



25 years Netherlands Commission for
Environmental Assessment

Information for Members of Working Groups & Other Experts of the International Department of the NCEA



January 2019



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1. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment

The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) was established as an independent advisory body of experts by decree in 1987. In the first years, its advisory reports focused mainly on projects in the Netherlands. However, in 1993 the Department for Development Cooperation was established. This department provides several services to assist environment and sector ministries, environmental and social assessment professionals and non-governmental organisations in low and middle-income countries to achieve better environmental assessment (EA) practice, both Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Since 2012 it also provides services to Dutch Embassies and departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that secure mainstreaming of environmental and climate issues into Dutch supported programmes in developing countries.

In the framework of development cooperation, 'environment' is not restricted to the ecological environment in a narrow sense. The socio-economic and institutional 'environment' play an important role as well. Because a growing number of international organisations and countries are adopting the term environmental and social impact assessment. The NCEA presently uses ESIA instead of EIA for projects, the term SEA remains unchanged.

The objective of NCEA's work is to improve the quality of environmental and social information used in decision making, in particular identifying and evaluating projects, plans and programmes. To achieve this, the NCEA provides advisory as well as capacity development services. In this way, the NCEA aims to contribute to sustainable development. This should result in a better environment, better governance and less poverty in the countries with which it cooperates.

The services provided by NCEA's Department for Development Cooperation fall into four categories, each of which are further outlined in the following chapter.

The main types of support that the NCEA provides abroad are:

- Advice on Terms of Reference for ESIA/SEA (before the process starts);
- Quality review of ESIA/SEA (during/after the process);
- Coaching of ESIA/SEA processes;
- Screening on legal ESIA requirements for projects by Dutch entrepreneurs in developing countries;
- Advice on strengthening ESIA/SEA systems including institutional setting, processes and legislation;
- ESIA and SEA capacity development;
- Knowledge on ESIA/SEA legislation, practice and guidance;
- Assist Dutch Embassies, through the Sustainability Advice Programme (SAP), in developing countries and departments at the Ministry's headquarters to safeguard sustainability of their programmes, mainly in relation to environment and climate issues.

This information leaflet is mainly intended for working group members contracted for NCEA's advisory services and it explains the approach applied. In addition to this leaflet, the NCEA has

developed the following note: General conditions for experts in relation to international work. This leaflet and a contract will be sent to all experts that will be contracted to contribute to the provisioning of the NCEA's services.

2. Products and Services

2.1 Advisory reports

The NCEA issues advisory reports in the following categories:

- Advice on the timing and process of applying EA or other forms of environmental and social appraisal to project, plans, or programme proposals (screening);
- Advice on the content and process of the scoping report or Terms of Reference for the EA study and report. This advice is also known as scoping advice or advisory scoping report.
- Advice on the quality of the EA report and process. This advice is also known as advisory review report;
- Advice on guidelines for monitoring project implementation and mid-term environmental reviews of projects for which the NCEA has provided advice – at the project preparation stage.

A distinction is made between reports by the NCEA and reports by the secretariat. Advice from the NCEA is prepared by an NCEA working group, preferably consisting of both Dutch and local experts, a chairperson and a technical secretary. Advice from the secretariat is prepared by a technical secretary, in some cases supported by one or two experts.

2.2 Institutional capacity building and training

The NCEA helps to improve EA system performance through raising capacity of relevant organisations having a stake in EA and developing functions such as the development of a platform for EA practitioners. It starts with diagnosing the performance of the present EA system and providing advice in terms of a strategy or plan for improving performance. Lasting contacts are being established with the recipient parties, and the NCEA seeks to establish further alliances with countries and with national and regional organisations that promote EA.

The NCEA regularly contributes to training activities on specific EA-related subjects and on-the-job training programmes on scoping and reviewing by local authorities. Generally, the work related to institutional capacity building and training is executed by the technical secretaries of the NCEA. Occasionally experts are asked to contribute.

2.3 Knowledge and learning

The NCEA has a knowledge centre that provides services to the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Dutch Embassies, EA professionals, governments and NGOs in the partner countries¹ and in the Netherlands, including:

- An (online) database comprising:

¹ Countries eligible for support in the framework of Netherlands Development cooperation.

