Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

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Social Impact Assessment Guideline

For State significant projects

July 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Contents

Table 1: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EP&A Act	*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*
CPP	Community Participation Plan
SEARs	Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SIMP	Social Impact Management Plan
SSD	State significant development
SSI	State significant infrastructure

Section 6 includes a glossary of terms used in this guideline.

1 Introduction

Certain projects are considered State significant based on their scale, nature, location, or strategic importance to the State's development. State significant projects can impact people in many ways -both positively and negatively.

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is a process used to identify, predict and evaluate the likely social impacts of a project. It also proposes responses that aim to avoid, mitigate or reduce negative impacts and enhance positive impacts.

'Social impacts' generally refer to the consequences that people experience when a new project brings change. For the purposes of SIA, 'people' includes as individuals, households, groups, communities, or organisations.

Figure 1 illustrates how the SIA assesses projects from the perspectives of people, which means developments are more likely to be socially sustainable. See Section 3.2 for an explanation of the terms used in Figure 1. The SIA is one input to the broader Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process that also considers environmental and economic impacts.

This guideline is designed to help guide proponents through preparing an SIA. It draws on the agreed principles and frameworks of various international institutions, including the International Association for Impact Assessment and the Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment.

It details how social impacts should be identified, evaluated, responded to and, if appropriate, monitored and managed.

Figure 1 Social elements of value to people

State significant projects[1]

A State significant project refers to development under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) that is either:

- State significant development (SSD)
- State significant infrastructure (SSI)
- Critical State significant infrastructure.

The EP&A Act requires development consent or approval for these projects and sets a framework and requirements for the assessment and determination of applications for these projects.

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[1] Under the EP&A Act, development can become SSD or SSI in 2 ways: through a declaration in a SEPP or through a declaration in an order made by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces.

1.1 When this guideline applies

All State significant projects need to prepare an SIA in accordance with the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs).

The SIA should be targeted and proportionate to the project's likely social impacts, and tailored to its specific context.

For most State significant projects, proponents are required to prepare an SIA in accordance with this guideline. For a project with no or low impacts, the SIA may be only a few pages long whereas for a large or complex project, a more substantial report is likely to be required.

For State significant housing projects, the EIS must consider social impacts. If any significant social impacts are identified, an SIA must be prepared in accordance with this guideline. If not, proponents can refer to housing-specific SIA guidance on the SIA webpage that illustrates how to consider social impacts for these projects.

This guideline recognises that an SIA is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Social impacts will vary based on the nature, context and scale of a project. Social impacts may be both positive and negative, direct and indirect, or tangible and intangible.

The guideline provides:

- a rigorous framework to identify, evaluate and respond to social impacts
- a scalable approach that adjusts to the nature, scale and social context of each project
- guidance on meaningful, respectful and effective stakeholder and community engagement and how this engagement should inform the identification and assessment of social impacts from project planning to post-approval
- the means to obtain reliable, relevant information, insights and analysis for decision-makers
- advice on how the SIA can inform ongoing engagement, project refinement, monitoring and adaptive management.

Benefits of undertaking an SIA in accordance with the guideline

Using this guideline during the preparation of an SIA can:

- build higher levels of community understanding of projects and their impacts
- help proponents to understand what is required to meet the Department's expectations
- give stakeholders and the community confidence that their concerns and perspectives are being considered early in the assessment
- reduce project risks and costs related to unplanned or reactive management of social impacts
- assist agencies during business case planning to identify potential social risks and constraints
- facilitate improved proponent-community relations and more socially sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes
- streamline assessments by reducing departmental requests for more information
- better integrate the SIA and EIA.
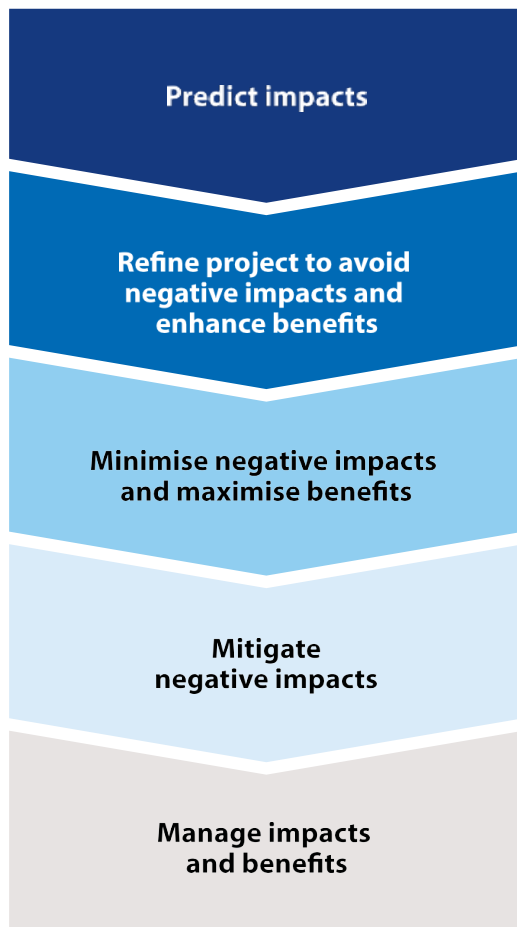
1.2   Using this guideline

This guideline has been developed for proponents of State significant projects. It can also be used by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the Department), and the community.

It explains how to assess likely social impacts for State significant projects under the EP&A Act.

Among other things, the EP&A Act aims to promote the social and economic welfare of the community and facilitate ecologically sustainable development. It integrates relevant economic, environmental and social considerations in planning and assessment decisions and enables the community to participate in assessment.

SIA and this guideline provide a framework to identify and manage social impacts. This is done by first predicting impacts; refining the project to avoid negative impacts and enhance benefits; minimising then mitigating negative impacts and maximising benefits; and finally managing impacts, as illustrated in Figure 2.

This guideline emphasises high-quality assessment and high-quality outcomes. It allows for information gleaned during the SIA to be used for other purposes, such as engagement, project risk assessment and project benefit realisation.

The guideline is supported by a technical supplement which, while not a mandatory requirement, provides useful additional guidance.

Figure 2 Managing social impacts

Other resources

A **technical supplement** sets out worked examples, social impact prompts for various development types, methods for collating and analysing social data, methods for evaluating significance, and requirements for mitigation, monitoring and adaptive management. The supplement will be updated from time to time to include best-practice examples and new research.

The Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects provides guidance for proponents to plan, undertake and report on engagement that is meaningful and proportionate. These guidelines support community participation in planning and assessment. They align with this guideline and should be considered alongside it.

The **Community Participation Plan (CPP)** sets out the Department's approach to community participation including within the assessment process.

The **Community Guide to Planning** is designed for the community, to help people navigate the NSW planning system. It details who does the planning, how it works and how the community can get involved.

1.3   Principles

The principles in Table 2 support an evidence-based approach to effective SIA. The table will be a useful reference throughout the SIA and support the appropriate collection, assessment and analysis of information to inform the SIA.

Table 2: Principles to guide the SIA[2]

Principles	Description
Action-oriented	Defines specific actions to deliver practical, achievable and effective outcomes for people.
Adaptive	Establishes systems to respond to new or different circumstances to support continuous improvement.
Culturally responsive	Develops culturally informed approaches and methodologies to ensure Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities are engaged appropriately, and their perspectives, insights and feedback are valued.
Distributive equity	Considers how different groups will experience social impacts differently (particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups, future generations compared with current generations, and differences by gender, age and cultural group).
Impartial	Uses fair, unbiased research methods and follows relevant ethical standards
Inclusive	Seeks to hear, understand, respect and document the perspectives of all likely affected people. Uses respectful, meaningful and effective engagement activities tailored to the needs of those being engaged (e.g. being culturally sensitive and accessible)
Integrated	Uses and references relevant information and analysis from other assessments to avoid duplication. Supports effective integration of social, economic and environmental considerations in decision-making.
Life-cycle focus	Seeks to understand likely impacts (including cumulative impacts) at all project stages, from pre-construction to post-closure/operation commencement.
Material	Identifies which likely social impacts matter the most for people and/or pose the greatest risk/opportunity to those expected to be affected
Precautionary	If there are risks of serious or irreversible environmental damage (including harm to people), avoids using any limits on full scientific certainty as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental (including social) degradation.
Proportionate	Ensures the scope and scale of the SIA corresponds to the scope and scale of the likely social impacts.
Rigorous	Uses appropriate, accepted social science methods and robust evidence from authoritative and trustworthy sources.
Transparent	Explains, justifies and makes available information, methods and assumptions so that people can see how their input has been considered.

