

Strategic Environmental Assessment in Canada

A Key Link in Pursuing Sustainable Development Outcomes

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Today...

Linking SA and SEA

Canada's SEA System

Recent progress in R-SEA



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Linking SA and SEA

Sustainability assessment (SA) is: “a process by which the implications of an initiative on sustainability are evaluated... (often) derived from environmental impact assessment (EIA) and **strategic environmental assessment (SEA)**” (Pope et al. 2004: 595).



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Linking SA and SEA

Gibson, R. and Hanna, K. (2009) –
Evolution of Environmental Assessment in Canada (4 stages)

STAGE 4 – “ADVANCED EA”

Integrated planning and decision making for sustainability
Addresses policies, plans, programs & projects
Cumulative local, regional, and global effects
Empowers the public
Recognizes uncertainty
Favours precaution, diversity, reversibility, adaptability
Strategic



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Linking SA and SEA

“Stage 4--Advanced EA” does not exist to a great degree anywhere in the world (Gibson and Hanna 2009).

In Canada, SA is **not yet widely practiced**, even though “sustainability” is frequently cited as a core value guiding both project EIA and SEA (CEAA 1999; Government of Canada 1992).

Rather...

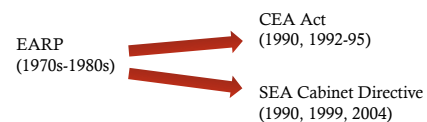


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SEA System: Canada

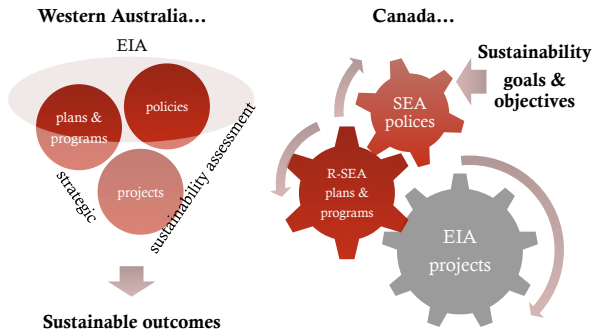
... a considerable amount emphasis has been placed upon developing SEA, and more recently regional-scale SEA (R-SEA) as a primary vehicle to pursuing sustainable development agendas. Why?

In the 1990s, strategic assessment of policies, plans, and programs was formally separated from project EIA (Noble 2010; Gibson and Hanna 2009).



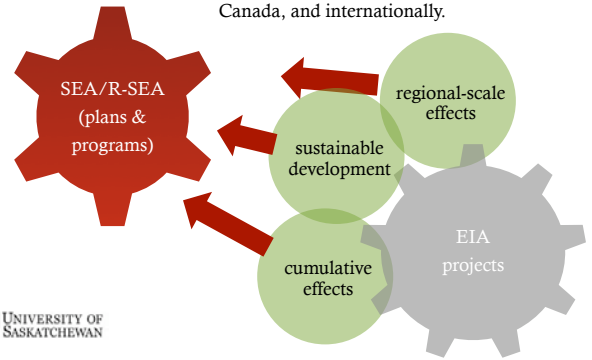
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SEA Systems: Canada vs. WA



SEA System: Canada

Separation of SEA from project-EIA has led to very high expectations of R-SEA, both in Canada, and internationally.



Progress in R-SEA

Therefore, when progress is charted toward SA in Canada, part of the answer is related to progress in R-SEA.



R-SEA Critical Success Factors:

- **Structure and support**
 - Enable the process
- **Knowledge and Practice**
 - Make the process happen
- **Influence**
 - Ensure desired outcomes

Progress in R-SEA

Structure and support- “enabling the process”

- Endorsement by Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and three provinces

Challenges:

- R-SEA/SEA ‘uptake’ rather uneven
- relationship of R-SEA/SEA to other planning, management, and assessment initiatives unclear
- environmental management silos & leadership vacuum



Progress in R-SEA

Knowledge and Practice – “making it happen”

- Assembling lessons from similar initiatives; greater emphasis on role of science and cumulative effects

Challenges:

- only one full-scale R-SEA complete to date (SK Great Sand Hills RES) (see: Noble 2008)
- wide range of “para-SEA” processes also adds some confusion: “Don’t we already do this?”



Progress in R-SEA

Influence – “ensuring desired outcomes”

- Literature recognizes that R-SEA is a key link in pursuing sustainable development outcomes

Challenges:

- R-SEA/SEA disconnected vertically from other tiers of assessment and horizontally from broader planning and management initiatives
- mechanisms of influence and environmental protection not well understood



Summary

In Canada,

- SA is **not yet widely practiced**
- Sustainable development agendas fall more-so with the purview of **SEA**
- **R-SEA** is perhaps the closest facsimile of SA

While interest in R-SEA is relatively high at present...

- Much of the progress to date has been conceptual and process-oriented. **No proof** as yet that R-SEA does result in “sustainable outcomes” or even “desired outcomes”

- R-SEA uptake is relatively uneven and challenged by it’s “orphan” status among other planning, management & assessment initiatives

- There is a pressing need to study mechanisms of *influence*

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