- Up-to-date information on ESIA/SEA, information on NCEA's work, activities and advisory reports.
- Interactive map with links to (the history of) the implementation of ESIA and SEA legislation in specific countries, as well as to its country profiles (see below) and NCEA's project information.
- ESIA/SEA country profiles that provide structured information on ESIA/SEA regulations and legislation of over 30 countries.
- Research, networking, communication, presentations and publications. This includes the development of various products in order to share NCEA's experiences and lessons learnt.
- Helpdesk service for professionals and the general public to ask questions on ESIA/SEA in developing countries.

The knowledge and learning centre is kept up-to-date by the NCEA knowledge manager.

2.4 The Sustainability Advice Programme

Since 2017, the NCEA facilitates the Sustainability Advice Programme and pays specific attention to the integration of the main themes of Dutch development cooperation policy. This programme is the successor of the Dutch Sustainability Unit (2012–2016). It has the same target audience and objectives: to support DGIS and embassies with mainstreaming sustainability in (the development of) their strategies and activities – but with a stronger focus on strategic advice.

The NCEA core team is responsible for staying in touch with the embassies and the MFA, identifying the necessary expertise to support mainstreaming in cooperation with the embassies, finding the most suitable experts to give this support and safeguarding the quality of this support through monitoring and learning. The NCEA database includes experts from all segments of society, including academia, consultancies, government agencies and NGOs. Experts may be found both within and outside the Netherlands, both in developed and developing countries.

3. The NCEA organisation and staff

The NCEA is a foundation. It acts as an independent body of experts for EISA and SEA procedures in the Netherlands. For projects in the partner countries the Development Cooperation Department issues advice on request from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Embassies, multilateral organisations or national governments. The NCEA's activities outside the Netherlands are mainly funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The work of the NCEA is founded on two principles: expertise and independence. It is the combination of these two that allows the NCEA to be an impartial observer and reviewer of environmental and social information. The NCEA has been granted a formal status in Dutch legislation.

The secretariat is based in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It consists of a Dutch and an international department, both headed by one chairperson. The national department consists of 5 deputy

chairs, 12 technical secretaries, 1 knowledge manager and a team of 11 support staff. The international department consists of a director, one deputy chairperson, 8 technical secretaries, 2 knowledge managers, and a team of 4 support staff (situation as per February 2019).

The NCEA can call upon a pool of several hundred experts working at universities, consultancies and research institutes, allowing it to field any expertise required for any advice on ESIA or SEA.

The day-to-day work of the International Department is carried out by technical and project secretaries. One chairperson is assigned to the international department for approximately one and a half days per week.

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4. Rights and responsibilities of working group members

4.1 How we work

For the advisory reports mentioned in paragraph 2.1, the NCEA appoints a working group for each advisory trajectory, consisting of a chairperson, a technical secretary and three to five experts from the Netherlands and/or the recipient country. The chairperson is responsible for focusing expert attention on the essential issues related to the project and represents the working group in all contacts with stakeholders. The technical secretary is responsible for overall management and the preparation of (draft) reports.

The experts are selected for their specific project/plan related expertise, experience with EA and country knowledge/experience. The chairperson and experts are not, in any capacity, involved in the programmes, plans or projects they assess as working group members.

Working groups often visit the country to discuss the particular plan or programme or visit the proposed site of the project and meet with ministries and other government bodies. They also seek to consult with the local population and interest groups.

4.2 Participation and responsibility

The members of working groups participate on personal title and thus cannot have others replace them. In their advisory work for the NCEA they represent the NCEA only and never another organisation they may work for.

Participation in a working group is confirmed by a contract drawn up specifically stating the expert's contribution, deliverables and information regarding the fee agreed upon. The contract is signed by both the NCEA and the expert (or any other individual or company on behalf of the expert).

The working group members act on behalf of the NCEA and are responsible for the content of the advice given. During a final meeting the definite text is approved. The advice has to reflect the views of the entire working group.

The advisory report is signed by the chairperson and the technical secretary on behalf of the working group. It is customary that the advice is accompanied by a letter highlighting elements that strictly speaking are outside the advisory mandate of the NCEA. Although the chairperson of the working group is responsible for this letter, it is usually discussed beforehand with the other working group members.

4.3 Independence

It is essential that the other participants in the EA-process acknowledge the members of the working group as independent and as being free of conflicting interests.

This matter is raised in the first contact between technical secretary and the expert. If new developments occur at a later stage, the technical secretary has to be informed right away. Working group members must be aware that participation on personal title in a working group could have consequences for their regular employer, to participate at a later stage during the tender procedure for the project or programme/plan.

