



Developing Social Impact Assessment guidelines in a pre- existing policy context

EIANZ conference 2018:

'Imagine – Environment, People, Future'

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NSW 'imagines' a framework for SIA as comprehensive as that for EIA... why?

Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979

Social impacts must be considered – but how?

Widespread view that social impacts were not well considered (compared to environmental and economic impacts)

Applicants & consultants did not know what the Department required.

DPE Assessment Officers typically not trained in social sciences.

Result

Inconsistency and distrust in planning system

Contested projects, e.g. WestConnex, Bentley

Bentley blockade, 2014



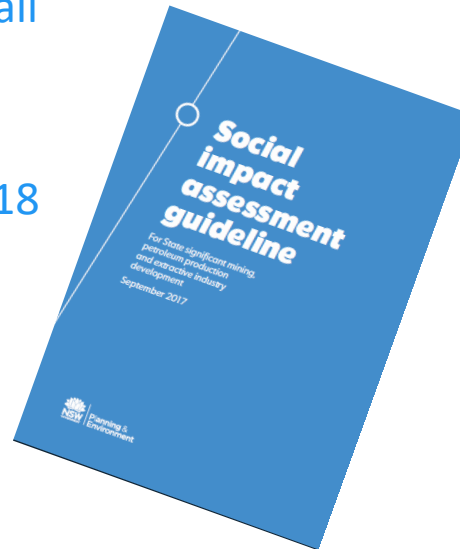
NSW sought to develop a leading-practice guideline

Perceived shortcomings of SIA practice in NSW (pre-guideline)	Equivalent characteristics of SIA, based on leading practice
1. A goal of approving projects	Impartial, unbiased assessments
2. Lack of sensitivity to context	A dynamic, flexible, and context-specific approach
3. Social impacts treated as separate and subsidiary to environmental and economic impacts	Integrated assessment that acknowledges the interrelated nature of many impacts
4. An imbalance in analysis of negative and positive impacts	Balanced consideration of positive and negative impacts, and ways to mitigate/enhance them
5. An emphasis on 'objective', technical, and quantitative methods	Diversity of methods and data, with community participation in identifying impacts and ways to mitigate/enhance, monitor, and manage them
6. A universalist approach that assumes all people, at all times, are affected equally	Sensitivity to heterogeneity of interests and impacts within and between communities

Source: Parsons, Everingham & Kemp (2018)

SIA developments in NSW, 2017-2018

- SIA guideline released Sept 2017 for resources projects
- Guideline to be extended to all major projects
- Training – 50 staff in April 2018
- Internal resources
 - *Step-by-step practice notes*
 - *Access to two SIA specialists*



What's in the guideline?

- definition & principles
- engagement for SIA
- scoping social impacts
- identifying social impacts
- preparing a SIA report
- mitigating social impacts
- monitoring & managing social impacts
- review questions

<http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Under-review-and-new-Policy-and-Legislation/Social-Impact-Assessment>

