

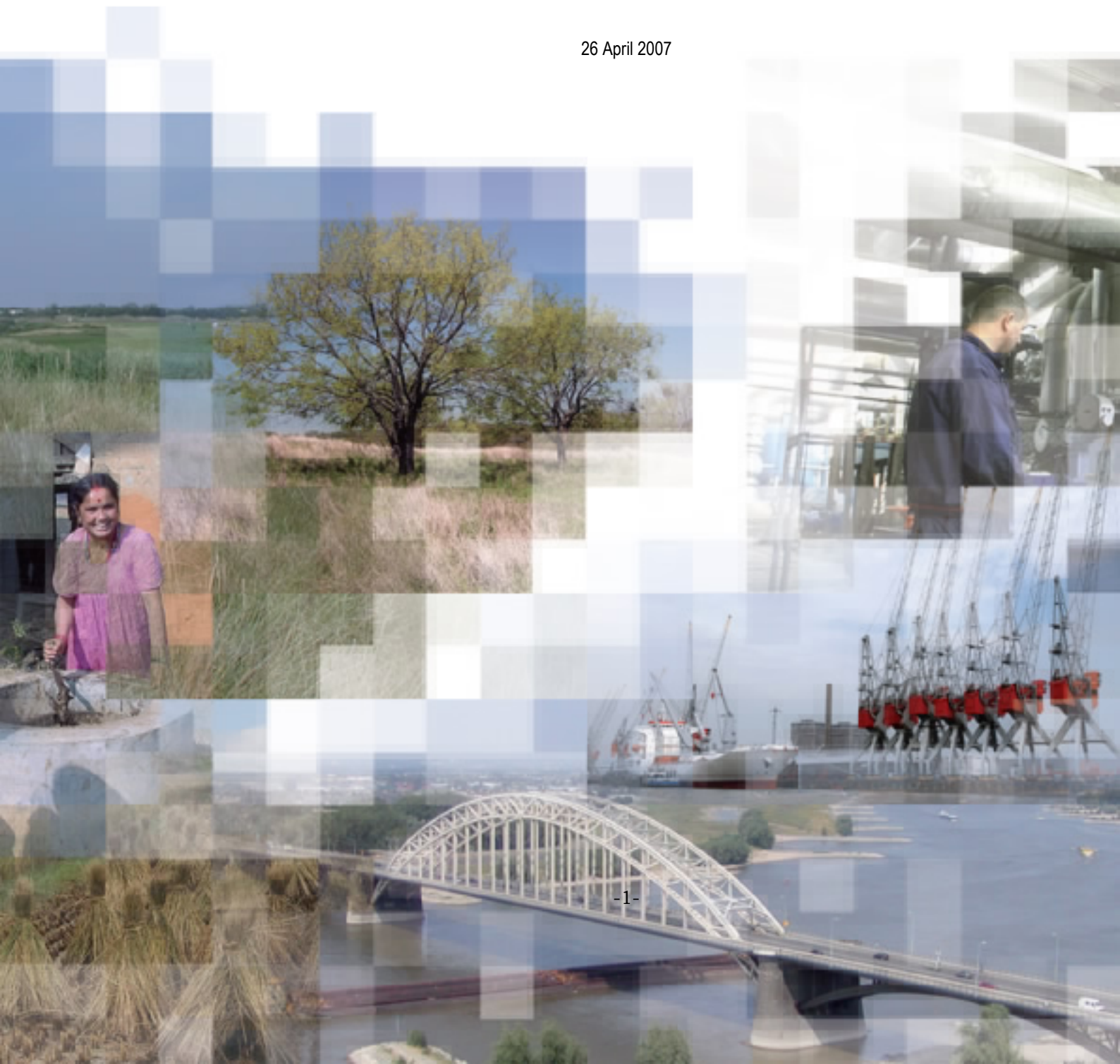


Netherlands Commission for  
Environmental Assessment

# SEA for development of Wetlands policies and plans – the added value!

Memorandum by the NCEA

26 April 2007



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**Advice of the Secretariat**

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**To** Wetlands International, Wageningen

**Attn** Kemi Seesink  
**From** Mr Arend Kolhoff (staff members of The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment)

**Date** 26 April 2007

**Subject** SEA for development of Wetlands policies and plans – the added value!

By: Secretariat of the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment – Arend Kolhoff

Advice 2007-002

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**SEA for development of Wetlands policies and plans – the added value!**

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**1. Introduction**

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Wetlands International (WI) stresses the importance to apply SEA for the development of Wetland policies. In ten African countries SEA will be applied for the development of a new or the adaptation of an existing Wetland policy.

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The purpose of this paper is to assess the added value of SEA for the development of a National Wetlands policies and develop a suitable SEA approach.

Therefore two questions will be answered:

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- Does the approach followed to develop a National Wetland policy include the ten SEA good practice principles?
- If, not what could be the added value of SEA and how to do it.

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SEA is primarily a decision support tool that can be applied for the development a Wetlands policy. The first step is to get an overview of the approach followed in the development of a Wetlands policy. Second step is the review based upon the ten SEA good practice principles. Third step is the added value of SEA.

**2. Approach used in the development of National Wetlands policies**

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In the Handbook for National Wetland policies a flow chart is presented of the major steps in the development of a National Wetlands Policy p.22, see table 2. This approach which is elaborated in the handbook will be reviewed by making

use of the ten SEA good practice principles developed by the OECD-DAC (2006). These principles are used a review framework, see table 1. Dependent on to what extend an SEA principle is applied in the NWP approach the question will be answered with yes, partly or no.

