



Guidance Note for Ethical Practice in Undertaking Peer Reviews¹

Environmental peer review² is an important element of the provision of environmental services and, more generally, scientific method, engineering design and research publication. It is widespread where: 'professional judgment' is involved; subject matter is technically complex; significant environmental or cost consequences could arise from any error or inaccuracy; or where novel or new process are being applied.

This note is relevant to all cases where environmental professionals are independently evaluating the work of others, whether or not these evaluations are formally designated as 'peer reviews' – i.e. this note covers internal and external peer reviews, and reviews as part of audit processes including [contaminated] site environmental assessment reviews of assessors.

The EIANZ Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (the Code), to which both members of the Institute and CEnvPs are bound, encourages the practice of peer review, specifically under the heading of *Demonstrate integrity*:

c. Be objective, seek peer review and other quality assurance of work as appropriate, and accept as well as give honest and fair criticism when required.

At the same time, the Code discourages reviewers from unfair criticism or inappropriately denigrating the work of colleagues, under the heading *Represent and promote the profession*:

*c. Support others in their development as environmental practitioners;
d. Do not advertise or represent services, or those of another, in a manner that may bring discredit to the profession.*

However, situations inevitably arise where 'honest and fair criticism' may be interpreted as unduly harsh and damaging to a colleague's professional reputation, or as an attempt by the reviewer to take over the project. It is essential that practitioners trust the process of peer review, especially where they have not voluntarily sought such review or selected the reviewer. The credibility of peer reviews is underpinned by the codes of ethics, including those of the EIANZ and allied professions, ensuring a high degree of trust between practitioners, reviewers and agencies.

Continues page two.

¹ This guidance note is a revision of the original 2018 version.

² EIANZ recognises *environmental peer review* as the 'practice of obtaining an independent, unbiased evaluation of the adequacy and application of environmental principles, standards, and judgment from an independent group of professionals having substantial experience in the same field of expertise'.



The following guidelines are based on the EIANZ Code, externally available guidance and codes, and a critical review of the 2018 version of this Guidance³:

- 1) The scope, accountabilities and costs (if any) of peer reviews should be agreed by the client, peer reviewer and, as appropriate, the reviewee, before the review commences
- 2) A peer reviewer should have appropriate and relevant experience to assess the work being reviewed and be independent from the proponent and the project. The peer review should demonstrate independence by acting objectively, disclose interests as appropriate and be free from actual or perceived conflicts of interest⁴ that may arise in relation to the engagement (such as being employed by the same firm as the reviewee; or having been an unsuccessful bidder for the work that is now being reviewed)
- 3) Peer reviewers should understand the context and constraints of the work they are reviewing
- 4) Peer reviewers should clearly identify and describe all work they are reviewing that deviates from the original the work scope / brief, and the environmental, cost, regulatory and / or implications of these deviations
- 5) Peer reviews should give honest and fair professional criticism when commenting on another's works or making public comment
- 6) Where appropriate (consistent with the review brief), reviewers should consult with the 'reviewee' regarding the findings of the review or to seek explanation and corrections
- 7) A peer reviewer should not maliciously nor carelessly do anything to injure, directly or indirectly, the reputation, prospects or business of others
- 8) A peer reviewer should use appropriate and respectful language and tone at all times
- 9) A peer reviewer should neither attempt to supplant another individual or organisation who has been duly appointed by a client or employer, nor accept engagement from a client or employer in replacement of another without first ascertaining that the appointment has been terminated by due notice
- 10) Peer reviews should not unfairly criticise past work conducted in accordance with the accepted standards and practices and community values of the time.

Endorsed by the EIANZ Board 7 May 2025

³ The 2018 version of this guidance drew on Consult Australia's then Code of Ethics and the NSW Dept Planning and Environment Guidance Series – neither of which are currently web searchable (Consult Australia is acknowledged as the original source for points 4,5, 6, 8 and 9).

⁴ The reviewer should declare any prior involvement and/or conflicts prior to engagement as the reviewer and outline the steps to be taken to manage such conflicts (e.g by reference to industry best practice and citing relevant research articles).