

# EIANZ 2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**MOVING BEYOND TRANSITION**  
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## ABSTRACT

### IESIA - a call to action

The application of IESIA is commonplace in other countries around the world but has yet to fully enter the Australian planning and assessment narrative. Countries such as Canada, have a dedicated Impact Assessment agency at the federal level, no longer referring to environmental and/or social impact assessments separately, instead specifying a focus on protecting components of the environment, and health, social and economic conditions, from adverse effects caused by projects. To ensure that we continually improve our environmental and social practice and evolve our profession, there is a call amongst many practitioners (environmental and social alike) for more integrated impact assessment practice and a greater acknowledgement of the benefits and value that both aspects bring to assessment and post approval management processes. The improved integration of engagement in IA practice is also required; with the transition to clean energy highlighting some significant deficiencies in engagement practice across rural Australia, as reflected in mounting community outrage. The need for improved and more creative engagement approaches is required, that facilitates more genuine voice in planning and assessment processes. This presentation provides a call to action to those working in complex project development environments. Utilizing relevant case studies from around the globe, including within Australia, we will outline how IESIA can ensure that better decisions about a project can be made early on, resulting in improved protections for human health, reduced risks of harm to the environment; and importantly how an enhanced understanding of project impacts can be gained from more genuine/meaningful input of First Nations communities and the public. So, what are we waiting for? Let's discuss how we can change the narrative and embed the principles of IESIA in major project development, facilitating a more holistic approach to assessment practice, and at the same time effectively achieving objectives of social inclusion, distributive equity, community value and nature positive. Afterall, as Aristotle noted: 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts'.

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### Three key takeaways

1. The need for more integrated multi-disciplinary (environmental and social) practice
2. The whole is more than the sum of its parts
3. Showcase how effective engagement can improve project design and assessment outcomes

## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Dr Sheridan Coakes is a social scientist with a PhD in Psychology, with 30 years' research and applied experience in the areas of social impact assessment (SIA) and stakeholder engagement across a diverse range of sectors including mining, quarrying, oil and gas, infrastructure, renewable energy, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry. Sheridan currently holds the position of National Social Practice Lead with Umwelt Australia, is a Commissioner with the NSW Independent Planning Commission (second term) and convenes the SIA Community of Practice for the Environmental Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ). With a strong methodological background in the social sciences, Sheridan has developed and applied a range of innovative approaches that afford the effective collection, analysis, interpretation, and use of social and community data to effectively inform project/policy planning and decision making, Formerly Director of Coakes Consulting, a national specialist social consultancy developed to address social and community issues within a resource management context, established in 1997, Sheridan has been instrumental in working with public and private sector clients to better institutionalize SIA and social license; and to afford meaningful community voice in these processes. Sheridan's work in professional services, followed on from her role with the Commonwealth Government in designing and implementing the social assessment methodology for the Australian Regional Forest Agreement Process – one of the most significant applications of social impact assessment and community engagement by government at a national level; and her subsequent role in the Social Sciences Centre in the Bureau of Resource Sciences (BRS). In late 2013, Coakes Consulting merged with Umwelt, and she was appointed to the role of National Social Practice Lead. Sheridan has published and presented papers and seminars on social assessment and community engagement in a variety of forums, contributing to international texts on Social Assessment and engagement practice. She has a deep knowledge of planning legislation and policies and has a sound understanding of the 'public interest' and frameworks for the effective integration of social science research to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.