
AGENDA ITEM 12.4.2:

Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines

Purpose of Paper

1. To inform Members of the background and rationale for developing regional guidelines on SEA including a brief update on progress to date; and
2. To seek endorsement of SPREP's proposed plans and process for completing and finalising the guidelines.

Background

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a means of systematically evaluating the environmental and socio-economic impacts of Policies, Plans and Programmes (PPP) to ensure that opportunities can be maximised, risks can be mitigated and alternatives are considered during the early stages of PPP development. SEA enables integration of environmental and socio-economic considerations into PPP initiatives, promoting collaboration and stakeholder engagement at an early stage and continuously throughout the development cycle so that strategic decisions can be made. SEA shares much in common with EIA, as they are both used as a means of evaluating and mitigating potential effects of a proposal. However, EIA is applied on a project basis, whilst SEA is generally applied at an earlier stage, during the development of policies, plans and programmes. SEA is a process that can be used in three main ways:
 - i. To prepare a strategic development or resource use plan for a defined land and/or ocean area;
 - ii. To examine the potential environmental impacts that may arise from, or impact upon, the implementation of government PPP; and
 - iii. To assess different classes or types of development projects, so as to produce general environmental management policies or design guidelines for the development classes/types.

SEA relevance and interest in the region

4. The SPREP Strategic Plan 2017-2026 specifically under Regional Goal 4 requires SPREP to strengthen national sustainable development planning and implementation systems through use of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA), and spatial planning.

5. In 2016, the Guidelines for Strengthening Environment Impact Assessment for PICs and Territories was endorsed by the SPREP Meeting. This was followed in 2017, with the endorsement of the EIA guidelines for Coastal Tourism Development by the SPREP Meeting and also by the Executive Board of the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO).
6. SEA is briefly introduced in the Guidelines for Strengthening Environment Impact Assessment with the aim of developing specific guidelines on SEA.
7. SEA might be a relatively new concept to some regions and countries however, it has been around since the late 1960s.
8. In the Pacific island region, only a few examples of SEA application are known:
 - i. 1996: SPREP conducted an SEA of the development projects that had been proposed for the town of Neiafu, on the island of Vava'u, Tonga, as part of the Vava'u Development Programme.
 - ii. 2001: SPREP, Asia Pacific ASA and Sea Australia conducted an SEA and evaluated potential future shoreline impacts of oil spills from WWII shipwreck Hoyo Maru on Chuuk Lagoon in the Federated States of Micronesia.
 - iii. 2003: The World Wide Fund for Nature conducted an SEA of Fiji's Tourism Development Plan in collaboration with the Ministry for Tourism.
 - iv. 2003: SPREP prepared an SEA on the wreck of the USS Mississinewa, a sunken WWII US military oil tanker, to determine the environmental impacts of the oil spill.
 - v. Recently in 2018, the Federated of Micronesia initiated an SEA process to support integrated land and sea planning and management.
9. With limited capacity on SEA in the region and given the increasing interest to effectively address new emerging issues such as seabed mining and multiple development projects in the region and within countries, it is pertinent to develop appropriate SEA guidelines that are integrated and linked to planning, policy and decision making that will assist in achieving sustainable development goals and priorities and foster cross-sector collaboration and coordination. To realise this, it is important to ensure that a participatory and engaging awareness raising and capacity building process is established as integral parts for developing SEA frameworks and guidelines.

Regional SEA Guidelines Development - status

10. In 2018, SPREP under the UNEP EU ACP-MEA Capacity Building project phase 2 initiated the development of the Strategic Environment Assessment guidelines with the intent of having it endorsed in the 29th SPREP Meeting.
11. Initial discussions on the need for developing SEA guidelines was carried out in September 2018 which was attended by representatives of twelve Pacific island countries. The drafting of the SEA guidelines followed this with the first draft circulated in April this year to Members for comments.
12. Feedback was received from only one Member which prompted the Secretariat to review and adjust the process for developing the SEA Guidelines to ensure that Members are fully informed and actively engaged in developing the SEA Guidelines.

Next steps – process for finalising the SEA Guidelines

13. Building on the current draft SEA Guidelines already developed and circulated to Members, the Secretariat, will develop and deliver targeted awareness raising and capacity building activities to gauge input, raise awareness and understanding, and build capacity on SEA. Based on the availability of resources, the Secretariat will endeavour to implement these activities through a mix of country specific, sub-regional and regional level activities that could be linked to relevant on-going and new activities, as appropriate.
14. The main outcome of this process would be the finalisation of the SEA Guidelines with input from Members and key stakeholders and partners.
15. It is envisaged that the process and the final SEA Guidelines are completed by the end of June 2020 with the Guidelines submitted for consideration by the Executive Board in September 2020.

Recommendation

16. The Meeting is invited to:
 1. **note** efforts by the Secretariat to progress the development of the SEA guidelines for PICs and Territories;
 2. **endorse** the proposed process for finalising the SEA Guidelines that integrates key awareness raising and capacity building activities for Members as key aspects of the process towards the finalisation of the SEA guidelines; and
 3. **endorse** the proposed timeline for completing the SEA Guidelines for the Executive Board's consideration at its meeting in 2020.

26 July, 2019