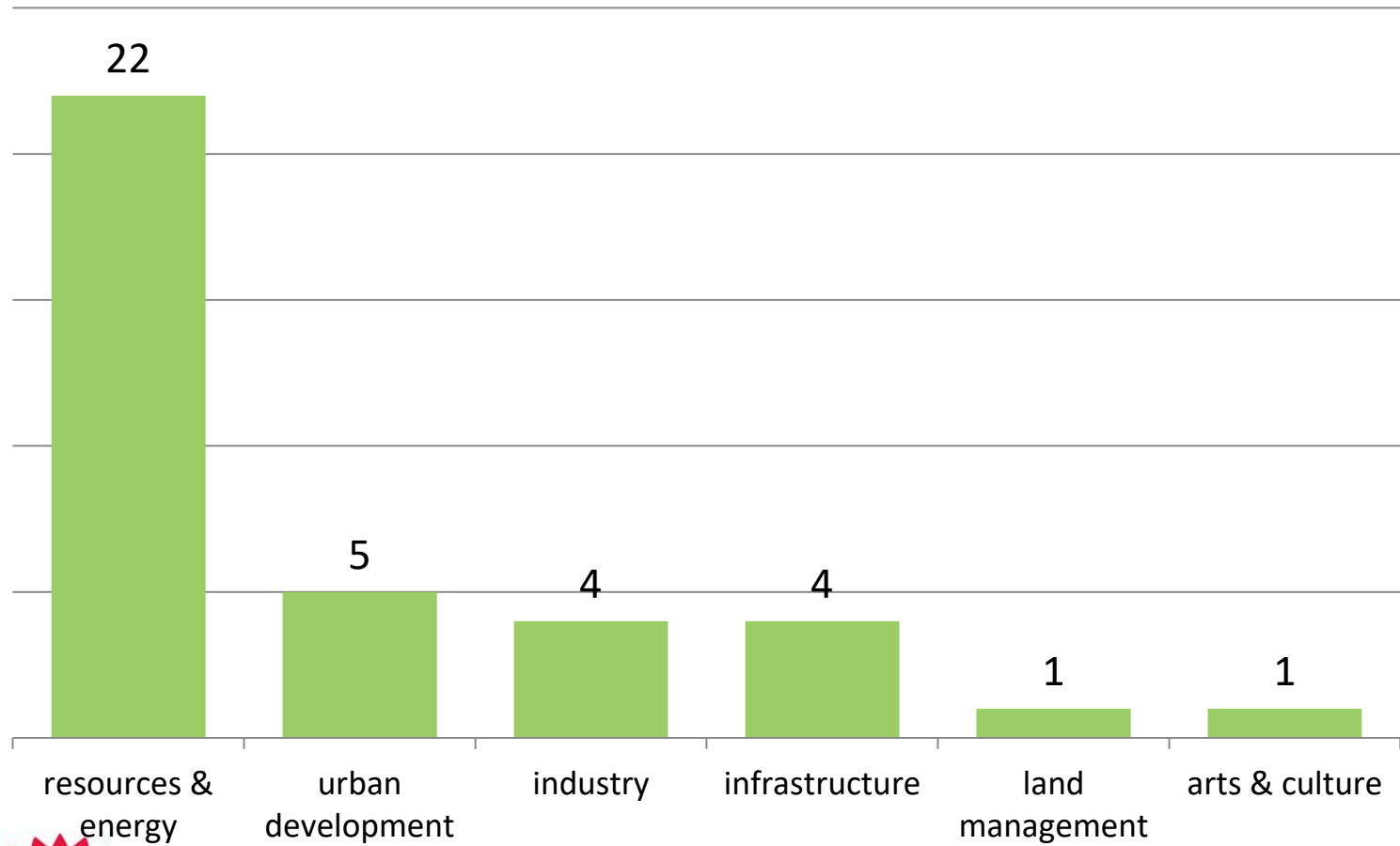
Implementing the SIA guideline:

What does this mean for development applications?

- A consistently **higher standard** is now expected.
- Applications will be assessed against the guideline, applying the **review questions** (Appendix D).
- Applications that have not followed the guideline will be asked to provide **further information**.
- Planning outcomes should be more closely aligned with **community values and aspirations**.

