



**39th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT, 27
APRIL - 3 MAY 2019 BRISBANE CONVENTION and EXHIBITION CENTRE BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA.**



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1. What was the name of the event?

The 39th Annual Conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment, 27 April - 3 May 2019 Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

2. Date Attended

27 April - 6 May 2019.

3. Venue

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

4. Officials who attended

- Emmanuel Letebele (Senior Professional Planner: Strategic Spatial Planning, Development Planning Department.)
- Sabelo Nkosi (Senior Environmentalist, Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department).

5. Area of expertise

- Urban Development, Strategic Spatial Planning and Climate Change.
- Environmental Management.

6. What was the purpose of the event, the broad objectives and themes? Why was it of importance?

The International Association for Impact Assessment Annual Conference is the world's largest and longest-running gathering of practitioners, private corporations, government representatives, non-governmental agencies, consultants and researchers working in and with impact assessment. This Conference presented a great opportunity for built environment practitioners to engage with leading practice in impact assessment policies and practices which in turn informed better outcomes in health, environment, society and human rights.

Some of the big questions that the conference delegates grappled with in the discussions are:

- What are the directions of change that are needed and will this be sufficient to meet the needs of the 21st century?
- As we work towards the implementation of sustainable development goals, do we need new instruments?
- Is a revolutionary change needed and is there a role for impact assessment?

It is said that Environmental Impact Assessment (IA) has evolved to be a substantive broad-based plank in project and policy decision making. Impact Assessment has shown both flexibility and resilience, its processes being adapted and applied in a wide range of contexts and settings across the world. It has diversified its focus to strategic environmental assessment, sustainability assessment, economic impact assessment, social impact assessment, health impact assessment, and cumulative impact assessment.

Purpose of the Workshop and motivation:

The Conference Theme was Evolution or Revolution: Where next for Impact Assessment? The conference theme was deliberately provocative, inviting delegates to consider Impact Assessment

from different viewpoints. It called for reflection on the imperatives for change if Impact Assessment is to be part of another half-century of good practice environmental management. The conference offered practitioners an insight into global practice regarding the enhancement of undertaking impact assessments and striking a balance with economic development.

The conference topics allowed participants to address questions such as:

- How can Impact Assessment meet the challenges of the 21st century?
- How might evolution or revolution address common and long-standing criticisms of Impact assessment such as:
 - Poor consideration of cumulative impacts
 - Lack of follow-up to determine predicted consequences and efficacy of avoidance and mitigation measures
 - Inadequate responses to trans-boundary and global scale threats such as climate change.
- If revolution is the way forward, who will lead it, and to what end?
- What purposes are we seeking to achieve through Impact Assessment?
- What is done well and can Impact Assessment be further enhanced?
- What can we learn from the perceptions and practices of other disciplines?
- Does the focus of Impact Assessment need to be narrowed or broadened?
- Are the different forms of Impact Assessment evolving on convergent or divergent trajectories?
- How can decision making, and political and dispute resolution theory, inform the practice of Impact Assessment?

In the context of eThekweni Municipality, the above conference topics are relevant in the manner that the City needs to address issues of sustainable economic development in order to be a *Liveable and Caring City*. Rapid urbanization is a challenge however through the implementation of the densification strategy, integrated rapid transport systems (IPTN, i.e. Go Durban!) and the inner city generation project, the City has already started making strides in dealing with these urban challenges.

Discussions also addressed general Impact Assessment topics and the work of the International Association for Impact Assessment special –interest Sections. In addition to conference sessions, training courses, and special meetings, there was a range of technical visits that involved learning.

7. What in your opinion are some of the KEY LEARNINGS that you came away with? In other words, what stood out for you? Were there any "aha!" learning moments that you can share with colleagues? What were some of the KEY OBSERVATIONS that were important or different?

The following learning's are drawn from the Strategic Environmental Assessment sessions we attended at the conference:

SEA is a powerful tool to enhance the contributions of a national/sectoral policy or strategy (strategic document) towards environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and low carbon development. International SEA literature emphasises that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) applies to projects, whereas SEA applies to 'policies, plans and programmes'.

The SEA should provide an answer to the following questions:

- Is it likely for the implementation of the sector strategy and support programme to result in significant impacts on the environment? How can these impacts be avoided, mitigated or compensated?
- Does the strategic document offer an adequate response to the effects environmental degradation and climate change may have on the sector's performance? How can these concerns be better addressed by the sector strategy and programme?
- How can the strategic document and support programme better grasp opportunities to contribute to environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and low carbon development?

There are a number of tips to get SEA right and they are follows:

a) Put the Government in the driving seat: The best way to guarantee the environmental sustainability and climate resilience is when these dimensions are integrated in the planning process from the very start, and promoted by the Government. Approach the Government at an early stage to promote the SEA and jointly define its scope. Prepare the SEA Terms of Reference (ToR) jointly with your Government counterparts.

b) Get the timing right: A common shortcoming of SEAs is that they are often prepared late in the decision-making process. This limits the opportunities to influence the final design of the sector strategy or the support programme, as key decisions have already been taken. However, even in cases where the SEA comes late in the planning process, it can nevertheless still bring important contributions. Ideally SEAs should be carried out during the Government's planning process, so as to maximise opportunities for the SEA to influence it.