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[2] Adapted from Vanclay F. 2003. 'International principles for social impact assessment', *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 21(1), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.3152/147154603781766491; and Vanclay F. et al. 2015. Social impact assessment: Guidance for assessing and managing the social impacts of projects. International Association for Impact Assessment. https://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/SIA_Guidance_Document_IAIA.pdf.

1.4   Guideline language

This guideline uses words such as 'should' or 'suggested', rather than prescriptive terms such as 'must' or 'will'. This allows for a nuanced approach that is proportionate to the proposed project and reflects the range of development types that this guideline applies to.

SIA uses terms that may have a different meaning in everyday language. Section 6 clarifies what these terms mean within the context of this guideline.

2   SIA overview

SIA generally occurs across 3 phases from project development and scoping, through assessment and into post approval (Figure 3).

The first phase of SIA is scoping. It involves scoping, initial assessment, refining and planning. It occurs early in project development and is used to identify likely social impacts before considering suitable refinements or other early responses. This phase identifies the project's likely social impacts, the level of analysis they require and how it will be undertaken in the more detailed assessment phase of the SIA.

The second phase is the assessment. In this phase the identified issues and impacts are analysed, and appropriate responses and management measures are developed and finalised. This results in an SIA, which forms a part of the EIS. For a low impact project, the SIA may be just a few pages or a chapter in the EIS; for a large, complex project, it may be a more substantial standalone report.

The third phase occurs post-approval. It focusses on implementing the social impact mitigation and management measures outlined in the SIA. For some projects - depending on their level of impact, complexity or conditions of consent- this many include preparing a Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) to verify and refine those measures. Not all projects will require post-approval monitoring and management of social impacts.

Figure 3 summarises the steps and outputs within each SIA phase.
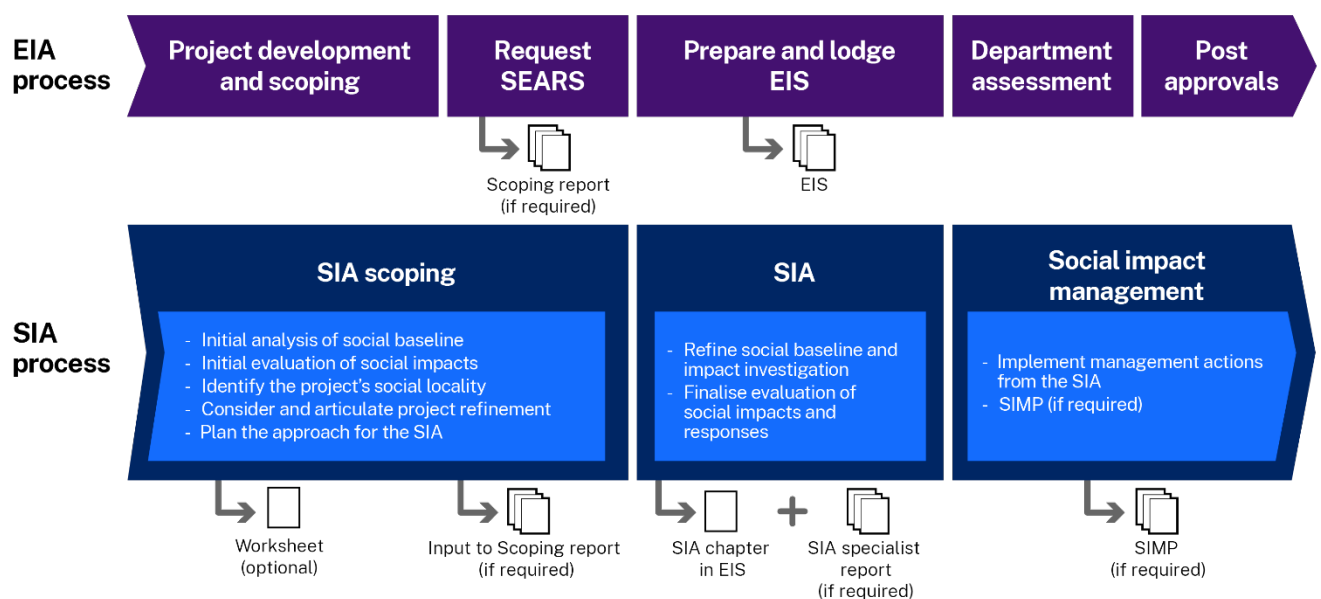
Figure 3 SIA aligned with EIA

Engagement to inform SIA

Engagement is a vital part of social research to inform all stages of SIA – from scoping and assessment to post approval mitigation and management. While overall project engagement is important for establishing an informed community, SIA specific engagement builds on this and focusses on engaging affected people and other key stakeholders. Its purpose is to inform each step of the SIA process – scoping, assessing, mitigating, evaluating, managing and monitoring social impacts.

Appendix A contains more information on SIA engagement, including its objectives.

3 Scoping

SIA involves social research, analysis and assessment which is informed by effective community engagement. The process is often iterative, and non-linear. SIA scoping includes many of these steps at an initial or preliminary level, with these later refined and finalised in the SIA. This chapter describes what is involved in the SIA scoping phase.

3.1 Scoping overview

The scoping phase identifies and determines the size and scale of likely social impacts of the project and, in turn, the scope of the SIA.

Scoping identifies the level and approach for assessment of each social impact

Starting the SIA process early through scoping is important for all State significant projects. A project can be adjusted or refined in response to identified impacts, which may address community views. This can reduce the risk of delays from unexpected community responses or unforeseen impacts.

In carrying out the SIA scoping:

- gain an initial understanding of all aspects of the project (see text box below)
- conduct an initial evaluation of the likely social impacts both positive and negative, across the eight categories of impact identified in Figure 1 (see also Section 3.2),
- consider potential refinements or approaches in response to likely social impacts (see Section 3.3)
- gain an initial understanding of the project's social locality (see Section 3.4)
- gain an initial understanding of the characteristics of the communities within the project's social locality (described as the social baseline see Section 3.5)
- consider how people might experience impacts differently
- determine the level to which each impact needs to be assessed in the SIA, and
- consider and plan the remainder of the SIA tasks, including engagement.

The technical supplement provides further guidance and scoping tools.

Understand the project

Consider all elements of the project that may interact with people, such as:

- associated activities, including ancillary works and infrastructure
- construction methods and their duration
- methods of operation
- nature of the workforce and any future users
- all lifecycle stages including decommissioning or closure
- direct and indirect impacts (e.g. transport and logistics corridors, property acquisition)

Scoping report

For all projects the outcomes and findings of this scoping should inform planning of the SIA. If a scoping report is being prepared to support the request for SEARs, include the findings of SIA scoping. This can include:

- the identified impacts
- the level of proposed assessment of each impact
- a description of how the scoped impacts will be researched in the SIA
- a description of any project refinements that have been made to address social impacts and improve social outcomes

For further advice on scoping reports, refer to the State Significant Development and State Significant Infrastructure Guidelines – Preparing a Scoping Report.

3.2   Identify likely social impacts

To begin, identify likely social impacts, both positive and negative, and analyse how they will be distributed.