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### 3. Review findings

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1. Five out of the ten SEA good practice principles are applied in the development of the Wetlands policy. More interesting is which principles are not applied.

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2. In the development of the National Wetlands policy it seems that participation, transparency and accountability are considered as part of the good practice approach. Because the SEA principles (question 2, 3, and 9) related to this have been answered positively.

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3. The development of alternatives seems not to be conducted as part of the development of National Wetland policies. And as a consequence impact determination and a comparative assessment of those impacts are not considered (question 4, 6, 7 and 8).

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4. The consistency analysis (question 5) is an important step in SEA and provides insight in supporting or conflicting objectives, in an early phase of the planning process. In the Handbook NWP is stated that inter-ministerial consultations are held p.28.. However, the purpose of those consultations is not mentioned.

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Table 1: Evaluation findings, whether SEA principles are applied in development of Wetland policy

SEA principles applied?	Wetland policy development
1. Commitment for the plan.	1. Partly – A lead agency is established who develops and implements the NWP. Need for national consensus on need for plan is clear but how commitment is achieved is not clear?
2. Participation of all stakeholders.	2. Yes - A National Wetland Committee is established in which all stakeholder groups are represented they act as advisory panel involved in e.g. planning and consultation of the policy development process.
3. Transparency (and accountability) of the decision making process	3. Yes – In principle, access to information and accountability of decisions are secured by ...
4. Common vision developed on environmental problems, objectives and alternatives by all stakeholders	4. Partly – In the background paper a national vision, objectives and problems are presented to all stakeholders for consultation and discussion. Its not developed by all stakeholders. Alternatives are not considered.
5. Consistency of new objectives are checked with existing policies and objectives, weather they are conflicting or in line with	5. No – A consistency analysis seems not be conducted. Inter-ministerial consultations are organised but for what purpose is not made clear.
6. Assessment of the environmental impacts of the	6. No – As a consequence of the fact that alterna-

alternatives is executed	tives are not considered.
7. Environmental assessment findings are discussed with stakeholders and what it means for decision making	7. No – As a consequence of the fact that alternatives are not considered.
8. Quality assurance of assessment product and process	8. No – As a consequence of the fact that no assessment is made.
9. The political decision made is justified (accountable)	9. Yes, foreseen.
10. Monitoring of the adopted policy or plan	10. Yes, foreseen.

#### 4. Added value of SEA

5 The heart of SEA is the development of alternatives for strategic decisions. Subsequently a comparative assessment of the impacts of the alternatives is made in order to arrive at well informed decisions. This component is currently lacking in the development of National Wetland policies.

10 In my view there is one major step identified in the development of the Wetland policy that provides good opportunities to include the development of alternatives, namely the preparation of a background paper or document.

15 *“According to the Handbook a background paper on the scope and status of the nation’s wetlands is a valuable tool to assist in national discussions towards a wetland policy. Such a paper could include:*

- *functions and values of wetlands in the nation;*
- *type of wetlands and resources present in the nation’s ;*
- *historical review of uses and impacts of developments on wetlands;*
- *review of statistics on inventory of wetland loss;*
- *examination of relationships of wetlands to other sectoral resource management issues” .*

25 In my view this background paper provides good opportunities to include SEA, in particular development of alternatives. Therefore the following three steps could be included as part of the background paper:

1. A description of the autonomous development of the present situation for the next 30 years, based upon extrapolation of trends and proposed new developments. The current problems and expected changes provides most likely a good justification to change this trend.
- 30 2. At least one other alternative should be developed that aims to achieve the establishment of a network of national wetlands that are ecologically sustainable, again with a time horizon of 30 years. For the development of this alternative a balance between conservation and wise use could be searched for. Or conservation and wise use could be the starting points for the development of two separate alternatives.
- 35 3. A comparative assessment of the functions and values of the autonomous development alternatives with the ecologically sustainable alternative provides valuable input for the discussion. Of course the level of comparison can be done for different levels of abstraction.

These three steps can enrich the consultation and feed the discussion on the main decisions that have to be taken and the information on alternatives can provide valuable input in the preparation of concrete action plans.

5 Whether this suggestion is feasible depends on what level of detail the NWP is elaborated. The development of alternatives as mentioned above is only feasible in case the NWP is worked out in detail. In case the NWP is only a policy on headlines than development of alternatives cannot be part of the policy process but still could be done for the preparation of action plans for the identified wetlands.

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Table 2: Summary of the major steps in development & implementation of National Wetland Policy, p. 22.

Phase 1	Phase 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparatory initiative</li> <li>- Establish a lead agency</li> <li>- Establish a writing team</li> <li>- Set up National Wetland advisory committee</li> <li>- Preparation of a background paper and national issues statement</li> <li>- Circulation of papers and issue statement</li> <li>- Legislative review</li> <li>- Inter-ministerial consultations</li> <li>- Draft policy development</li> <li>- Targeted consultations and national and local workshops</li> <li>- Intergovernmental consultations</li> <li>- Revised policy drafts</li> <li>- Additional interagency consultations</li> <li>- Formulation of final draft of policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interdepartmental review</li> <li>- Preparation of Implementation plan and budget</li> <li>- Preparation of Cabinet document</li> <li>- Central agency treasury board submission</li> <li>- Cabinet / government approval</li> <li>- Public announcement</li> <li>- Work plan implementation</li> <li>- Set up of national implementation/lead agency</li> <li>- Establishment of on-going roles of national wetland committee</li> <li>- Development of implementation guidelines</li> <li>- Harmonization with other policies</li> <li>- Development of training program or affected parties</li> <li>- Legislative implementation or revision</li> </ul>