

# **The Role of Significance Criteria in SEA**

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# Introduction

- **The following slides were the product of a Practitioners Workshop held at IAIA04 – Vancouver in April 2004**
- **We are extremely grateful for those who participated in the workshop for their contributions**
- **To contribute to a paper on the workshop please contact:  
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# Introduction

- **Issues**
- **What criteria**
- **Evaluating significance**
- **Who's criteria are they?**
- **Levels of harmonisation**
- **Qualitative impacts**
- **Conclusions**

# Significance

- **Issues**
  - **Reliance on expert judgement - Arbitrary assignment of impacts to a 3 or 5 or more point scale**
  - **Need for clear criteria given multiple and diffuse actions and effects**
  - **Recognise timescales of plans and projects – does significance change over time?**
  - **Need for consistency**

# Significance

- **Issues**
  - **Dialogue with stakeholders**
  - **The use of thresholds**
  - **Reference to legislation and regulations**
  - **Some notion of environmental capacity?**

# Significance

- **What criteria**
  - **Criteria must be relevant to the decision which also has a scale dimension**
  - **Role of thresholds – would cumulative effects be missed?**
  - **Role of the precautionary principle**
  - **Consideration of intergenerational issues**
  - **Not assessing what is not known**

# Significance

- **Evaluating significance**
  - **Would the impact be controversial?**
  - **Would the impact establish a precedent?**
  - **Are environmental and health standards and objectives being threatened?**
  - **Are mitigating measures available and how costly are they?**
  - **Can the impact be better assessed at a more local plan or in a project?**

# Significance

- **Evaluating significance**
  - **Which community groups would be affected and in what way?**
  - **Is the impact reversible or irreversible?**
  - **Does the impact occur over the long or short term, is it continuous or temporary and increase or decrease with time?**
  - **Is the impact at a local, regional, national or global scale?**

# Significance

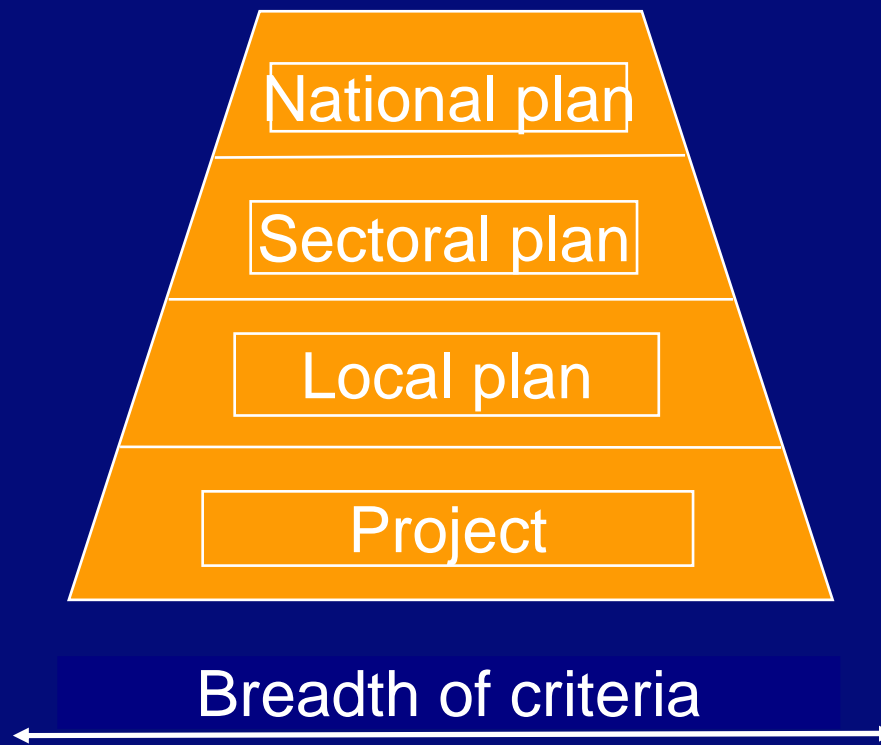
- **Who's criteria are they?**
  - While criteria may be set by plan-makers, public really set criteria e.g. GMOs
  - Role of the public in setting criteria
  - Advocate needed for future generations
  - How are criteria set/validated?
  - Which stakeholders are involved?
  - Does the decision making process affect the criteria?

# Significance

- **Levels of harmonisation**
  - **Locally defined criteria or national criteria?**
  - **Frameworks set nationally for each sector**
  - **Global impacts require international criteria e.g. greenhouse gases**
  - **Avoid over prescription on local issues**
  - **Is a major impact in a plan SEA the same as a major impact in a project EIA?**

# Significance

- **Levels of harmonisation**



# Significance

- **Qualitative impacts**
  - **Need to explore mechanisms for stakeholder involvement setting criteria**
  - **Involve stakeholders with traditional knowledge**
  - **Some level of quantification possible with qualitative impacts**
  - **Political will can influence approach**

# Conclusions

- **The main conclusions to emerge were:**
  - **The need for a set of guiding principles towards good practice**
  - **Further debate on levels of harmonisation**
  - **Involvement of stakeholder in establishing significance criteria**