



Strategic  
Environmental  
Assessment

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE: INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE**

This instructional guide explains the structure of the course and expected learning outcomes, suggests some course assignments, and suggests some guidance for course participants when carrying out the assignments.

### **A. COURSE STRUCTURE AND LEARNING OUTPUTS**

The course covers SEA principles; SEA status worldwide; links between SEA, environmental impact assessment, and strategic decision-making; and a wide range of SEA tools and techniques, and their advantages and disadvantages in various settings. The course is divided into:

- Background
- Strategic actions
- SEA Process
  - Baseline
  - Assessment
  - Implementation
- References and definitions

The course enables participants to critically analyse a range of existing SEA reports, understand SEA regulations and guidance and how they apply in the participant's country, and carry out many of the steps involved in SEA. By the end of the course, participants should be able to:

- critically analyse an SEA report,
- organise an SEA process,
- understand SEA regulations and guidance, and how they apply in the participant's country,
- carry out many steps in an SEA,
- draw up a specification for an SEA, and
- understand the key issues affecting and constraining the development of SEA.

Depending on the course exercises carried out, participants may also have had practice in critical analysis, succinct written presentation, use of information technology, and possibly collaboration with other course participation via the Internet.

## B. POSSIBLE EXERCISES

A range of possible course exercises are listed below, organised in the same sections as the SEA course. They can be selected and adapted as required. Exercises 1 and 7 are good entry-level exercises.

Many of the exercises involve critically analysing existing SEA reports. SEA reports can be found:

- on the SEA-Wiki (<http://sea.unu.edu/wiki/>)
- in the list of recommended SEA reports (<http://www.levett-therivel.co.uk>, under 'SEA') – this primarily contains UK reports
- by carrying out an Internet search.

### Background

#### 1. Reading an SEA report

Participants or the trainer choose 1-2 existing SEA reports. For each report, the participant should:

- identify the strategic action, the area it covers, and the time period it covers
- identify whether it is, in SEA terms, a policy, plan or programme
- identify the competent authority
- identify who prepared the SEA report (was it the competent authority? if not, does that matter?)
- identify the legislation and/or guidance (if any) under which the SEA was carried out
- identify whether and where, in the SEA report, the various SEA stages shown in Unit 2 are documented
- see whether there is any evidence that the SEA influenced/changed the plan decision(s).

This exercise can be carried out in small groups of 2-4 people. Each participant looks at a different SEA report using the questions above, and then describes their SEA report to the other participants in their group.

#### 2. SEA systems

Participants or the trainer choose 2 countries' SEA systems from the SEA-Wiki or using information from the references of the UNU SEA course ([http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page\\_id=88](http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=88)). Participants compare and contrast the systems:

- what strategic actions require SEA
- what information must be contained in the SEA report
- what the requirements are for participation by the public and environmental authorities
- whether the SEA is limited to environmental impacts, or whether it also covers social and/or economic impacts
- how widespread the SEA application in that country is

Participants could prepare a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis of the SEA systems.

### Baseline

#### 3. Describing the baseline

Participants choose 1-2 environmental topics, e.g. biodiversity, soil. They suggest 3-4 indicators for each topic and explain the reason for the choice of indicators. This could include discussion of input v. outcome indicators, presence of existing data v. need to collect new data, how well the indicators cover the topic, and any obvious gaps. They could include information on who provides the data, data quality, and how frequently it is monitored.

#### 4. Environmental/sustainability problems

For their country/city/neighbourhood (specify which) participants identify 3-6 existing significant environmental/sustainability problems and explain why these are problems. The explanation could include reference to legal targets, environmental conditions in other similar areas, and/or trends over time.

Participants could discuss whether all groups in their society would agree that these are problems, and reasons for their choice of sustainability v. environmental problems. This discussion could either be in a report, or could take place in small groups if the course is being carried out by a group of participants.

### **Assessment**

#### 5. Devising alternatives 1

Participants or the trainer choose 1-2 existing SEA reports. For each report, the participants:

- identify the alternatives considered
- critically analyse the alternatives, for instance using the “dos and don’ts” list from Unit 3
- suggest other alternatives, explaining the rationale for suggesting them
- determine whether the new alternatives are mutually exclusive or mix-and-match

Participants should demonstrate an understanding of the alternatives hierarchy, and of the links between plan objectives and alternatives.