After having been reported informally, the composition of the working group must be communicated to and in some cases be approved by the requesting authorities and the Netherlands Embassy. In addition, the relevant contact person at MFA is informed. These may raise objections to the participation of a particular expert, only in relation to matters related to the impartiality of the experts, based on clear and transparent arguments. The NCEA chairperson ultimately decides on the composition of the working group.

4.4 Time schedule

A scoping or review advice generally takes each working group member approximately 3 to 5 days in preparation and reporting time and time for attendance of meetings. Per advice, an average of two meetings is held, at the NCEA secretariat in Utrecht. Usually, a site visit is part of the procedure, which takes one week approximately, depending on the location and character of the project or programme/plan.

The expert's input should remain within the estimated amount of days, agreed upon in the signed contract. If experts foresee that this will not be possible, the technical secretary needs to be informed beforehand. In exceptional cases, extra days can be claimed. The technical secretary will judge this on fairness in consultation with the chairperson. The NCEA agrees with each expert individually, the expected number of days needed for the assignment and the daily fee they will receive.

In most cases, local experts are not present in the preparatory meetings, however they are informed and enabled to participate through conference calls and/or email.

5. The duties of a working group

The NCEA's advisory services focus mainly on advice on the guidelines/ Terms of Reference for and reviews of environmental and social assessments of projects, plans, and programmes. If considered necessary, the NCEA forms a working group of experts. In order to do so, the technical secretary, in consultation with the chairperson selects experts for participation in the working group. When the group is complete, the secretary writes to the group members, confirming the membership, enclosing the letter with request for advice by the Ministry, Embassy or other requesting party, and/or additional information regarding the project, plan or programme. The secretary plans the meeting schedule and advice preparation. As a first introduction, a preparatory meeting is held. If necessary and feasible, a visit to the country involved and the specific project site is planned. In principle, no site visit is planned for the review advice of an activity if a visit has already taken place during the scoping advice.

In general, the programme of a site visit contains the following items:

- briefing and debriefing at the Netherlands Embassy;
- meetings with representatives of ministries or national institutes having a direct connection with the project or plan;
- visit to project site/plan area and direct surroundings;
- meetings with the proponent or local organisation involved and with representatives of regional and local authorities and institutes;
- meetings with NGOs and 'grassroots organisations' as well as representatives of the inhabitants of the project area and direct surroundings.

During this site visit, the proponent and any representatives of the requesting party explain the rationale of the proposed activity. The (project, plan or programme) location and its surroundings are visited. The purpose of the activity and eventual identified and unidentified alternative solutions, possible decisions and prior decisions, identified and unidentified environmental and social consequences that can be anticipated on the basis of the available data will all be discussed.

Below, the working approach of the advice on the Terms of Reference for, and the review of environmental and social assessments of projects, plans, and programmes is outlined.

5.1 Advisory report on SEA process

The aim of the advisory report for the SEA process is to provide guidelines with regard to the process of the SEA study. Especially for SEA, it is considered good practice to start with a phase known as: *setting the context for SEA*. This phase ideally results in a screening decision and a starting document that has been agreed upon by the main government stakeholders. To be able to prepare this report, the technical secretary and one of the

working group experts will conduct an assessment of a starting document for an SEA process.

Typically, the following issues are addressed in an advice on an SEA process:

- Key issues (problems and opportunities) for development;
- Decisions to be taken;
- Responsibilities within the SEA process;
- Stakeholder engagement plan;
- Time, geographical and budgetary boundaries;
- Preliminary development scenarios and alternatives.

5.2 Advisory scoping report or scoping advice

The aim of the advisory scoping report is to give guidelines with regard to contents and process of the EA-study. To be able to prepare this advisory scoping report the working group will conduct a scoping process. In a scoping process the issues that need to be analysed in the EA study will be identified. The working group uses national or international standards that are agreed upon with the requesting authority as a reference framework for the scoping process such as:

- National EA procedure and environmental and social standards;
- World Bank standards for EISA / IFC Performance standards;
- International good or best practice standards.

In order to gather information on the programme or plan that will be subjected to EA, the working group will study one of the following documents:

- Starting note or document;
- (draft) scoping report;
- (draft) Terms of Reference, focusing on content and process.

