SEA: Lessons Learned from Australia?

Carolyn Cameron MEIANZ
10 years of SEA in Australia = EIANZ has started to reflect .... SEA working group

- EIANZ 2017 Conference Roundtable
- 2 Day seminar in 2018 on Strategic Approaches to Impact Assessment
- Drafting of Good Practice Guidance for SEA in Australia
- EIANZ 2018 Conference Panel Session on: Imagine A national environment Act focused on landscape scale approaches
- IAIA19 Lessons Learned from SEA in Australia
- Post IAIA19 Conference Workshop with international experts to explore how to increase uptake and effectiveness of SEA in Australia
Principles for effective SEA

- **Sustainability-led** - strategically influencing policy, plans, and programs towards more sustainable outcomes.
- **Practical** - resulting in sufficient, reliable and usable information to influence decision-making.
- **Evidence based** - incorporating an interdisciplinary approach and the use of Traditional knowledge where relevant.
- **Outcomes focused** - delivers effective protection of TBL values.
Principles for effective SEA

- **Fit for purpose** - achieves objectives of the PPP within available time, resources and information.
- **Adaptive** - to lessons learned throughout the process.
- **Participatory** - being open to the views of stakeholders and the wider community with regular communication.
- **Transparent** - facilitating ease of access to information for the public, and a clear identification of factors taken into consideration during decision-making.
What could we do better?

- What are the ingredients for success in an SEA?
- How do we embed SEA within strategic land use and infrastructure planning to properly inform plan development?
- What are the defining features of good practice SEA?
- Is there something special about effective SEA that is more than quality cumulative impact assessment and/or regional landscape-scale planning?
SEA using landscape as a driving concept

Garry Middle
VisionEnvironment and Curtin University
Australian IA and planning
IA is - 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 5
Our unique Oz context never embraced
Defining ‘landscape’ in an Oz context
“...an understanding of landscape moves from being a more or less visible and tangible entity to being inclusive of the subjective matter of the mind. In such light the importance of the perceptions of those who experience the landscape is drawn into focus. Comprehending the perceptions, meanings and values of a landscape is based on the knowledge and its articulations by those who encounter the landscape.”

- Butler and Åkerskog 2014,
In an Australian context? ”Country”

• People talk about Country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to Country, sing to Country, visit Country, worry about Country, grieve for Country and long for Country. People say that Country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life. Because of this richness of meaning, Country is home and peace: nourishment for body, mind and spirit; and heart’s ease.

— Rose (1986: 7)
• **Landscape assessment**
  - Regional, catchment, bioregional planning

• **IS**
  - Recognising connection between nature and people – including cultural connections – recognizing the 'whole'
  - Recognising Traditional knowledge
  - Looking to build those connections
  - Looking for both environmental and social benefits
  - Looking for landscape gains for local losses
Tanya Burdett

Registered Planner, Planning Institute of Australia
IAP2 Foundations Trainer (public participation)
IEMA EIA Quality Mark Panel member
PhD research graduate (University of Melbourne)
Relating to the assessment of impacts of the Program to revise Melbourne’s Urban Growth Boundary

- RRL – construction phase;
- Pakenham East Precinct Structure Plan Panel
Other SEA experience...
But does it make a difference?

Recommendations:
- Integration with plan-making process
- Spatial emphasis
- Scope focus
- Clear alternatives
- Impacts against baseline
- Better engagement and monitoring

Q: How can SA be made more effective?

(6) Get real about what sustainability entails
Need to cut GHGs radically as soon as possible.

*Any* plan, programme, decision or development that increases emissions overall is unsustainable.

Almost *all* current plans, projects are unsustainable.

SAs should say this loud and clear, and state the conditions/constraints to make them sustainable.

If these exceed plan powers, that’s a problem for planning—and human survival—not a defect of SA!

**Integration is essential**
Separate environmental appraisal casts environment as negative barrier to development … which will almost always prevail.

Integrated appraisal can challenge development’s claimed / assumed economic *benefits* on same footing as its environmental *disbenefits*.

Easier to argue against *environmentally* bad development if it’s bad for *people* too.
SEA in Australia?

Commonwealth EPBC level:

- “strategic thinking” research (Ross), sustainability a core component, including cumulative/alternatives. Varies by proponent.