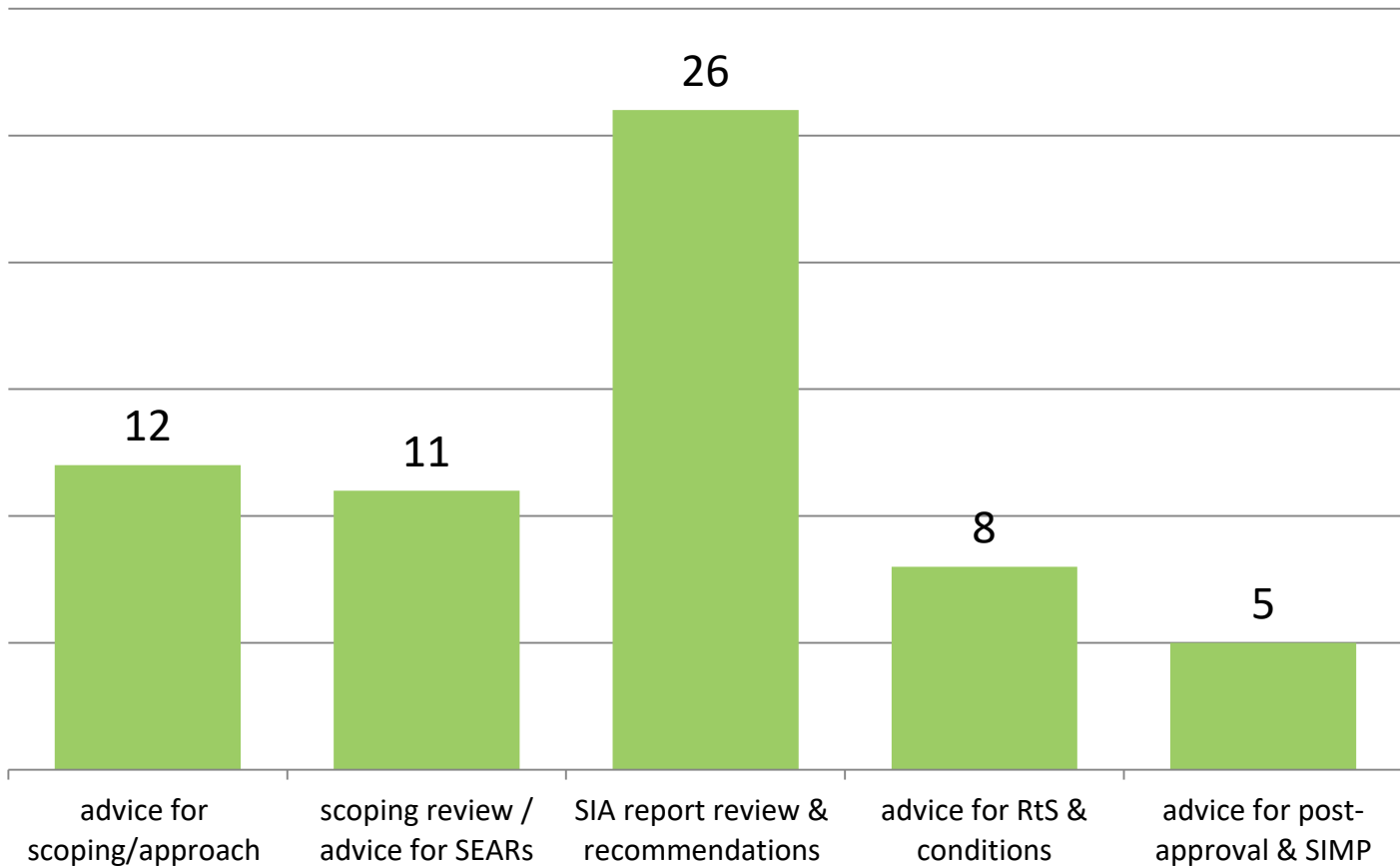
Requests for SIA support by project type

(Aug 2016 – Oct 2018)

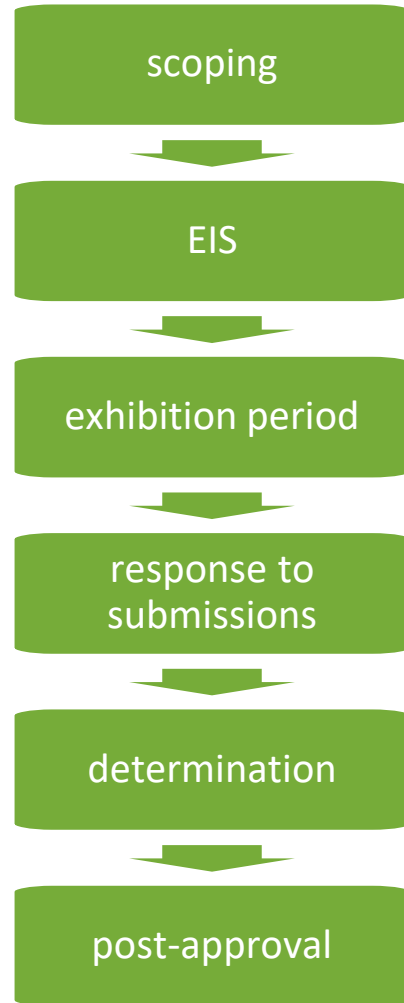
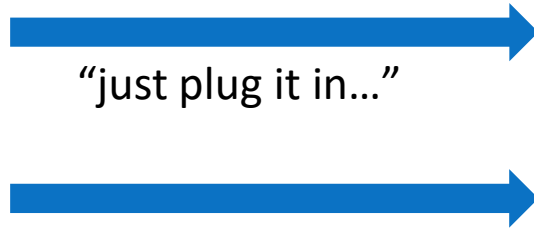


