

Scoping

Determining the scope of the EIA must be the first formal stage in the process. It is the first opportunity for public involvement and can set the tone of the developer—public interaction. Considering the potential importance of scoping in successfully completing the EIA, the limited number of publications available is surprising. What publications do exist focus more on public participation during the environmental impact assessment process than they do on the importance of determining components and alternatives to include in the assessment. An example of the need for public participation is found in [14]; they devote a chapter to public participation in the UK and the European Union. More comprehensively, the Canadian Environmental Protection Agency (CEPA) demonstrates the importance of public participation in the scoping process. As described by [17], the CEPA includes Aboriginal peoples' values and needs in the EIA process. Canter [4] includes a chapter discussing public involvement in the overall EIA process. The chapter considers both the advantages and the disadvantages of involving the public in the scoping project. Canter also includes a model for such participation. Abundant references can be found that describe the scoping process and results in specific environmental impact assessments, but there are very few texts or other academic considerations of the rationale, process, and goals of scoping. From the regulatory perspective, both France and the U.S. require public involvement in scoping when the project is of sufficient size or

potential adverse impacts. Otherwise, such participation may not be mandated by statute or regulation.

The scoping stage serves three functions within the environmental impact assessment process:

1. It is the first opportunity for public input.
2. It identifies environmental, social, economic and cultural components that might be considered in the assessment.
3. It allows for suggestions of more (or different) alternatives than the project proponent might have recognized.

Public input to the assessment process takes different forms depending on the jurisdictional level and project size. Construction of a boat launching facility (ramp and parking lot) on a lake is quite different from construction of a multi-megawatt electrical-generating plant. The former is probably under the permitting authority of a state or local jurisdiction and could be expected to have little opposition and few environmental impacts. The latter is almost certainly under the regulatory control of an authority at the national level and will be closely examined by many different interest groups.

For small projects with limited and local potential impacts (such as the recreational boating facility example) public participation during the scoping phase may consist of a notice published in the local newspaper, a mailing to adjacent property owners, and notification of other state regulatory and resource agencies. Written comments are solicited and the lead agency determines the scope of the assessment.

For major developments with the potential for regional or national adverse impacts (e.g., the power plant example) the scoping phase may involve several public hearings, widely publicized to bring in as many stakeholders as possible. At the hearing the project is explained, comments are elicited, and the process repeated at different locations and dates. While the lead agency still makes the final decision on the scope of the assessment process, attendees of the meetings should be kept informed of the decisions.

With regard to the components addressed during the assessment, there are generally accepted lists of physical, chemical, biological, social, cultural, and economic factors for all environmental impact assessments. Quite often the scope of the components to be considered in the EIA is decided by the lead agency or the technical team preparing the