, planners, engineers in local and regional government and the public to raise awareness of SEA, its responsibilities and benefits
- B3** Develop and provide training on the assessment of effects (short, medium and long term, cumulative, synergistic, permanent, temporary, direct, indirect, interrelationships, etc.) including the use of Geographical Information Systems
- B4/B5** Convene regional and national SEA/AA/FRA Fora in association with the Regional Planning Authorities to exchange and promote best practice approaches in the Regions

Data Collation, Provision and Sharing

- C1** Develop a central environmental database with access to legislation and all documents from the statutory authorities. SEA best practice examples should be available and a web-based SEA Portal should be developed. Mapping should be kept up to date
- C2** Statutory (SEA) environmental authorities to keep their websites updated

Governance and Legislation

- | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| D1 | <p>Establish a national SEA/AA Technical Forum comprising members of the statutory authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promote overall compliance with the requirements of the SEA Directive & Regulations b) Seek to ensure that SEA Statements are prepared and reviewed, mitigation is implemented, monitoring is conducted and reports are reviewed c) Develop and agree a set of standardised key national environmental objectives, targets and indicators |
| D2 | <p>Issue a Circular Note on Article 8 of the SEA Directive; that is, what are the legal implications if SEA is prepared but not adequately 'taken into account' in the plan-making process?</p> |
| D3 | <p>Ensure existing statutory environmental authorities have sufficient resources to engage effectively at key stages of the SEA process</p> |

Conclusions

This review aimed to provide evidence on how effective SEAs were in integrating environmental considerations into the RPGs 2010–2022. While all Regional Authorities sought to engage and effectively integrate the findings of SEA into the RPGs, some fundamental elements of the process were not properly addressed or fully utilised, highlighting the need for guidance. Despite this, SEA had a very positive effect on the RPG documents and successfully raised the awareness of environmental pressures or problems in each Region.

The report has highlighted that the EPA plays a major role in the current governance arrangements and the EPA and other Statutory Authorities have influenced the shaping of the SEA and RPGs.

It is clear that SEA influenced the RPG decision-making process, however key areas for improvement identified in the report relate to the need for Best Practice Guidance Notes on many aspects of the SEA process, clarification on the strength of SEA legislative requirements, and training and awareness.

The findings of this study have been incorporated into the 'Review of Effectiveness of SEA in Ireland' prepared by RPS for the Environmental Protection Agency. The recommendations outlined above and the more detailed recommendations in Chapter 7, Appendices 1 and 2 of the main report provide the basis for a significant improvement in the SEA process during the next review of the RPGs and for effective monitoring of the adopted RPGs.

Successful implementation of the recommendations in this report will enhance the effectiveness of the SEA process by improving the assessment of likely significant effects, improving integration of environmental concerns into the RPG-making process and improving governance. This will ensure that regional planning policy documents are sustainable and represent best practice in Ireland, thereby setting a high standard for lower level land use plans and programmes.

An Gníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Is í an Gníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil (EPA) comhlachta reachtúil a chosnaíonn an comhshaoil do mhuintir na tíre go léir. Rialaímid agus déanaimid maoirsiú ar ghníomhaíochtaí a d'fhéadfadh truailliú a chruthú murach sin. Cinntímid go bhfuil eolas cruinn ann ar threochtaí comhshaoil ionas go nglactar aon chéim is gá. Is iad na príomhnithe a bhfuilimid gníomhach leo ná comhshaoil na hÉireann a chosaint agus cinntiú go bhfuil forbairt inbhuanaithe.

Is comhlacht poiblí neamhspleách í an Gníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil (EPA) a bunaíodh i mí Iúil 1993 faoin Acht fán nGníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil 1992. Ó thaobh an Rialtais, is í an Roinn Comhshaoil, Pobal agus Rialtais Áitiúil.

ÁR bhFREAGRACHTAÍ

CEADÚNÚ

Bíonn ceadúnais á n-eisiúint againn i gcomhair na nithe seo a leanas chun a chinntiú nach mbíonn astuithe uathu ag cur sláinte an phobail ná an comhshaoil i mbaol:

- áiseanna dramhaíola (m.sh., líonadh talún, loisceoirí, stáisiúin aistrithe dramhaíola);
- gníomhaíochtaí tionsclaíocha ar scála mór (m.sh., déantúsaíocht cógaisíochta, déantúsaíocht stroighne, stáisiúin chumhachta);
- díantalmhaíocht;
- úsáid faoi shrian agus scaoileadh smachtaithe Orgánach Géinathraithe (GMO);
- mór-áiseanna stórais peitreal;
- scardadh dramhuisce.