Social impacts are considered across eight categories illustrated in Figure 1. Use the categories, explained below to identify all relevant and important likely social impacts:

- **way of life**, including how people live, how they get around, how they work, how they play, and how they interact each day
- **community**, including composition, cohesion, character, how the community functions, resilience, and people's sense of place

- **accessibility**, including how people access and use infrastructure, services and facilities, whether provided by a public, private, or not-for- profit organisation

- **culture**, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, including shared beliefs, customs, practices, obligations, values and stories, and connections to Country, land, waterways, places and buildings

- **health and wellbeing**, including physical and mental health especially for people vulnerable to social exclusion or substantial change, psychological stress resulting from financial or other pressures, access to open space and effects on public health

- **surroundings**, including ecosystem services such as shade, pollution control, erosion control, public safety and security, access to and use of the natural and built environment, and aesthetic value and amenity

- **livelihoods**, including people's capacity to sustain themselves through employment or business

- **decision-making systems**, including the extent to which people can have a say in decisions that affect their lives, and have access to complaint, remedy and grievance mechanisms.

Some projects may have impacts in all these categories, but others may only have a few. For example, an influx of workers could affect both 'way of life' and 'community'. Neatly categorising impacts is not as important as identifying and assessing them. Some project impacts may also relate to more than one social impact category.

The categories provide prompts to consider possible social impacts.

Social impacts should also be considered in context, such as:

- what project activities could induce social impacts for which people (see text box in Section 3.1)

- any other activities or projects that may combine to produce cumulative impacts

- what the social context is (see Section 3.5), such as:

  – the characteristics of the people that live, work, study or spend leisure time in the area, and

  – the environment, trends, and conditions people are experiencing

- whether the project meets the objectives of relevant environmental planning instruments, such as a local environmental plan

Combined social impacts can also occur where multiple impacts from the same project are experienced by the same people. Consider both combined and cumulative impacts, where relevant in the SIA process.

Consider how benefits and impacts are distributed differently between different social groups, and each group's capacity to respond to these. This includes impacts on Aboriginal communities, with consideration of livelihood and wellbeing as well as cultural impacts. Depending on the project, it may be necessary to consider and assess reasonable and justified fears and concerns held by the community in relation to any of the above categories. The focus should be on their logical basis, not merely their number.

Scope and plan the social impact assessment

Once likely social impacts are identified, determine the level of assessment required for each impact in the SIA. The technical supplement defines four assessment levels; minor, standard and detailed levels of assessment, and 'not relevant' where potential social impacts are immaterial and do not warrant assessment. For each impact plan your method for assessing it in the SIA.

Further guidance on identifying social impacts and determining the required level of assessment is included in the technical supplement.

Consider discussing the initial assessment with the Department to ensure social impacts are adequately scoped. This will help to avoid later delays if additional assessment or information is needed. Where standard or detailed impacts are identified a more comprehensive SIA is required.

3.3   Refining the project

The steps of identifying and analysing likely social impacts may prompt refinement of the project design and exploration of alternatives to reduce social impacts and improve social outcomes. Testing and refining the project design in response to social impacts is likely to be iterative. If project refinement has occurred after consideration of social impacts, describe any changes to the project design in the scoping report (if required) and the SIA that is part of the EIS.

Negative social impacts

Negative social impacts may include:

• decreased amenity during construction programs affecting local business livelihoods

• increase in dust or noise impacts affecting community health and wellbeing and surroundings

• alterations to traffic routes reducing people's ability to move around in their community, in turn affecting community health and wellbeing

• land use changes that affect sense of place and community character and people's sense of place inducing a sense of cultural loss for Aboriginal people.

Positive social impacts

Positive social impacts are equally important, with assessment including the positive social consequences of change (e.g. improved public health resulting from increased public space, greater access to areas of importance to the community), rather than simply stating the change itself. Be careful to assess positive impacts impartially and not to overstate or understate them. Positive social impacts may include:

• improved livelihoods from increased jobs and business opportunities

• improved public/community health and wellbeing and surroundings

• stronger sense of place and community cohesion through community investment or development of shared infrastructure

• community development initiatives, capacity building and stronger community institutions

Cumulative social impacts

Cumulative social impacts can arise from project activities (such as dust and noise), or project resource needs (e.g. skilled labour, housing or water) in combination with those of other relevant future projects. The most effective way to assess cumulative social impacts is to consider them from the viewpoint of those experiencing them.

The Department's Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Projects complements this guide and can also be used to inform the SIA and EIS assessment.

3.4 Social locality

The SIA assesses social impacts within the social locality which is defined by where people are likely to experience those impacts.

There is no fixed or predefined geographic boundary for a social locality. Defining it arbitrarily (e.g. by the local suburb, or 'within 500m') is unlikely to reflect how impacts are likely to be distributed. Rather, the social locality should be defined uniquely for each project to reflect the spatial distribution of its impacts. The social locality does not need to align with the boundary of secondary data that may be used for the social baseline.

The social locality should be developed during scoping phase and refined throughout the SIA process. The term 'social locality' is similar to the commonly used 'area of social influence' in SIA practice.

Identifying the social locality begins with understanding the nature of the project, the characteristics of affected communities (see social baseline Section 3.5) and how different people may reasonably perceive or experience positive and negative impacts.

Some State significant projects may have a relatively focused social locality, while others may be spatially and/or temporally dispersed, involving different timeframes and/or multiple areas that require different considerations for different people. Some projects may involve a longer duration of impacts that may be experienced over multiple areas.

The social locality helps identify and consider multiple and often overlapping impacts (i.e. combined impacts). It can also assist to consider the different gradients of impact that people may be experience in different locations. This allows social research and engagement efforts to be more targeted and effective.

Mapping is an effective way of illustrating the social locality. It can provide a clear overview of where the greatest impacts are likely to occur and illustrate any differences how those impacts are distributed across the locality.[3]

Figure 4 represents a relatively confined social locality. Figure 5 represents a more diverse social locality.

Figure 4 - Simple project social locality
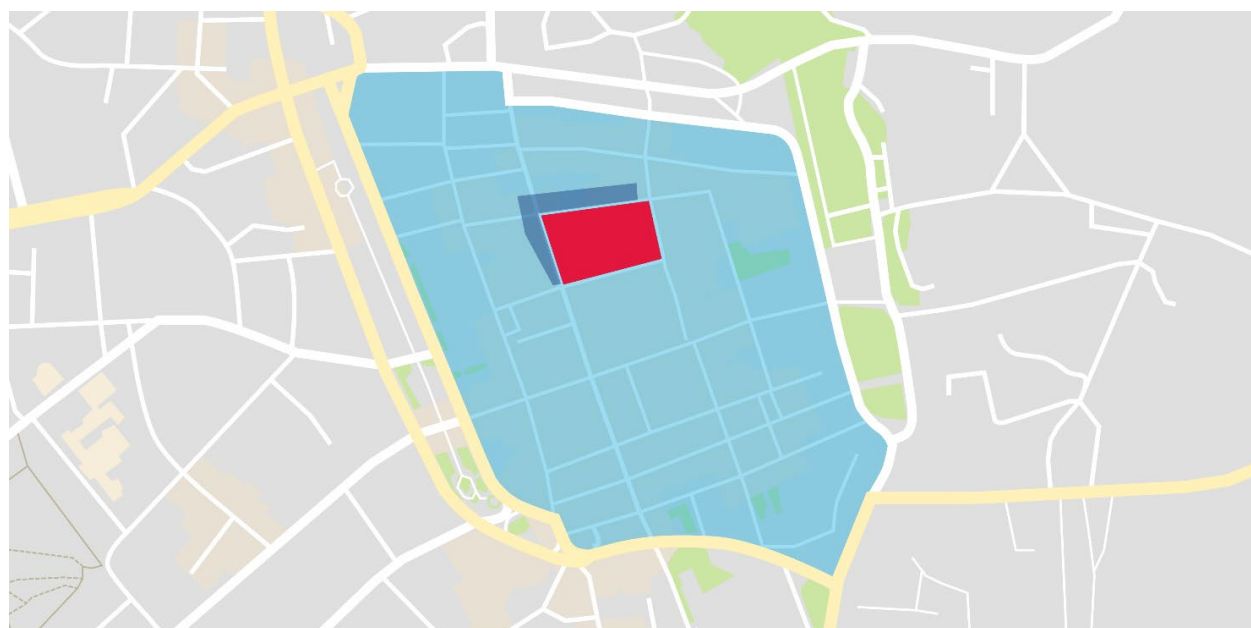
Legend

■ Multitude of moderate direct impacts   ■ Project's Social Locality   ■ Project Location

Determining the social locality for this example primary school project in Figure 4 considered:

- the area that will benefit from improved school infrastructure and service in the school catchment (light blue)
- way of life and access impacts for some nearby neighbours where reduced parking and increased vehicle movement and associated noise may be experienced (darker blue)

Information about the beneficiaries of the school will likely be readily available from school and other secondary data. Impacts to neighbours would be informed by engagement and review of other specialist reports.