In addition, other documentation can be used. If necessary, a site visit is organised to gain site-specific information and meet stakeholders.

Often earlier advice on a comparable project, plan or programme is taken as a point of departure, so that the advice given by the NCEA is consistent with earlier advisory reports. Note that advisory reports on scoping/ToR differ from advisory review reports and that advisory ESIA reports differ very much from those on SEA.

The NCEA distinguishes two approaches in drafting a scoping advice: with or without a site visit. A site visit is conducted when the proposed project programme or plan is complex and/or politically sensitive. Usually, the technical secretary asks the members of the working group to read the available information and make a report (based on their field of expertise) of their observations. Based upon these observations the technical secretary prepares a first draft of the advice and a working group meeting is organised at the office of the NCEA in Utrecht to discuss those observations.

In case of a site visit, the first meeting will also be used for preparation of this visit. The draft advice will be elaborated during the site visit. The NCEA intends to have the main observations and a draft advice ready at the end of the site visit in order to benefit optimally from the creative

process within the working group during the site visit and to take advantage of the participation of local experts. On the last day of the site visit, a presentation on the preliminary findings is usually held. Ideally, a draft report will be available at the end of the site visit or within 1 or 2 weeks after the visit. The final report will be published after an agreed number of weeks (if necessary in two languages), together with an accompanying letter setting out specific areas of attention with respect to the project, plan or programme. In some cases, an additional visit is necessary to explain the draft advisory report or findings of the final advisory report by the technical secretary (and possibly the chairperson and an expert) to the project proponent, approximately 6 to 8 weeks after the site visit of working group.

If a site visit is not in the planning, the first working group meeting will be followed by a second and sometimes a third, at the NCEA's office in Utrecht where discussing draft versions of the advice are the main focus. As a rule, the final draft advice is sent to the requesting authority and a face-to-face meeting is organised. The aim is to answer questions and identify inaccuracies in the draft advice. Following this discussion, the NCEA finalises the scoping advice.

A scoping advice for **ESIA** is normally made up of the following elements:

- Introduction;
- Statement of the purpose and rationale of the proposed activity as well as the decision on the basis of which the EIA is undertaken and earlier decisions which confine the scope of the activity;
- Description of the activity and the 'reasonable' alternatives;
- Description of present condition of the environment and description of the projected state of the environment should the proposed activity not take place;
- Description of environmental impacts of the proposed activity;
- Description of comparison of alternatives in terms of environmental impacts;
- Assess to what extent the IFC Performance standards are applicable;
- Portrayal of the gaps in knowledge;
- Post-project evaluation;
- Presentation of the EA-report.

In a scoping advice for **SEA** the following elements are generally addressed:

- Shared vision on objectives of the plan and SEA
- Problem and opportunity analysis
- Baseline;
- Development of scenarios;
- Development of alternatives;
- Impact Assessment;
- Planning process including scenarios and alternatives, stakeholder consultation, quality assurance and monitoring.

The NCEA strives to allow for comments made by relevant stakeholders. Comments by involved or affected parties may provide useful insights into potential or existing problems, particularly concerning local conflicts which might otherwise go unnoticed by the NCEA.

5.3 Advisory review report

The aim of the review of the EA report and process is to check whether the report contains the required information and if the process followed is in compliance with the regulations and the guidelines agreed upon with the requesting authority. The EA report is reviewed against the following criteria: (i) completeness, (ii) correctness and (iii) relevance for decision making. The EA process is reviewed against procedural requirements, transparency and inclusiveness. Shortcomings should be identified, and the seriousness of the shortcomings needs to be assessed by the working group. For the essential shortcomings the NCEA provides recommendations to remedy these shortcomings. The NCEA has no opinion on the feasibility or acceptability of the project or plan. The objective of the advice of the NCEA is to guarantee that all essential environmental and socio-economic information has been provided for sound and well-balanced decision making and through a transparent and inclusive process.

As an example, a review may contain the following scenarios, comments and conclusions:

- Essential information is missing, and the EA report does not make a useful contribution to decision making: the NCEA will advise to have the report supplemented. Note that such a conclusion is rare in a final version. Usually the EA report is supplemented before the NCEA presents its final review document.
- Important information is missing, but the NCEA foresees that it will be relatively easy to gather this information and that it will not alter the conclusions in the EA report. To avoid delays, the NCEA will stress the need to supply the information and will advise to publish this data together with the draft permit or draft decision.
- Certain comments on the EA report can be used for the wording of a permit or a development plan. The NCEA will point out the usefulness of these passages for the permit.
- Certain comments on the EA report can lead to recommendations for the post-project evaluation.
- The quality of the EA report is of such a satisfactory nature that the decision making can proceed as planned.