- IA in Australasia session, and recent EPBC 20 years on symposium, suggested need for regional, strategic approaches

- Various issues remain:
  - consideration of alternatives
  - follow-up monitoring
  - Ministerial powers and discretion, political acceptability of the tool
  - lack of transparency
  - institutional capacity including resources and funding
  - policy makers and planners’ indifference?
  - role of positivist, scientifically rational, evidence-based approaches vs complex and politically-charged environment of policy, plan and programme generation, and deliberative approaches
### Reimagining SEA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Key EA legislation</th>
<th>Strategic assess’t / SEA?</th>
<th>include soc-econ?</th>
<th>supports develop’t of overall vision e.g. country / region (strategic approach)?</th>
<th>supports drafting of policy (e.g. reg.IA) or other policy types (e.g. territorial IA)</th>
<th>EIA-process based, usually in support of PP at local level</th>
<th>supports creation of consensus on future action, open towards outcomes / strategies (e.g. roundtable)</th>
<th>understood as a system, systematically covering PPP</th>
<th>defined by specific techniques e.g. GIS driven, matrix driven objectives-led</th>
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Substantive effectiveness of SEA and effects on plans and decision-making

Normative values for strategic planning and decision-making
(based on review of planning literature)

- Social change, social justice and socio-political considerations
- Dialogue, collaboration, democratic and community-based/driven solutions
- Different ways of knowing or experiencing problems and crafting solutions
- Contextualising approaches, aware of political reality (including scale)
- Transformative practices, bringing new things into being, and drawing on holistic thinking using the mind, heart and spirit – challenging the status quo
- Focussing on matters of equality and/or equity, and diversity
- Place-focussed, as well as on the ‘here and now’
- Structural change, exploring opportunities for enterprise, creativity, and dealing with uncertainty.
Moving SEA practice along in Oz....

- More case studies to:
  - highlight need for improvements
  - replicate what is working
  - explore in depth:
    - what was it about the Melbourne UGB example that contributed to being seen as a success?
    - what happened in Perth after strong start with legislative support?
- Contrast with international examples? London Integrated IA? Others?

In context of World Bank ESF renewed focus on outcomes-based approaches, and strong engagement throughout – **how about applying that in the local market?**

**Doing the right things (strategic decisions), then doing things right...**
Strategic Environmental Assessments: a regulator’s perspective

Bruce Edwards – Assistant Secretary, Environment Standards Division
Advantages of a successful SEA

- Planning at the landscape scale and over long timeframes:
  - Achieve better triple bottom line outcomes
  - Opportunities for cumulative benefits for both parties
- Connected actions and strategic investment
- Clarity for environment and industry from the start
- Offers regulatory simplicity as project progresses
- Offers flexibility if the right approach is chosen:
  - Plan Versus Program
Scale of Strategic Environmental Assessments

Example: BHP Billiton – Iron Ore – Pilbara Strategic Assessment
Biodiversity hotspots - challenge to opportunity

- Australia is one of 17 countries described as being ‘mega diverse’
  - This group of countries has less than 10% of the global surface, but support more than 70% of the biological diversity on earth
  - Australia is one of only two countries in the high income category

- There is opportunity through Strategic Environmental Assessments to better align biodiversity hotspots and our protected areas

Map showing Australia’s protected areas in green, overlaid with biodiversity hotspots in orange.
Observations

- Greater use of Strategic Environmental Assessments can help to manage multiple overlays of biodiversity and land use demands

- The core elements:
  - A willing and well resourced proponent and a clear approval holder
  - Identifying and communicating mutual benefits with proponents to ensure support throughout the process
  - Good availability of information to underpin environmental assessment
  - Scale can give a strategic advantage – it is at the right scale for the proposal:
    - Achieve better outcomes with cumulative benefits
  - The project and the site need to be right for SEA to be the right approach

- Protecting Matters of National Environmental Significance under the EPBC Act works best when aligned with assessment processes at each tier of government.

- Best outcomes are achieved when the approach is used with the right intent
Implementing strategic assessments: lessons learnt

IAIA Conference

2nd May 2019

Peter Hemphill – Open Lines Consulting
Strategic assessments only matter if on-ground outcomes actually happen.

Implementation is important.
What do we mean by implementation?

The legislation, processes, rules and governance that will deliver the development and conservation outcomes of a strategic assessment.
## Elements of implementation

### Over-arching elements

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<th>Governance</th>
<th>Adaptive management</th>
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<td>Funding</td>
<td>Compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring, evaluation, reporting</td>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
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### Development elements

- Development planning and approval processes

### Conservation elements

- Processes for ongoing avoidance and mitigation
- Biodiversity offsets program
- Research
Funding

Issues to consider:

• How much funding is required?
• What funding model is used?
• How is funding managed?

Money isn’t the most important thing in life, but it’s reasonably close to oxygen on the “gotta have it” scale ~Zig Ziglar
The demand for certainty is one which is natural to [humans], but is nevertheless an intellectual vice ~Bertrand Russell
Lessons learnt

1. Implementation needs to be prioritised
2. The right people need to work on implementation
3. Implementation needs to be designed using quality decision making processes
4. There needs to be money over the life of the Program
5. The tools for implementation need to work
6. PPPs need to provide the appropriate balance of certainty and flexibility
7. Designing implementation should try to consider various scenarios, and provide mechanisms to deal with unintended consequences during implementation
8. Implementation needs to address environmental trend and the drivers for biodiversity loss