



Environment Institute
of Australia and
New Zealand Inc.

Regional planning and the mitigation hierarchy: A guide

Prepared by EIANZ's Strategic Environmental Assessment Community of Practice ([SEA CoP](#))

Regional planning is an important mechanism for sustainable development. Regional plans can help to

- ensure development occurs in appropriate locations and that land uses are complementary
- facilitate efficient decision-making by both developers and regulators through a shared understanding of the objectives of the regional plan and preferred development site/s
- ultimately, achieve good environmental outcomes at a regional scale.

Regional plans are strategic land use plans that provide a framework to support the achievement of environmental and development objectives within a region over time. To enable this, regional plans should have a number of different components, some of which are strategic (e.g. objectives, desired environmental outcomes), some of which are spatial (e.g. maps, zones) and some of which are procedural (e.g. guidance on what actions and processes are required during project planning or implementation). Collectively, these components inform and guide decision-making processes such as statutory planning and development assessment processes, including environmental impact assessment (EIA). Together, these components should:

- facilitate the application of the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimise, restore, offset) at the regional level
- establish actions and processes for the mitigation hierarchy to be applied at the micro and individual project scale
- promote the achievement of good environmental outcomes over time as development progresses.

The table below explicitly demonstrates how each component of regional planning can contribute to the effective application of the mitigation hierarchy at the project level, **and** how the overall regional planning process, when undertaken effectively, will itself implement the mitigation hierarchy at a regional scale. When the mitigation hierarchy is implemented effectively at both the individual project and the regional scale, the potential for good environmental outcomes is greatly increased.

MITIGATION HEIRARCHY	NECESSARY REGIONAL PLAN COMPONENTS
<p>AVOID (MACRO / REGIONAL)</p> <p><i>Identify areas and values for protection at macro/regional level & areas where development could be located</i></p> <p><i>Answers the questions WHAT and WHERE at a high level</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental and development objectives established for the region (<i>strategic</i>) • Identification of key environmental and social/heritage values and desired outcomes for these values (<i>strategic</i>) • Conservation zones where development is generally prohibited and the achievement of environmental outcomes is prioritised (<i>spatial</i>) • Development zones where development may be facilitated and be ecologically sustainable (<i>spatial</i>) • Restoration zones (generally within conservation zones) where restoration, offset and strategic restoration activities should be targeted (<i>spatial</i>)
<p>AVOID (MICRO/PROJECT)</p> <p><i>Identify areas and values for protection at micro/project level</i></p> <p><i>Answers the questions WHERE, WHEN and HOW for a specific development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations for micro-level avoidance of potentially significant impacts of individual developments within designated development zones through (<i>spatial and procedural</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project planning and design requirements ○ Appropriate placement of infrastructure ○ Scheduling of activities • May include specific rules (e.g. minimum buffer width) or more more outcomes-oriented guidance (e.g. ‘connectivity must be maintained, but how is not prescribed’) that should be applied in strategic level or project level environmental assessment.
<p>MINIMISE</p> <p><i>Establish requirements for the development and assessment of future project proposals - Answers the question HOW</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements for minimisation of impacts throughout project lifecycle (<i>procedural</i>), e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guidance for assessment of development proposals outside development area (e.g. standardised scoping requirements) • Standard mitigation measures/conditions of approval for developments proposed within development zones that should be applied in strategic level or project level environmental assessment.
<p>RESTORE</p> <p><i>Identify WHAT restoration outcomes at end of project life are required and HOW restoration should occur</i></p> <p><i>Answers the questions WHAT and HOW</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration priorities for the region (aligned with environmental objectives and outcomes) (<i>strategic</i>) • Requirements and guidance for restoration/rehabilitation after temporary impacts and end of project life that should be applied in strategic level or project level environmental assessment. • (<i>procedural</i>)

OFFSET <i>Identify WHERE and HOW offsets should occur</i> <i>Answers the questions WHERE and HOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirements and guidance for restoration in restoration zones to compensate for unavoidable impacts that should be applied in strategic level or project level environmental assessment (<i>procedural</i>) Should apply to both project-specific offset activities to be undertaken by individual proponents or Approval Holders (<i>procedural</i>) and landscape scale community led restoration activities if and where to be funded under the Regional Plan (<i>strategic</i>)
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Key

Colour	Meaning*
	Preventative actions (through strategic planning)
	Preventative actions (through statutory planning and assessment processes)
	Remediative actions (development-specific and potentially strategic)

*using *preventative* versus *remediative* language of The Biodiversity Consultancy¹

About the EIANZ SEA CoP

[The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand](#) (EIANZ) is Australasia's leading body for environmental practitioners.

The SEA CoP sits within EIANZ's Impact Assessment Special Interest Section. It seeks to:

- share knowledge and experience of strategic approaches/SEA in the Australian/Aotearoa New Zealand context
- build a basic understanding of strategic approaches and SEA as terms and concepts with good practice examples
- identify potential champions for strategic approaches in government and the private sector
- highlight where there may be upcoming opportunities for a more strategic approach in planning, impact assessment and/or decision-making
- establish a 'community of practice' for strategic approaches to impact assessment.

¹ The Biodiversity Consultancy, [A cross-sector guide for implementing the mitigation hierarchy](#), 2015, accessed 7 February 2025.