FEIDHMIÚ COMHSHAOIL NÁISIÚNTA

- Stiúradh os cionn 2,000 iniúchadh agus cigireacht de áiseanna a fuair ceadúnas ón nGníomhaireacht gach bliain.
- Maoirsiú freagrachtaí cosanta comhshaoil údarás áitiúla thar sé earnáil – aer, fuaim, dramhaíl, dramhuisce agus caighdeán uisce.
- Obair le húdarás áitiúla agus leis na Gardaí chun stop a chur le gníomhaíocht mhídhleathach dramhaíola trí chomhordú a dhéanamh ar líonra forfheidhmithe náisiúnta, díriú isteach ar chiontóirí, stiúradh fiosrúcháin agus maoirsiú leigheas na bhfadhbanna.
- An dlí a chur orthu siúd a bhriseann dlí comhshaoil agus a dhéanann dochar don chomhshaoil mar thoradh ar a gníomhaíochtaí.

MONATÓIREACHT, ANAILÍS AGUS TUAIRISCIÚ AR AN GCOMHSHAOIL

- Monatóireacht ar chaighdeán aeir agus caighdeán aibhneacha, locha, uiscí taoide agus uiscí talaimh; leibhéil agus sruth aibhneacha a thomhas.
- Tuairisciú neamhspleách chun cabhrú le rialtais náisiúnta agus áitiúla cinntiú a dhéanamh.

RIALÚ ASTUITHE GÁIS CEAPTHA TEASA NA HÉIREANN

- Cainníochtú astuithe gáis ceaptha teasa na hÉireann i gcomhthéacs ár dtiomantas Kyoto.
- Cur i bhfeidhm na Treorach um Thrádáil Astuithe, a bhfuil baint aige le hos cionn 100 cuideachta atá ina mór-ghineadóirí dé-ocsaíd charbóin in Éirinn.

TAIGHDE AGUS FORBAIRT COMHSHAOIL

- Taighde ar shaincheisteanna comhshaoil a chomhordú (cosúil le caighdeán aeir agus uisce, athrú aeráide, bithéagsúlacht, teicneolaíochtaí comhshaoil).

MEASÚNÚ STRAITÉISEACH COMHSHAOIL

- Ag déanamh measúnú ar thionchar phleananna agus chláracha ar chomhshaoil na hÉireann (cosúil le pleananna bainistíochta dramhaíola agus forbartha).

PLEANÁIL, OIDEACHAS AGUS TREOIR CHOMHSHAOIL

- Treoir a thabhairt don phobal agus do thionscal ar cheisteanna comhshaoil éagsúla (m.sh., iarratais ar cheadúnais, seachaint dramhaíola agus rialacháin chomhshaoil).
- Eolas níos fearr ar an gcomhshaoil a scaipeadh (trí cláracha teilifíse comhshaoil agus pacáistí acmhainne do bhunscoileanna agus do mheánscoileanna).

BAINISTÍOCHT DRAMHAÍOLA FHORGHNÍOMHACH

- Cur chun cinn seachaint agus laghdú dramhaíola trí chomhordú An Chláir Náisiúnta um Chosc Dramhaíola, lena n-áirítear cur i bhfeidhm na dTionscnamh Freagrachta Táirgeoirí.
- Cur i bhfeidhm Rialachán ar nós na treoracha maidir le Trealamh Leictreach agus Leictreonach Caite agus le Srianadh Substaintí Guaiseacha agus substaintí a dhéanann ídiú ar an gcrios ózóin.
- Plean Náisiúnta Bainistíochta um Dramhaíl Ghuaiseach a fhorbairt chun dramhaíl ghuaiseach a sheachaint agus a bhainistiú.

STRUCHTÚR NA GNÍOMHAIREACHTA

Bunaíodh an Gníomhaireacht i 1993 chun comhshaoil na hÉireann a chosaint. Tá an eagraíocht á bhainistiú ag Bord Iánaimeartha, ar a bhfuil Príomhstíúrthóir agus ceithre Stíúrthóir.

Tá obair na Gníomhaireachta ar siúl trí ceithre Oifig:

- An Oifig Aeráide, Ceadúnaithe agus Úsáide Acmhainní
- An Oifig um Fhorfheidhmiúchán Comhshaoil
- An Oifig um Measúnacht Comhshaoil
- An Oifig Cumarsáide agus Seirbhísí Corparáide

Tá Coiste Comhairleach ag an nGníomhaireacht le cabhrú léi. Tá dáréag ball air agus tagann siad le chéile cúpla uair in aghaidh na bliana le plé a dhéanamh ar cheisteanna ar ábhar inní iad agus le comhairle a thabhairt don Bhord.



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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