



Environment
Institute of
Australia and
New Zealand
SOUTH EAST QLD DIVISION

Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

Issues and Opportunities for Reform

A review of Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) practice in Queensland has identified five core issues undermining successful outcomes from the ESIA process:

1. The scope and depth of issues covered in ESIA is often poorly matched to the potentially significant issues arising from individual projects, resulting in broad ranging, poorly focussed ESIA documentation.
2. The quality and veracity of analysis in ESIA documentation is lacking, with assessments and mitigation measures often presented in generic terms that bare little relationship to site specific conditions and actual project impacts.
3. The relationship of ESIA to overall project delivery is often mismatched, with proponents seeing the ESIA process as a roadblock to projects, rather than an opportunity for optimisation of project outcomes.
4. The openness and transparency of ESIA documentation and associated consultation processes is poor, shutting out many stakeholders from being able to provide meaningful input to the ESIA process.
5. The extent to which strategic and cumulative impacts and issues are addressed through the ESIA process is inherently limited, and the process needs to be supported by strategic frameworks that provide a context for the identification, assessment and, wherever possible, quantification of cumulative impacts.

In response to these issues, EIANZ has developed a series of statements on what constitutes good practice ESIA. Analysis of the extent to which good practice ESIA is achieved in Queensland revealed a number of gaps and eight core opportunities for improving the outcomes achieved by ESIA were identified:

1. ESIA Scoping:
 - Identifying key issues for individual projects based on potential impacts and hazards and the presence of known or likely environmental and social values
 - Development of project-specific, targeted Terms of Reference
2. Improving the skills of environmental practitioners through the development of guidance notes and the delivery of professional development activities, including on:
 - Collecting and interpreting baseline data
 - Identifying impacts and cause and effect relationships
 - Evaluating the significance of impacts
 - Undertaking cumulative impact assessment at the project level
 - Addressing sustainability in ESIA
 - Overcoming key limitations of ESIA
3. Strategic environmental assessment
4. Coordinated assessment of cumulative impacts
5. Developing guidelines for proponents on integrating the ESIA process into overall project delivery with a focus on:
 - Early integration of environmental and social considerations into project decision making
 - Ensuring adequate project design information is available to support the ESIA
6. Centralised collation and management of data on environmental characteristics, values and condition
7. Guidelines on public participation and engagement in the ESIA process
8. Validation of predicted outcomes and the effectiveness of mitigation measures identified in ESIA documentation and incorporated into conditions of approval.