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[3] Note that some social impacts may be experienced by communities of interest that are not usefully represented spatially, but these would be described.

Figure 5 - Diverse project social locality

Legend

■ Project's social locality (light blue) ■ Multitude of moderate direct impacts (medium blue) ■ Transformative level of direct impacts (dark blue) ■ Project location (red)
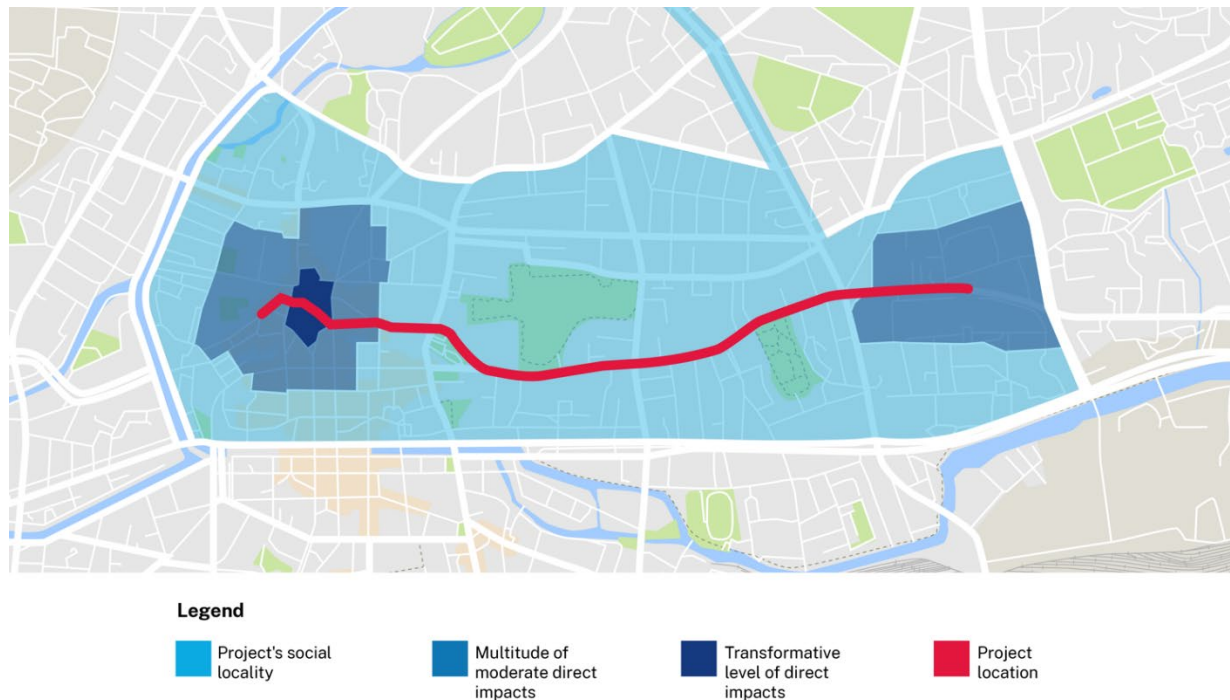
Determining the social locality for this example road tunnel project in Figure 5 considered:

- the area that will benefit from improved access (e.g. reduced traffic) during operation, but also from congestion and access issues during construction (light blue)

- way of life improvements (e.g. travel times) for users during operation (light blue)

- impacts to surroundings and accessibility in proximity to the tunnel portals from noise, vibration, traffic and altered travel routes during construction (medium blue)

- impacts on community and way of life from land acquisition and disturbance (dark blue)

The figure illustrates how impacts are layered and where the greatest social impacts are likely to be experienced across the community. These differences would be reflected in the planning of proportionate and targeted SIA research (secondary data review and primary social research/engagement).

3.5 Social baseline

The social baseline study describes the social context in the social locality *without* the project. It documents the existing and historical social environment, conditions and trends relevant to the impacts identified.

The study is a benchmark against which direct, indirect and cumulative impacts can be predicted and analysed. Tailor the scope and content of the social baseline study to the project context and the level of assessment of social impacts using meaningful indicators and information.

To prepare the social baseline, consider:

- **who may be affected** by the project; how they may be affected; their social, cultural and demographic characteristics (including Aboriginal populations); their relevant interests and values; the things that differentiate groups (such as cultural diversity) as well as things that they have in common; and the broader community and public interest

- **whether any vulnerable or marginalised people may be affected** by the project, including people on low incomes; people living with disabilities, chronic medical conditions or in poor health requiring access to services; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are homeless or in insecure housing; people who are unable to represent themselves; or other vulnerable people such as elderly people, children or single-parent households

- **built or natural features** on or near the project that could be affected, and the tangible and intangible values that people may associate with these features, such as a sense of place or belonging, rural character, connection to Country and value of stories within the cultural landscapes, community cohesion, and use of natural areas and resources

- **relevant social, cultural, and demographic trends, and other change processes** now or in the past near the project and in the broader region, including how people have felt or experienced these changes; community resilience; how Aboriginal people engage in the area (past and present); different trends and patterns around issues like rental affordability, employment, shifting land uses, or population and demographic; or experiences of extreme weather and natural hazards

- **the history** of the proposed project and the area, and any similar experiences or impacts people in the locality have experienced from other existing or planned projects, including change prior to, or created by, the project's planning assessment; how people reacted to early discussions; how these discussions and other experiences affected the broader community; and the traditional Aboriginal use of the place, recent history of the place and people and any ongoing traumas.

Tailor the social baseline data so that it:
- illustrates what is important to people,
- is relevant and proportionate to the impacts, and
- provides evidence to support social impact assessment and management.

3.5.1 Social data

The social baseline is usually described by drawing on primary and secondary data that may be quantitative or qualitative.

Existing data sources such as the ABS, NSW Health, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, data from similar projects, published research, relevant local, State and Commonwealth strategic plans and policies, and the outcomes from previous community engagement, will inform the preparation of the SIA. These are considered secondary data sources.

In addition, seek out primary data through engagement with key stakeholders such as:

- Discussions with State agencies.

- Interviews, focus groups or community workshops.

- Written and oral stories, first-hand testimonies or community histories.

- Community surveys.

Primary social data is important to:

- Test and validate secondary data.

- Provide social information that is not documented.

- Understand nuance and difference in how people may experience impacts, particularly those that may be vulnerable and marginalized.

Primary data should be grounded in people's reports of their actual experiences, views, and perceptions, and informed by details of the project.

Social data should be used to demonstrate where the social locality is demographically, socially and/or culturally diverse, or where some groups may be more affected than others.

> **Where groups are impacted differently or communities are diverse, disaggregate social data to illustrate these differences**

Use social science research methods that are tailored and proportionate to the social context and level of assessment for the impact. Use relevant indicators and information and note any limitations.

Information and insights from all sources should be trustworthy, credible, rigorous, up to date and relevant to the social context –for example, regional data may not be relevant across all communities and may need to be disaggregated locally.

While community profile data should inform an understanding of the demographics of the social locality, further comparative analysis may be important to identify differences with State, regional or district trends.