#### 6. Devising alternatives 2

Participants or the trainer choose one of the sets of plan objectives from:

- Securing Australia’s Energy Future (UNU SEA course, ‘Strategic Action’ Unit 2, [http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page\\_id=37](http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=37))
- Oxford West End Area Action Plan (UNU SEA course, ‘Strategic Action’ Unit 2, [http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page\\_id=37](http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=37))
- Sustainable Forest Development in South Africa (UNU SEA course, ‘Strategic Action’ Unit 3, [http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page\\_id=112](http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=112)) or
- objective(s) of a strategic action that they are familiar with.

Participants propose alternative ways of achieving the objective(s). Participants should explain the reasoning behind their proposed alternatives, for instance different levels of the alternatives hierarchy, sequence of alternatives from broad themes to more detailed implementation, and/or links to existing environmental problems.

#### 7. Assessment and mitigation

This exercise can be carried out by individuals or in small groups. Participants or the trainer choose 3 of the plan statements in Box 1 (below); or 3 of the alternatives that they devised in the two previous exercises; or 3 statements from a strategic action that they are familiar with. Using Table 1, participants assess the statements/alternatives. Alternatively, participants can devise their own SEA objectives/framework and use that

to test the statements/alternatives. (Extra points for identifying the source of the SEA objectives in Table 1!)

If participants are assessing mutually exclusive alternatives, they put forward a preferred alternative and explain why. If they are using mix-and-match alternative or plan statements, they propose specific measures for minimising the negative impacts of the statements/alternatives or enhancing their benefits.

## Implementation

### 8. SEA report review

Using one of the review criteria from Unit 4, participants review an existing SEA report (chosen by them or the trainer). Participants assume either that they are a non-government organisation using the review criteria to publicly criticise the SEA report, or that they are an in-house sustainability officer helping the competent authority to fine-tune its draft SEA report. Participants write a brief report, in a tone appropriate to the scenario they have chosen, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the SEA report, and making recommendations for improvements.

**Table 1. Assessment/mitigation table for Exercise 7**

| SEA objective   | Statement or alternative   |    |    | Mitigation, suggestion for changes to statement/alternative   |
|---|--|----|----|---|
|   | 1.   | 2. | 3. |   |
| 1. The life support functions on which human and ecological wellbeing depends are recognised                          | <i>describe the impact of the statement/alternative on the SEA objective in words, and summarise including the symbol from the key</i> |    |    | <i>recommend changes to the statement/alternative, wider strategic action, or other strategic actions to help minimise negative and optimise positive impacts</i> |
| 2. A decent life for all people is ensured without compromising the same possibilities for future generations         |  |    |    |   |
| 3. Equity of sufficiency and opportunity for all people is ensured  |  |    |    |   |
| 4. Extractive damage is reduced, waste is avoided, and overall material and energy use per unit of benefit is reduced |  |    |    |   |

Key:

- *negative impact. try to mitigate: rewrite policy, delete policy, add other policies*
- + *positive impact: can it be enhanced?*
- / *impact depends on implementation: what "rules" are needed for good implementation?*
- ? *uncertain impact: need more information. who has it? what will be done about it?*

### **Box 1. Plan statements for Exercise 7**

PS1. Proposals for built waste management facilities will be assessed against the following criteria:

- if the site is within an existing industrial area, it can be accommodated without unacceptable harm to the character, operation of other uses, and health and amenity of users of the estate;
- if the site is located within an urban area, the proposal is compatible with neighbouring uses and can be accommodated without unacceptable harm to the community or the environment.

PS2. Rapid and convenient access to the primary road network of high quality roads will be sought for minerals traffic. Where such access is not directly available, the use of other roads will be strictly controlled.

PS3. In town centres priority will be given to pedestrians and public transport. Appropriate comprehensive local policies for car parking and service areas will be sought.

PS4. Tall buildings (>10 storeys) will be permitted anywhere in the district.

PS 5. Two new airport runways will be provided in the South in the 30 year period to 2037.

PS6. Government will facilitate the entry of small farmers and entrepreneurs into the forestry sector by introducing incentives and minimising barriers.

PS7. The commercial use of genetically modified organisms will not be permitted in Country X

### **C. POSSIBLE COURSEWORK RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS**

- Be concise and focus on key points
- Don't merely compile lots of quotes and data; focus on critically analysing them
- Make sure that all work is properly referenced: don't borrow or copy from others without specifically acknowledging their input.
- Use consistent referencing throughout, for instance the Harvard System (use the Internet to search for 'Harvard referencing system')
- Use non-discriminatory, including non-sexist, language.