A review starts with a chapter called 'appraisal of the EA report on main points' in which the report is summarised, and which leads to the conclusion 'sufficient or insufficient information for decision making' as well as the main comments on the EA report. The remaining comments are grouped per subject.

While reviewing the report, the working group should keep in mind, it is not its task to give a verdict on the acceptability of a particular solution in respect of environmental and other impacts and the conditions under which it is acceptable. Nor should a working group define how a project, plan or programme should be executed. This is the responsibility of the governmental bodies concerned.

If the NCEA wishes to make comments that are strictly observed beyond the scope of its task, these can be expressed in the letter of the chairperson accompanying the review advice.

If applicable and possible, the review is undertaken by the same working group that prepared the scoping advice for the guidelines/ToR.

The working group starts by forming a provisional opinion about the EA report based on the main points of the guidelines or if non-existent, a review framework. During the first meeting, an initial assessment of the EA report is made. During the second meeting the draft review comes up for discussion which is put together by the technical secretary on the basis of amendments by the experts of the working group. At this point, a site visit may take place and feed into the review. During this site visit, the final draft of the review is established.

Before the publication of the advisory review report to the competent authorities, the proponent and the competent authority have the opportunity to exchange views about the draft review with the working group. The aim is not to negotiate the text, but to answer questions and identify inaccuracies, just as with the draft scoping advice. Following this discussion, the NCEA finalises and publishes the advisory review.

If the review of the EA report reveals serious inadequacies, leading the working group to the conclusion that crucial information is missing, it will recommend the preparation of additional information. Generally, such shortcomings are revealed during the exchange of views about the draft review with representatives of the requesting authority. If the advice of the NCEA is followed, the supplementary information to the EA report will again be sent for review to the NCEA. The same working group will check whether the recommendation in the first final advisory review have been addressed adequately. Subsequently, the same steps are followed as described above.

5.4 Publication, distribution and communication

- The finalisation, lay out (NCEA format), printing etc. will be done by the project secretary. The technical secretary will coordinate with the project secretary who takes care of distributing the advice, based on a distribution list with relevant contacts, ministries, NGO's and others.
- If an expert cites or makes a reference to the advice, please note that the NCEA will always be named as the only author. Advisory reports by the NCEA do not share any co-authorship with experts or members from the working group.
- When the advice is published on the NCEA website (www.eia.nl), you may also add it to other databases. Please notify the NCEA if you do so and please take into account the above-mentioned instruction that only the NCEA should be named as author.

5.5 Confidentiality of data

In the EA procedure openness is very important. However, members of working groups may see confidential documents and data, for which the following guidelines apply:

- There may be occasion for an exchange of additional information between a working group member and the proponent or plan owner. In order to avoid misunderstandings, these contacts have to be made through the secretariat. The technical secretary has to inform the requesting party accordingly prior to the contact.
- During the advisory work on a project or plan, members of a working group have to refrain from making statements to the press, interest groups or competitive companies.
- All non-public documents, such as drafts of advice documents have to be treated confidentially. Only public documents and final advisory reports may be allowed to end up in public libraries.

- During conferences or lectures, members of working groups are not allowed to discuss views of the NCEA or of a working group without prior consultation with and approval of the NCEA chairman.

In case of company secrets or security data, a confidentiality procedure may apply. Secret documents are only given to working group members for perusal if this is necessary for the advisory work. This is at the discretion of the requesting party and the proponent needs to be consulted.

In general, the NCEA seeks publicity for its advisory reports with the objective to increase its effectiveness. This means that the NCEA sometimes issues press releases. In that case, the following guidelines apply:

- Press releases are drawn up by the technical secretary in consultation with the press coordinator of the NCEA and the chairperson of the working group. If possible, the press releases are discussed with the working group members.
- When working group members are approached by the press, they have to refer to the technical secretary or chairperson of the project.