Councils can provide valuable information and insights on key social groups, other current projects and stressors on the community, strategic plans, local data, networks and how to access diverse, minority and marginalised groups.

The scoping phase of the SIA, including defining the social locality, helps determine data requirements. For example, an impact requiring only a minor assessment may not require collection of any primary data. Conversely, an impact identified as requiring detailed impact assessment will need primary data collection and targeted engagement. The technical supplement provides more guidance on appropriate data collection for different levels of assessment of social impacts.

For project modifications, data may come from the previous assessment that resulted in the project's approval or from monitoring post-approval. It may also be necessary to obtain additional primary data, depending on the nature of the modification. This will allow for the consideration of any existing impacts from the project and any cumulative impacts that may be generated through a modification.

Collectively, this data will paint a picture of what is important to people and how they may be affected. When articulating this material, consider:

- What features of the community, the social locality, and/or the landscape do people value – from urban areas, the sense of community or the accessibility of services, to natural and diverse environments or quiet/vibrant neighbourhoods?

- How do these features influence local people's way of life, health or wellbeing?

- How might the project affect these features, and for which groups?

- How could the project be modified to enhance these features and how they affect people's wellbeing?

- Although the project may provide benefits in the longer term, how might the project be designed to avoid and minimise any short-term adverse impacts?

4   Assessment and responses

4.1   Overview and reporting

The second phase of the SIA is summarised in the SIA chapter of the EIS. Depending on the scale of the SIA, a standalone technical study may be required to underpin the chapter and be appended to the EIS.

Typically, the SIA should:

- predict and analyse the extent and nature of likely social impacts against baseline conditions using accepted social science assessment methods

- evaluate, draw attention to and prioritise the social impacts that are important to people, as informed though engagement

- develop appropriate and justified responses (e.g. avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures) to social impacts, and identify and explain residual social impacts

- propose arrangements to monitor and manage residual social impacts, including unanticipated impacts, over the life of the project (including post- closure phases for extractive industry projects).

   The size and structure of the SIA should reflect the scale of social impacts.

A simple SIA (minimum 2 pages) that involves desk-top research and analysis may be appropriate for a project where there are minor impacts and/or the social issues are not relevant to the project. If no social impacts are identified, the SIA chapter in the EIS should summarise the scoping and assessment undertaken in the scoping phase and conclude that no further assessment is required. In such cases, A standalone report would not be required.

Examples where a simple SIA may be appropriate could include a warehouse on appropriately zoned land surrounded by other industrial developments, or a modification to an approved project that proposes no material change to the impacts identified in the original SIA for the development.

Where social impacts are more than minor, a standalone SIA report (up to 100 pages) is appropriate. The size of the report should be proportionate to the level of social impacts. For example, a 100-page SIA would be appropriate for a complex project that will result in significant and multiple social impacts, both positive and negative, and require bespoke mitigation and management measures.

The technical supplement includes a suggested structure for a standalone SIA report, and examples and guidance on common likely impacts.

4.2   Incorporating EIA elements

Often several related technical studies are undertaken during the EIA and incorporated into the EIS. Consider the results of these studies to identify if any social impacts are likely.

For example, relevant environmental studies may predict and model noise and air quality emissions during construction or the economic assessment may predict gains or losses from the project. The SIA complements these by examining how people might experience these environmental and economic changes.

Environmental and economic changes often result in social impacts

Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between the SIA and other specialist studies and how these relate to the EIA.
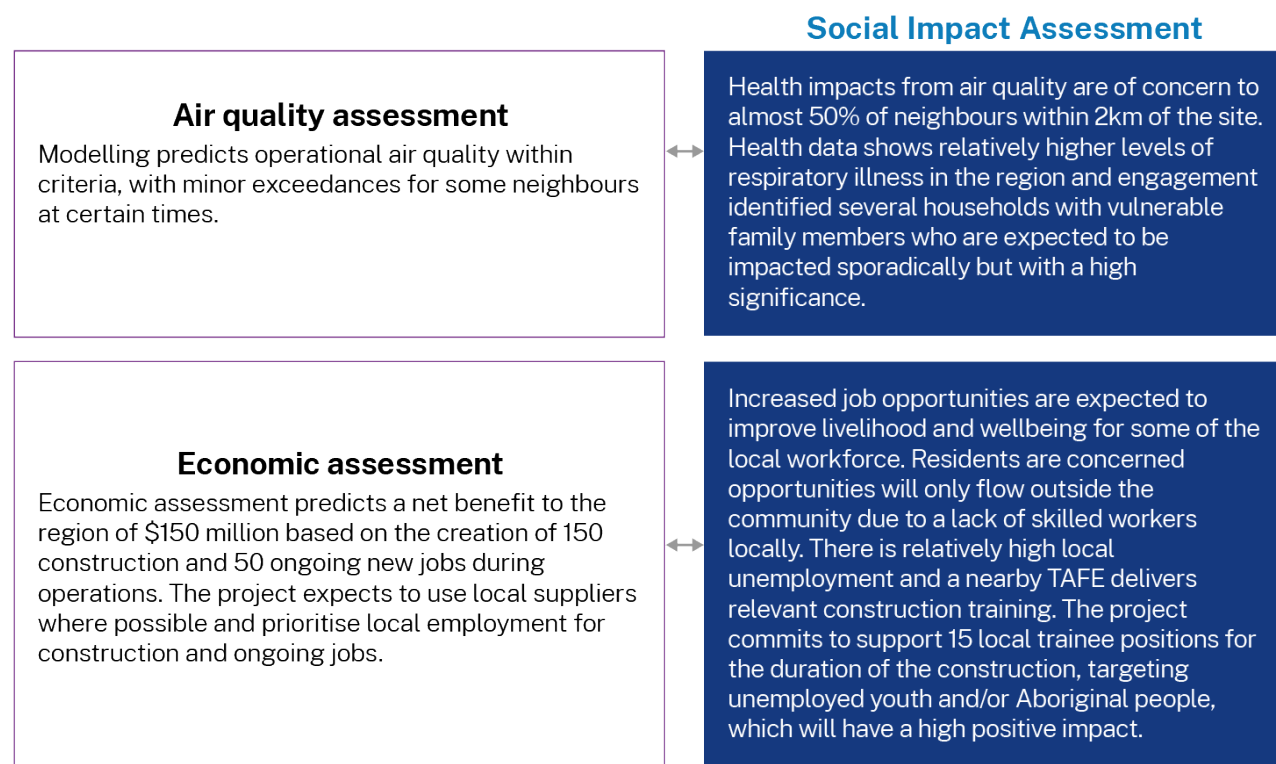

Figure 6 Example relationship between SIA and EIA specialist studies

4.3   Predict, analyse and evaluate social impacts

When describing and analysing the predicted nature and scale of likely social impacts for the lifecycle of the project, consider the following (as relevant):

- use accepted, suitable qualitative and quantitative social science research methods including workshops and focus groups; interviews and surveys; modelling of different scenarios (e.g. project vs no project); comparative studies; literature reviews; trend extrapolations; and risk/opportunity assessment

- engage with impacted people to obtain qualitative primary data (see **Appendix A** for potential research methodologies) and obtain multiple perspectives from various groups, proactively including groups that may have been historically marginalised

- consider likely social impacts from the perspectives of likely affected people

- acknowledge and account for uncertainties in predictions and data collection by applying sensitivity analysis (i.e. how would predictions change under different assumptions?), ensuring predictions consider any reasonably foreseeable scenarios

- comparatively assess positive and negative impacts of the project not proceeding

- use credible, reasonable and justified estimates and assumptions, particularly those that rely on expert judgement

- use comparative studies (where appropriate) to examine the accuracy of assumptions, by considering similarities and differences between the project and other recent projects

- describe and justify the methodologies used to predict and analyse social impacts, assumptions and estimates as well as outcomes of the assessment.

Evaluate likely social impacts, without mitigation or enhancement, by giving each one a significance rating.

Provide evidence to support the evaluation rating to demonstrate that it is impartial and based on:

- Outcomes of engagement.