c) Coordinate with other donors: You can support the Government in coordinating with other donors active in the sector; engage them; make sure the SEA will be beneficial to everyone. Consider promoting joint SEAs with other donors when providing support under innovative financial mechanisms (blending) in environmentally sensitive sectors.

d) Be clear on what you expect from the SEA: There are environment and climate change integration guidelines that provide sample ToR for an SEA, but these need to be adapted to reflect the country- and sector-specific context, as well as the entry points available to influence the Government's planning process and the formulation of the support programme. Ensure the ToR capture the concerns of the Government and other donors. Be realistic about what is being required. Don't expect the SEA to cover everything; focus on what is most important. At the same time, don't be overly prescriptive. Although an initial orientation of issues to be addressed is useful, remember that the scoping phase will be identifying the key issues.

e) Mind climate change: SEA informs strategic planning processes which, almost by definition, look into the medium- and long-term, a time scale where we expect impacts of climate change to be most felt. The SEA should examine the climatic changes already being experienced and those foreseen for the medium- and long-term, especially in the time-span in which the results and impacts of the sector strategy are expected. The SEA should examine how climate change is expected to affect the feasibility of the sector strategy and provide recommendations to build its climate resilience. The SEA can also look for opportunities for the sector strategy and contribute

to low carbon development and contribute to the country's own climate change objectives and commitments.

- f) Get the right team to do the job:** The team leader must have good experience implementing SEAs. Having a clear idea on what is expected from an SEA and how it should be conducted is critical. The rest of the team should provide the expertise needed on the sector and to address specific areas of attention. Keep in mind that EIA and SEA, although sister tools, are very different in how they are implemented, and require different sets of skills. Consultants with very good EIA experience don't necessarily make good SEA team leaders.
- g) Give due attention to scoping:** Scoping is a critical phase in an SEA. There are multiple interactions between environment, climate change and sector development; however, the SEA should not attempt to address them all, spreading out too thin. Attention should be given to the really important issues, those that represent opportunities to significantly enhance the sector strategy's environmental performance. The SEA should consist of two distinct phases: scoping and the SEA study proper. Sufficient buffer time should be allowed between scoping and the SEA study to allow key stakeholders to provide comments. The scoping phase should be participatory, and its findings validated by key stakeholders, preferably in a workshop. To the extent possible, allow flexibility for the reallocation of resources based on the findings of the scoping phase. Keep in mind that different areas of expertise than those originally foreseen may be required, as well as a different distribution of time allocation amongst experts.
- h) Ensure transparency and broad participation:** Transparency and public participation are key SEA principles. Consultations should be encouraged and meaningful opportunities for public participation provided, including making reports publicly available. SEA workshops are often some of the few occasions where different actors with an interest or a stake in environmental or climate change issues related to the sector strategy get together to discuss themes of common interest. This strengthens networking and inter-institutional coordination. Transparency of the process also allows broader communication that can feed national debates on issues of public interest. The generation of debate on the environmental dimension of sector strategies is often a key contribution of SEAs. Innovative ways to engage stakeholders can be conducive to more fruitful debate.
- i) Recommendations must be focused and duly discussed:** A key responsibility in managing the SEA is to ensure that recommendations are focused, relevant and realistic. They should be kept at a strategic level, avoiding temptation to analyse potential impacts of individual interventions in detail. Recommendations should be prioritised, clearly indicating to whom they are addressed. Sometimes the best solution to an environmental issue lies in the hands of an authority other than the sectoral authority that leads the SEA process. In such cases appropriate communication channels should be identified, where policy dialogue can play an important role. Adequate fora should be identified to discuss the findings with the relevant authorities and decide how recommendations will be taken forward.
- j) Think strategically! Promote a national SEA system:** The most effective way for SEA to influence national policy-making and planning processes is when these are promoted by the Government itself, guaranteeing ownership and a better timing of the SEA *vis-à-vis* the planning process. Seek opportunities to promote the development of national SEA systems and strengthening of capacities. Keep in mind that some other donor may already be promoting such support, in which case efforts should be coordinated.

8. As a result of this event, what is the ONE CHANGE that you may consider making backing back at work, if any? What follow ups are envisaged?

The one change that needs to be made at work is to intensively mainstream climate sensitive spatial planning approaches with all critical stakeholders in the city. Since spatial planning has a long term impact on the growth of the city, integrating climate change responses into the spatial planning framework contributes to increasing the city's climate resilience and supporting climate-proof urban development plans. A question may arise, why is climate-proof planning essential for a sustainable future? Planning is part of the solution. Planning helps build more sustainable communities, it facilitates economic development and connectivity, and improves the choices available for where and how people live and work. Planning facilitates and guides decision-making and helps balance private, government and community interests for future net benefit. Planning helps identify hazards, mitigate and reduce risks; it also identifies and protects environmental, social, cultural and heritage values.

9. Please indicate details of useful CONTACTS AND NETWORKS that were established during the event?

- Mr. Sabelo Malaza, Chief Director: Integrated Environmental Authorisations Department of Environmental Affairs. e-mail: Smalaza@environment.gov.za
- Mr. Ntsako Baloyi (CEnv, Pr.Sci.Nat, MIEEnvSc, PMP®), Director at International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) Board of Directors, Johannesburg Area, South Africa.

10. One of the key functions of our MILE website is to serve as a repository of LEARNING DOCUMENTATION, VIDEOS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER RESOURCE MATERIAL