

POLICY SUMMARY

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

revised Oct 2006

Strategic Environmental Assessment is a process for the identification and assessment of the potential environmental impacts of plans and programmes with a view to integrating environmental considerations into their preparation and adoption.

SNH's vision is for Strategic Environmental Assessment to provide a simple and effective mechanism to ensure that environmental issues are taken into account at every stage in the cycle of plan and programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and review.

Background

EU Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment' (referred to as 'The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive' came into force in Scotland on 20 July 2004. The Directive affects plans or programmes for which preparation began after that date, or those for which preparation was begun before but which are only adopted after 21 July 2006.

Through the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 the Scottish Executive has legislated to apply SEA across all new strategies, plans and programmes developed by the public sector in Scotland. This goes beyond the requirements of the European Directive. The Act came into affect from 20 February 2006. More limited Regulations applying SEA only to those plans and programmes covered by the European Directive were in force from 20 July 2004.

Plans and programmes covering cross-border or non-devolved policy areas and those plans and programmes of other Member States that potentially affect Scotland and which the UK Government are consulted on are subject to separate SEA regulations developed by the UK Government.

Benefits of SEA

SNH considers that the implementation of SEA will achieve better integration of environmental considerations at the heart of decision-making through a more rigorous and transparent planning process. We anticipate that SEA will benefit the development planning process and provide a framework which will enable EIA of individual projects consequent upon the plan or programme to be more efficiently and effectively targeted. SEA will contribute an environmental dimension towards an overall sustainability appraisal, and hence will foster sustainable development if considered alongside appraisals of social and economic impacts. SNH's aim is to help ensure that these benefits can be achieved through simple and effective

procedures that add value and avoid unnecessary bureaucratic burdens and delay. If this can be achieved, SNH will welcome the extension of SEA to cover all new strategies, plans and programmes which are likely to have significant environmental impact.

SNH's Role and Responsibilities in SEA

SNH has the following roles and responsibilities in relation to SEA:

- SNH is formally defined as a 'consultation authority' under the terms of the SEA Directive (along with SEPA and Historic Scotland) and is required to be consulted at the screening and scoping stages on the detailed contents of environmental reports prepared as part of the appraisal process;
- SNH will have an important role as a source of environmental information and expertise, both locally and nationally, to inform appraisal of proposed strategies, plans and programmes and for monitoring their subsequent impacts;
- SNH as a public body will be required to undertake SEA of its own proposed strategies, plans and programmes.

In responding to SEA responsibilities, SNH will:

- as a Consultation Authority at the Screening stage within 28 days of receipt of the report, comment on whether or not the plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects and whether or not an SEA should be undertaken.
- as a Consultation Authority, at the Scoping stage within 35 days of receiving under Regulation 17(2) sufficient details of the plan or programme from the Responsible Authority, comment on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the Environmental Report;
- work with the SE and other Consultation Authorities to provide guidance on the implementation of SEA;
- respond to requests from Responsible Authorities for data and information during the completion and adoption of the Environmental Report in accordance with our *publication scheme* and commitments under the Environmental Information Regulations;
- advise, to the extent that we are able, on the adequacies and implications of the environmental assessment, the effects of any mitigation measures and on the monitoring measures proposed, all in relation to the natural heritage;
- at the UK level, work with the other country agencies to clarify and agree an approach to SEA in cross-border plans and non-devolved matters.

SNH along with SEPA and Historic Scotland has published a draft [‘Information Note for Responsible Authorities’](#)¹.

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¹ The Information Note for Responsible Authorities on Procedures for Consultation with the Scottish Consultation Authorities and Access to Information and Advice’ by SEPA, Historic Scotland and SNH was subject to consultation in late 2005. It is still to be finalised but the consultation version is available at: http://www.sepa.org.uk/pdf/consultation/closed/2006/sea/annex_b.pdf.