- Relevant social research.

- Outcomes of environmental studies.

- Expert experience.

4.4   Responses

Outline proposed responses to positive and negative social impacts in the SIA, including how they will be implemented. Include key social responses in the mitigation measures table in the EIS.

Responses (for both negative and positive impacts) should specify when and where the measure will be applied, and how its effectiveness will be monitored and maintained. This includes, were appropriate, relevant measurable performance criteria and management objectives. Including proportionate, clear management and monitoring measures in the SIA can avoid the need for post-approval plans.

Ideally, involve affected communities in the identification, design and implementation of measures to manage social impacts and help to set relevant indicators and monitoring processes.

Once the proposed mitigation or enhancement measures are clear, re- evaluate the significance (for both negative and positive impacts) with mitigation in place, and describe the expected residual impact – that is the social impact remaining after mitigation.

Assess the significance of the residual impacts - both negative and positive

Mitigation and enhancement measures should be:

- Tangible – can be measured
- Relevant – will alter the impact
- Deliverable – within the control of the proponent to implement
- Enduring – effective for the duration of the impact

The SIA may identify social impact mitigation or enhancement measures to be delivered through other environmental plans. For example, this could include specific traffic restrictions in school zones, or requirements to develop construction schedules with impacted vulnerable neighbours. These measures should also be included in the relevant construction or operational environmental management plans. The SIA should cross-reference where these measures are integrated or include them in the mitigations table in the EIS.

4.4.1   Respond to negative social impacts

Consider measures to first avoid, and then minimise, negative social impacts by amending the project design (see Figure 2). If neither option is possible or reasonably practicable, consider relevant mitigation strategies. For example, installing physical barriers that embed public art to mitigate noise and visual impacts or providing a medical service on the project site to reduce demand on local health services.

4.4.2 Respond to positive social impacts

For positive social impacts, explain how and when benefits will be achieved, and, if possible, how they can be maintained and enhanced. Positive social impacts should be enhanced, particularly within the social locality to ensure that benefits are distributed equitably.

Measures to enhance positive social impacts must be able to be implemented and monitored effectively.

Describe any steps required such as how a procurement policy that requires a proportion of goods and services to be sourced from local providers will be implemented, or how a program to hire and retain apprentices throughout a construction project will be delivered.

It may be appropriate to consider providing material public benefits through a planning agreement.[4]

Strategies to enhance positive social impacts may also help to offset negative impacts, where the two impacts are directly related. If this is the case, clearly describe and justify the connection between the enhancement and the negative impact.

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[4] Refer to Division 7.1 of the EP&A Act for planning agreements.

5 Social impact management

The post-approval phase for SIA involves implementing the mitigation, enhancement, monitoring and management measures described in the SIA. This phase can help foster relationships with communities and increase community acceptance.

Monitoring and adaptive management should aim to protect and enhance the social environment throughout the life of the project. Project monitoring and management commitments can be integrated into overarching environmental management systems such as ISO 14001 accredited environmental management systems.

The Department's role during the post-approval phase is to regulate compliance with the project's conditions of consent or approval.

5.1 Preparing a social impact management plan

For some projects, such as those with high and/or complex social impacts or with high levels of uncertainty, it may not be possible to manage social impacts through mitigation or enhancement measures in the SIA alone.

For these projects, the SIA should include a Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) framework, including the desired outcomes and monitoring indicators for each impact at a minimum. The SIMP may be finalised post-approval. A SIMP describes the measures to be implemented and the impacts they will manage.

Social impact conditions of consent may require a SIMP. If there is a condition of approval requiring a SIMP, this will usually need to be approved by the Department.

The social impact management plan should:

- update or confirm the social baseline and impact assessment from the SIA

- enhance and refine mitigation, enhancement, monitoring and management of social impacts over the life of the project, and explain how unanticipated impacts will be addressed

- set out how the community can provide feedback as part of adaptive management.

The plan should describe how commitments in the SIA and any conditions will be implemented and monitored through a robust monitoring and auditing program. It should set out elements such as indicators, baseline values, frequencies, triggers, stakeholders and responses.

While there is no required format, include:

- a project summary

- how social impacts were identified, and updated if relevant

- how mitigation or enhancement, and management commitments will be delivered

- how engagement informed the plan, including the engagement strategy and future activities, and how these will inform monitoring and management

- measurable and defined targets and actions for monitoring, reporting, auditing and reviewing progress, with clear numbering, wording and commitments to locations, timing, frequency, method and responsibilities

- a commitment to measure results and report these findings via the project website

- how shortfalls will be addressed – for example, if a target is not being met or an impact is being inadequately managed, the steps to address and report on the shortfall.

A social impact management plan may also include other components required under a project's conditions of consent such as overarching commitments that must be upheld during the construction and operational phases.

Some social impacts may be explicitly managed through other management plans such as employment, procurement, or workforce accommodation. In these cases, outline the management approach in the SIMP and cross-reference the relevant plans where they are detailed.

The document and commitments should be easy for the community to understand and be available online, and where appropriate, communicated in other formats and through other mechanisms. Depending on the cultural diversity in the social locality, this information may need to be translated into other languages, including Aboriginal languages.

6   Glossary

Term	Description
Application	An application seeking development consent/approval for a State significant project or an application to modify an approved State significant project consent/approval (including concept plan) under the EP&A Act.
Community	Anyone affected by or interested in State significant projects in NSW, including individuals, community groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities or, stakeholder groups (defined below).
Department	The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Engagement	Actions to engage the community in the assessment of State significant projects and actions to encourage engagement.
Mitigation	Actions or measures to reduce adverse social impacts of a State significant project. Mitigations may be performance based (achieve an appropriate social outcome without specifying how the outcome will be achieved) or prescriptive (actions or measures that must be taken, such as a known best-practice technology, design or management approach).
People	Individuals, households, groups, communities, organisations and the general public.
Planning Secretary	The Secretary of the Department or their delegate.
Proponent	Those seeking approval for a State significant project.
Scoping report	A report that may be required to be submitted by the proponent to the Department, accompanied by a request for SEARs.
Stakeholder group	A group or organisation that represents several people with an interest in a State significant project.

Appendices

Appendix A – Community engagement

Respectful, inclusive and meaningful engagement is a key component of impact assessment. It informs the community about the project and seeks their involvement and feedback in the identification of impacts and relevant management measures to reduce negative impacts and enhance the positive ones.

Community input can be very valuable in informing assessment studies – both social and environmental – integrating local knowledge and ensuring that the community is fully aware of the project and its potential effects. It provides first-hand insights into what people value and how they expect a project to affect them. It also helps focus the scope of the SIA on the things that really matter.

As SIA assesses impacts on people, engagement is a key component of an SIA approach.

Engagement and public participation are not a substitute for good evidence-based SIA; rather, they are a component of it.[5]

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Community engagement actions

- Consider the community engagement objectives.
- Use engagement mechanisms that afford meaningful participation.
- Use outcomes of engagement to avoid or effectively mitigate adverse impacts and enhance positive impacts.
- Engage with a diversity of people, including vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Follow appropriate protocols for engaging with Aboriginal people.

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Objectives of community engagement for SIA

Aim to:

- ensure likely affected people are identified and have enough understanding of the proposed project, how it may affect them, the process for development of the EIA (of which the SIA is a part), and how they can participate

- collect qualitative and quantitative data, evidence and insights for scoping social impacts in ways that ensure both diversity and representativeness of views

- understand the interest's people have in the project and how likely impacts may be experienced from their perspectives

- validate data, assumptions, findings and recommendations

- consider the views of people in a meaningful way, and use these insights to inform project planning and design, mitigation and enhancement measures, and monitoring and management frameworks

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[5] Freudenberg WR & Olsen D. 1983. 'Public interest and political abuse: Public participation in social impact assessment. *Journal of the Community Development Society,* 14(2), 67-82.

