

PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS



KEY POINTS

- Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a two-way process for identifying and managing a development's potential impacts on the environment, and the potential impacts of the environment on a development.¹
- The two types of assessment, EIA and strategic environmental assessment (SEA), serve to inform development planning and decision-making from the local/village to the national level, across different types of [economic activity](#), and across the public and private sectors.
- SEA can support EIA by identifying types of [development](#) that are environmentally sound and appropriate; pinpointing locations where developments are/are not permissible; stipulating desired characteristics of developments; and identifying broad-scale environmental management measures.
- The application of EIA and SEA is particularly important to understand, plan and appropriately manage the broad range of uses of coastal and marine environments.

HOW ISSUE LINKS TO/IMPACTS SDGs BEYOND **SDG14 LIFE BELOW WATER**

- SDG1.5: impact assessments can contribute to the resilience of poor communities and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.
- SDG2.4 & 2.5: impact assessments can help ensure sustainable food production systems that maintain ecosystems and genetic diversity of wild species.
- SDG 3b: impact assessments can help to manage [ocean-based research](#) focused on the development of vaccines and medicines
- SDG 6.3: impact assessments can reduce pollution of waterways, coastal and marine ecosystems from hazardous chemicals and materials.
- SDG12.2: impact assessments assist the sustainable use and management of natural resources.
- SDG15.5: impact assessments can reduce habitat degradation and protect [biodiversity](#).

BACKGROUND

1. **Environmental impact assessments are a key tool** in managing the environmental and social impacts of development in coastal and marine environments. They are also an important tool for examining the potential impacts of the environment on development projects, including impacts arising from [climate change](#), [climate variability](#) and [disasters](#), and for identifying appropriate adaptation or risk reduction measures to avoid or mitigate these impacts. Any development project—on land or in the sea—that is likely to significantly affect the coastal or marine environment should be subject to EIA.
2. **EIA and SEA support sustainable development.** The definition of 'environment' in EIA and SEA covers natural and biophysical, social, cultural and economic aspects, as well as the relationships between these aspects. This definition is important in the Pacific, with extensive customary resource ownership and direct linkages between livelihoods, natural resource conditions, and sustainable development.
3. **Good assessments mean good economic returns.** The EIA process aims to strengthen positive development impacts, avoid negative development impacts, and reduce vulnerability to environmental hazards. When a project is well-suited to the environment, when its vulnerability to hazards is minimised, and when it is operating effectively, the maximum value from development can be achieved for the developer, government and local community.

- The effectiveness of EIA depends on capacity.** Pacific island countries now have legislation in place that provides substantive provisions for EIA. However, a number of countries are still learning how to use EIA to maximum effect within the context of staffing, financial, and technical resource constraints, and to comprehensively address the social and environmental impacts of development and the impacts the environment may have on development. SPREP has the regional mandate for EIA support and training. SPREP provides EIA capacity-building for its members, including the development and review of legislation, delivery of in-country training, and provision of technical assistance for key steps of the EIA process.
- SEA promotes better development plans and policies that address multiple values and needs.** SEA is a higher-level process used in three main ways: to prepare a strategic development or resource-use plan for a defined land and/or ocean area; to examine the potential environmental impacts that may arise from, or impact, the implementation of government policies, plans, and programmes; and to assess different classes or types of development projects to produce general management policies or design guidelines.
- SEA has many benefits.** SEA allows for the consideration of alternative development scenarios for a defined land and/or ocean area; identifies trade-offs between natural and biophysical, social, and economic aspects of the environment and enhances the chance of finding win-win options; promotes public involvement in policy development and planning; assists with identification and avoidance of cumulative impacts; and reduces the time and effort required for EIA for individual projects.