In principle, the NCEA retains publication and intellectual property rights on the advisory work to which working group members contribute. In case of submission for publication of professional, academic or scholarly works resulting from a working group member's involvement in NCEA's advisory services, the following guidelines apply:

- The publication cannot take place before publication of NCEA's advisory report.
- The working group member should contact the chairperson/technical secretary prior to submission of publications to agree on content to be included and on co-authorship.

6. General conditions

For the general terms and conditions of this contract please refer to the document titled 'General conditions for experts in relation to international work'. This note/ document should be sent to all experts of a working group, by the project secretary, together with this information leaflet and your contract.

7. Glossary

The terms included in the glossary are printed in bold typeface:

Activity

All actions or alterations etc. undertaken to attain certain objectives or to solve certain problems. An activity may either be a project, plan or programme that the proponent intends to undertake or an **alternative** which also has the intention to attain the same objectives or to solve the same problems.

Alternative

Other option to realise the objectives of the proposed activity in an acceptable measure. With the exception of **policy alternatives**, alternatives concern concrete activities. The Environmental

Management Act in the Netherlands prescribes that for an alternative to be considered it needs to be 'reasonable'. What is 'reasonable' should become clear from the scoping advice and the guidelines for the EA.

Autonomous development

Projected description of the future state of the environment should neither the **proposed activity** nor one of the **alternatives** be undertaken. If, however, there is a **do-nothing alternative** – if not undertaking any activity is also a reasonable alternative – the autonomous development is the same as the environmental effects of the do-nothing alternative.

Do-nothing alternative (no-go alternative or zero-alternative)

An **alternative** which is considered with a view to, at least partly, attaining the objectives of the **proposed activity** and which involves not undertaking the proposed activity. If the do-nothing alternative is not a reasonable alternative, i.e. is not really taken into consideration in the decision-making, it is called a reference situation. In such a case it may be useful to take stock of any activities that have been carried out and that have already been decided upon for the area in question, in order to predict the **autonomous development** of the environment.

Environmental assessment (EA)

Environmental assessment is a procedure, ensuring the incorporation of environmental, and where required, social and economic information in sound and well-balanced decision making. Environmental assessment can be undertaken at two levels: 1) For individual projects where it concerns for instance a dam, motorway, airport or factory, it is called Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). 2) For plans, programmes or policies such as for instance a land use plan, an energy development plan, or a sustainable development plan it is called Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

Environmental effects

Effects of an activity on the physical environment with respect to the protection of people, animals, plants, goods, water, soil, air, climate and the relationships between them, as well as the protection of aesthetic, scientific, cultural and historic values. Additionally, these effects are taken to include the effects of waste disposal, the use of energy and resources and transport of persons and goods. The environment is not restricted to the ecological environment in a narrow sense. The socio-economic and 'institutional environment' can play an important role as well.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

EIA is a systematic process that ensures that environmental, social and economic considerations are incorporated in sound and well-balanced decision making around specific projects. EIA is sometimes also referred to as Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) or Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA).

Environmental measure or mitigating measure

A measure to avoid (or to limit) environmental damage.

Existing situation

The state of the environment preceding implementation of the activity. It is generally legally required to describe as a baseline the existing situation of the environment in an EA-report.

Implementation alternative

Alternative in the way the activity can be actually executed.

Location alternative

Alternative involving a specific location for the activity.

Policy alternative

An alternative at a policy level of decision-making: the alternative is not bound to a concrete activity or a specific location by its character (for instance, a national regulation).

Preferred alternative

That alternative which is recognised by either the competent authority or the proponent as the best solution for the problems or the best way to attain the objectives – on the basis of the EA-report and/or draft decisions or permit applications, i.e. after weighing the environmental effects.

Proposed activity

The activity proposed by the project/plan proponent. Sometimes, in cases where there is no legal obligation to undertake an EA, a variety of equal **alternatives** is proposed, none of which has the preference of the proponent as yet (such as the projected routes of motorways and railways).

Scenario

External development(s) that influences the proposed initiative that is subject to EA but cannot be influenced by the initiative. In practice, the term alternatives and scenarios are often mixed resulting in a lot of confusion.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

SEA is a variety of approaches that aim to integrate environmental considerations into policies, plans and programmes and evaluate their inter-linkages with economic and social considerations. Public participation, transparency and good quality information are key principles. Consequently, SEA is more than the preparation of a report; it is a tool to enhance good governance.

Variant

Term usually applied as a synonym for 'alternative'. Sometimes, it may refer to an alternative that differs only in a minor way from the proposed activity.