- provide opportunities for people to collaborate on project design matters and provide input into the identification and consideration of preferred solutions

- ensure people know how their input and views have been considered, and to help illustrate what actions or mitigating measures will be put into place to address concerns

- help people understand how other specialist studies prepared for the EIA (e.g. air quality or noise), and any associated proposed mitigation measures, address social impacts

- respect people's privacy, allowing them to communicate their views anonymously if they wish

- continue community engagement throughout the project to monitor the community's experiences of social impacts and respond as necessary.

Consider how best to use engagement findings to inform the final project design so that it maximises community wellbeing and avoids or genuinely mitigates adverse impacts.

Who to engage

SIA involves people who are affected by or may have an interest in a project. Stakeholders may be affected groups or individuals that:

- are directly or indirectly affected by a project

- live, work, study or pursue leisure activities near a project

- use or value a resource associated with a project

- have an interest in a proposed action or change.[6]

The audience for engagement will depend on the project context, and the impacts likely to be experienced by different people.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis is a common tool to identify stakeholders who may be most impacted or are likely to have an interest in a project. Stakeholder mapping should begin during social impact scoping to understand those likely to be significantly impacted, as well as those with influence over, or interest in the social impacts.

Engage with a cross-section of people in a manner consistent with the SIA principles identified and outlined in Table 3. To ensure the SIA is not disproportionately influenced by those with more power, include people from all parts of the community, from grassroots to leadership levels, and from informal, community-based organisations to formal institutions. General categories of people to engage include:

- Aboriginal people and groups, especially those with a cultural connection to the project location, and including traditional owners or custodians who can speak for Country, native title holders or registered native title claimants and relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council/s

- existing and in-migrating residents and businesses, particularly those close to the project location and in nearby localities, or any other potential users of the project (e.g. future transport users for a rail project)

- councils

- community including stakeholder groups, industry, business, cultural and environmental organisations, advocacy groups, and peak bodies

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[6] Burdge, R. (2004). The Concepts, Process and Methods of Social Impact Assessment

- workers, contractors and suppliers who use the area
- public and private service and infrastructure providers and regulatory agencies (especially local, State and Commonwealth government-funded education, health, community, emergency and social services)
- elected representatives and other community leaders.

This analysis will inform the levels of engagement and appropriate techniques needed to meet the SIA objectives.

How to engage

Engagement may involve varying levels of participation and require the use of different engagement mechanisms and techniques for different purposes. Levels of participation and their objectives range from sharing information, to collecting information and insights through to involving the community in evaluation, decision-making, and co-design.

SIA engagement should be guided by an overall project engagement plan which outlines who is to be engaged and how, the purpose, responsibilities for engagement, and timing and recording of data. Develop an overall plan during scoping and refine as necessary. This can allow SIA engagement to complement, draw from, or align with engagement across other disciplines.

The choice of level and techniques will depend on the objectives of that engagement. For instance, if the objective is to explain the results and recommendations of a technical study, information-sharing techniques such as newsletters, social media and meetings may be enough. These approaches may be useful for a foundation understanding of the project and are often provided by broader project engagement. If the objective is to collect information or involve people in impact evaluation or decision-making, more participatory techniques such as interviews, focus groups, workshops, community visioning and co-design would be appropriate.

Ensure to consider the appropriateness of engagement data sourced from others, such as any biases, limitations, representativeness or other methodological issues that may influence data validity.

For example, key themes drawn from an overall project engagement survey may provide an indication of impacts for the SIA to assess. However, consider how the way survey responses were collected may influence representativeness, or the context and wording of the survey may influence impartiality, and consequently, people's responses.

Engagement must be undertaken ethically, for example, by ensuring participation is voluntary, can be anonymous, and that participants are able to review data they have provided.

To determine the levels and techniques of engagement for the SIA, consider:

- the scale of the project's social locality
- the degree of diversity among likely affected and interested people, and the extent to which they are expected to be affected or interested
- the range and types of impacts involved and their relative importance
- the timing and context, noting that stakeholders and their interests can change with different project stages
- the needs of different people (e.g. cultural appropriateness, capacity to participate, communication styles and/or preferences or, barriers to participation) including Aboriginal people; younger and older people; people with disability; people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are vulnerable, socio-economically disadvantaged or otherwise marginalised; and any other difficult-to-reach groups
- opportunities to draw on or integrate with other engagement activities planned for the EIA to avoid duplication and manage engagement fatigue.

Particular attention is needed when engaging with vulnerable and marginalised groups to understand how they might experience and reasonably perceive social impacts. Provide multiple opportunities for people to participate.

Be cognisant of power imbalances and social relationships when planning engagement activities so that participants feel comfortable engaging.
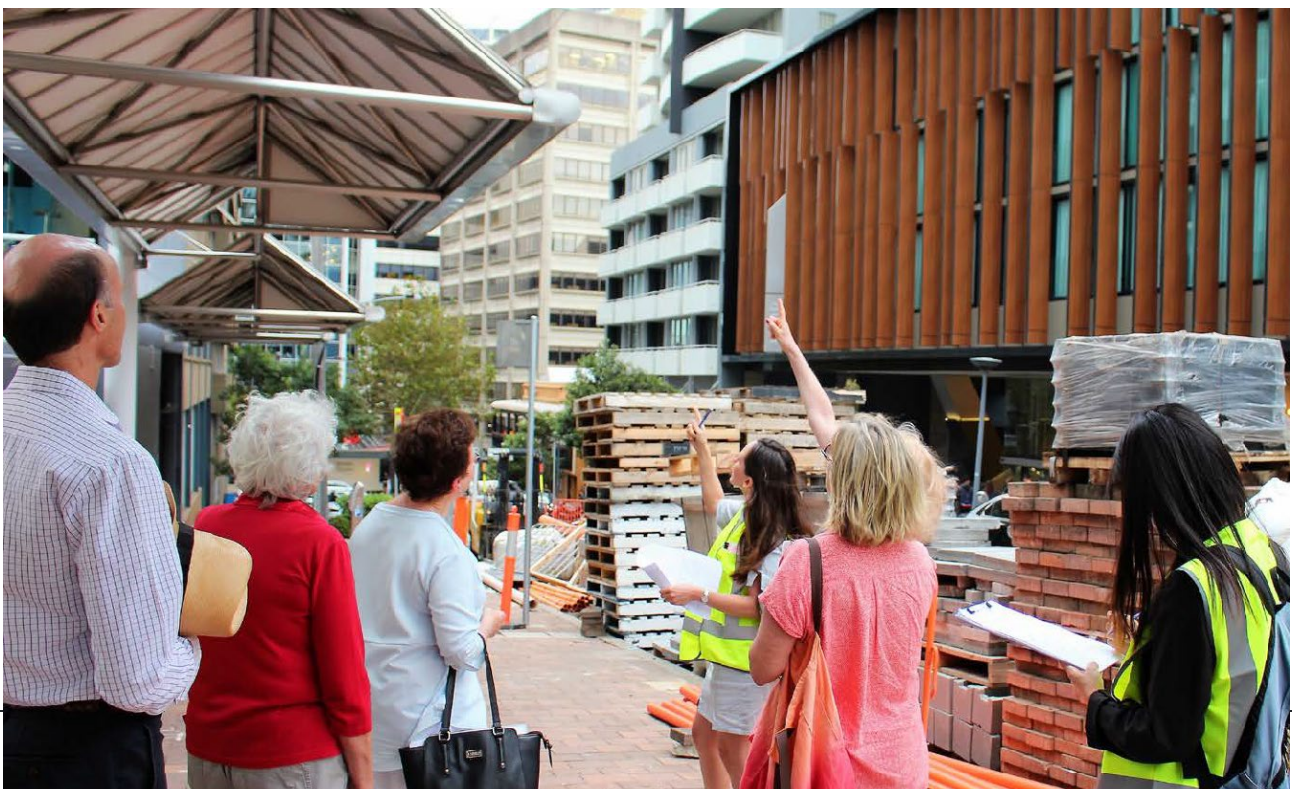
Table 3: Useful engagement techniques for social impact assessment