Requests by stage in project life-cycle

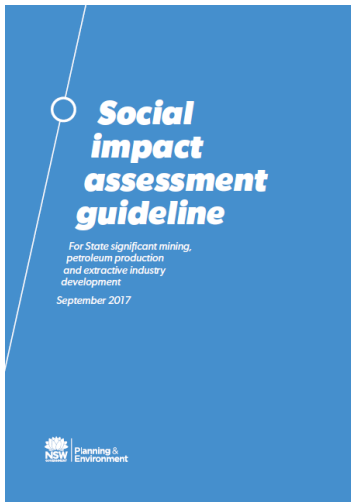
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Implementing the guideline in theory

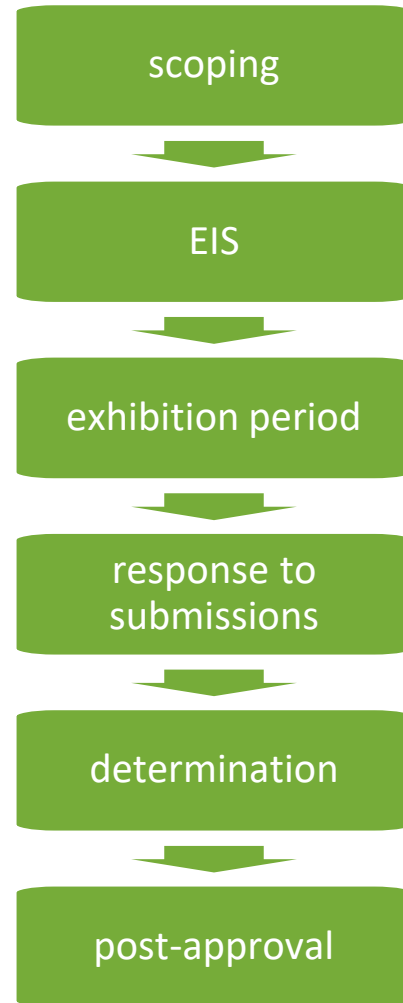


Implementing the guideline in practice



Implementation mediated by structural challenges, e.g.:

- time constraints
- budget constraints
- existing systems, skills, & behavioural practices
- resistance to change
- discomfort with 'non-technical' sciences



Implementing the SIA guideline: Opportunities for improvement

- **Assessment** and analysis, not assertion
- Clearly applying the SIA **principles** (e.g. distributive equity, impartiality, inclusivity, transparency, rigour, life-cycle approach)
- **Heterogeneity** – consideration of different impacts on different groups
- **Evidence** of what affected people actually think, via primary research, and how it's been taken into account
- Better consideration of:
 - **intangible** impacts (e.g. community cohesion, sense of place)
 - **cumulative** impacts (how people actually experience them)
- Meaningful **mitigation** – directly addressing the people and the impact
- Comprehensive **monitoring** frameworks
- Social dimensions of **positive** impacts

'Impact' does not have to be negative...



What's next for SIA? Six possible future trends

1. Gendered SIA

Doing SIA in the age of #MeToo

2. Smaller households, an ageing population, and loneliness

Extending understanding of 'social determinants of health' to consider causes of isolation vs. connectivity/cohesion

3. Climate change

Including 'fears for future generations' as a legitimate matter for consideration

4. Inequality and distribution of impacts

Disaggregating data; ensuring no project exacerbates inequalities

5. Critical analysis to dissect truth claims and emotional responses

Good social science to make sense of non-quantifiable evidence in the era of 'post-truth', 'fake news', and distrust of experts

6. Artificial intelligence and automation

Will the use of AI, robots, and automation mean fewer local benefits, or offer new opportunities? Can robots do social science?!



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