Level of participation	Engagement technique	Purpose in SIA
Sharing information	Impromptu discussions and informal conversations	• Identifying affected and interested people, groups, organisations and communities • Helping people to understand the proposal and the social impact assessment • Addressing questions, concerns and complaints • Demonstrating early engagement
	Public displays, briefings, information sessions and public meetings	
	Open days and site visits	
	Contact points (e.g. hotlines, websites, shopfronts)	
	Websites, direct mail/email/SMS, fact sheets, newsletters and webinars	
Consulting to collect information and insights	Surveys and interviews	• Identifying, predicting, assessing and developing responses for social impacts • Collecting data, evidence and insights • Demonstrating early engagement • Confirming data, assumptions and findings • Involving marginalised groups
	Community consultative committee or community liaison and advisory groups	
	Online forums or feedback forms, social media	
	Face to face meetings or telephone/ video calls	
Collaborating in decision-making	Workshops and focus groups	• Encouraging co-design, or collaboration in project design • Identifying, predicting, assessing and developing responses for social impacts • Collaborating during monitoring, mitigation and management actions • Involving marginalised groups
	Deliberative forums/workshops	
	Citizen panels	
	Citizens' assemblies	

When to engage

Community engagement for SIA should be developed to integrate or align with the project's overall engagement strategy and to avoid duplication.

Commence engagement on the SIA during early project planning and development. This early engagement should be planned and undertaken sensitively, with careful thought given to the appropriate level and scope of project detail to be discussed.

Further engagement should occur as the project is refined and as part of the EIA. Engagement with the community should continue through the project construction and operational phases, and into closure and post-closure phases, where relevant.

If a scoping report is being submitted for the EIA, describe the planned SIA community engagement.

Engaging with Aboriginal people

All SIAs should consider the livelihood and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities beyond cultural impacts. These can be understood through respectful engagement, which needs to be built on a relationship of trust.

Engagement with Aboriginal people for SIA should recognise and respect their rights and be culturally appropriate. In practice, this means:

- applying appropriate protocols when working with Aboriginal knowledge

- acknowledging and assessing both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage

- ensuring free, prior and informed consent

- engaging traditional custodians who can speak for Country, as well as a range of Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations

- allowing Aboriginal decision-making processes to function effectively

- understanding local cultural practices and events to ensure the community is available (e.g. 'sorry business')

- engaging in places, at times, and in ways that encourage participation.

In addition to understanding the differential social impacts for Aboriginal people, a key objective of engaging with Aboriginal people for SIA – distinct from Cultural Heritage Assessment –is to help identify the risk of a project causing intangible harm through 'cultural or spiritual loss'. This is defined as

Loss or diminution of traditional attachment to the land or connection to Country, and associated cultural obligations to care for Country, or loss of rights to gain spiritual sustenance from the land.

Engagement should also be aware of historical and ongoing trauma and social and health inequities experienced by Aboriginal people and the potential for the project to impact these. Equally, engagement should aim to identify opportunities for cultural or spiritual growth, including access to Country as well as improvements to livelihoods and wellbeing outcomes.

Refer to the Office of Environment and Heritage's Aboriginal cultural heritage consultation requirements for proponents (2010) for guidance when consulting with Aboriginal people about Aboriginal cultural heritage matters, and on social impacts more broadly. Refer to the Department's Connecting with Country Framework for guidance on responding to County for built environment projects.

Appendix B – Authors of SIA documents

The SIA report should outline the lead author's qualifications, experience and demonstrated understanding of social impacts.

As a general rule, suitably qualified and experienced practitioner/s should be involved in the SIA scoping and the SIA report preparation phases. These practitioners are best placed to investigate and evaluate the likely social impacts, including stakeholder and community perceptions, and to help identify effective refinements to the proposed project design.

A 'suitably qualified person' must have:

- suitable **qualifications** in a relevant social science discipline (e.g. sociology, human geography, anthropology, social or community planning), and/or

- proven **experience** over multiple years and substantial **competence** in social science research methods and SIA practices.

They also should be a member of a relevant professional organisation, such as the International Association of Impact Assessment, Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand, Planning Institute of Australia, and/or Australasian Evaluation Society. Members of professional organisations agree to a code of ethics and professional conduct, ensuring they apply relevant principles and demonstrate integrity and competence in professional practice.

A specialist (or suitably qualified person) may not be required for projects where only minor or no likely social impacts have been identified.

All practitioners should follow relevant ethical considerations that apply to research involving people.[7] Research must be conducted in a responsible, safe, secure, impartial, and respectful manner.

Safeguards should be put in place, and documented, to ensure that the assessment and the outcomes provide an impartial assessment and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The lead author of the SIA report should include a signed declaration confirming:

- their qualifications, experience in conducting SIA

- their professional memberships

- the date(s) on which the SIA was completed

- that the SIA contains all relevant information

- that they understand their legal and ethical obligations, and that none of the information in the SIA is false or misleading

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[7] For further information on ethical considerations, see: National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. 2015. *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; and Vanclay F, Baines J & Taylor CN. 2013. Principles for ethical research involving humans: Ethical professional practice in impact assessment Part I. Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal, 31(4), 243-253.

Appendix C – Review questions

Use these review questions to check that the requirements of this guideline have been fulfilled when considering the scale of social impacts of the project.

General
1   Does the lead author meet the qualification and experience requirements?
2   Has the lead author outlined their qualifications and experience in SIA and provided a signed declaration?
3   Would a reasonable person judge the SIA to be impartial, transparent and suitably rigorous?

Project's social locality and social baseline
4   Does the SIA define and justify the social locality based on the spatial extent of expected impacts?
5   Does the SIA identify and describe the social context/locality including different social groups likely to be affected by the project?
6   Does the SIA identify and describe all the built or natural features that have value or importance for people, and explain why people value those features?
7   Does the SIA identify and describe historical, current, and expected social trends or social changes for people in the locality, including their experiences with this project and other major development projects?
8   Does the social baseline study present data relevant to the social impacts, supported by relevant literature and a diversity of relevant views and likely experiences?
9   Does the social baseline study demonstrate applied social-science research methods and explain any significant methodological or data limitations?

Identification and description of social impacts
10   Does the SIA adequately describe likely social impacts from the perspectives of how people may experience them, and explain the research used to identify them? When undertaken as a part of SIA scoping and initial assessment, has the plan for the SIA been detailed?
11   Does the SIA apply the precautionary principle to identifying social impacts, and consider how they may be experienced differently by different people and groups?
12   Does the SIA describe how the preliminary social impact analysis has influenced project design?

Community engagement
13   Were the extent and nature of engagement activities appropriate and sufficient to canvass views of those most affected, including those of vulnerable or marginalised groups?
14   Have the views, concerns and insights of affected and interested people influenced both the project design and the impact assessment, management and monitoring?

Predicting and analysing social impacts
15   Does the SIA impartially focus on the most important social impacts to people at all stages of the project, without any omissions or misrepresentations?
16   Does the SIA analyse the distribution of both positive and negative social impacts, and identify who will benefit and who will likely experience greater costs because of the project?
17   Does the SIA identify its assumptions, and include sensitivity analysis and alternative scenarios? (including 'worst-case' and 'no project' scenarios where relevant)

Evaluating significance
18   Do the evaluations of significance of social impacts impartially represent how people in each identified social group can expect to experience the project, including any cumulative effects?

General

| 19 | Are the evaluations of significance disaggregated to consider the likely different experiences for different people or groups, especially vulnerable groups? |

Responses, monitoring and management

20	Does the SIA propose responses that are tangible, deliverable, likely to be durably effective, directly related to the respective impact(s) and adequately delegated and resourced?
21	Does the SIA demonstrate how people can be confident that social impacts will be monitored and reported in ways that are reliable, effective and trustworthy?
22	Does the SIA demonstrate how the proponent will adaptively manage social impacts and respond to unanticipated events, breaches, grievances and non-compliance?