



**IAIA**  
International Association  
for Impact Assessment

Scoping is identifying the key issues to be assessed in the IA process.



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**FASTIPS**

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# Scoping

Scoping is the process of identifying and prioritising the key issues associated with a project and the extent to which each will be investigated in a subsequent impact assessment (IA).

Scoping is important because it focuses further study on the potentially significant impacts of a proposed project and ensures that proportionate depth and scope is given to:

- The sensitivity, quality, and values associated with the receiving biophysical, cultural and social environment.
- The extent (magnitude, intensity, duration) of the likely impact.
- The likely consequence or change to the environment.
- The resilience of the environment to cope with impacts/change.

Scoping focuses IA on the matters that will be considered by the decision maker when determining whether or not to approve a project and in determining what conditions to apply.

Scoping provides greater certainty for the proponent in setting out the work required for the IA, and limits changes to IA terms of reference to substantial new information or significant changes in project design. It also ensures the concerns of the affected community are considered early in the IA process.

A good practice scoping document includes the following:

- Brief description of the project including project rationale and objectives.
- Feasible alternatives.
- Relevant laws, regulations and regulatory standards, policies and guidelines.
- Identification of key stakeholders, their interests and how they will be engaged in the IA process.
- An outline of the consultation process.
- Relevant environmental impacts to be investigated, including:
  - o Physical systems
  - o Ecological systems
  - o Social systems
  - o Archaeological and cultural effects
  - o Land use effects
  - o Economic effects
- Methodology to be adopted for impact and risk assessments.

IA, including the scoping process, involves dealing with uncertainty. For example, baseline environmental and social studies may not have been undertaken or be sufficiently comprehensive at the scoping stage to be confident about the values that may be impacted. The use of modelling in IA requires assumptions about parameters to be used. It may also be uncertain whether the proposed mitigation measures will be effective.

Risk assessment is often used as a tool in the scoping process to deal with uncertainty. It considers the consequence of unexpected events and the likelihood they will occur. Risk assessment ensures the scoping process addresses all matters that require consideration in the IA process.

## WHY IS SCOPING IMPORTANT?

Scoping is a process that is important for effective IA, but is not always suitably undertaken. Some of the issues that arise when scoping is not undertaken effectively are:

- Unnecessary information/data is collected with a resultant decrease in IA efficiency and effectiveness, as well as wastage of time and resources.
- Key impacts are not identified, or lack appropriate stress, leading to:
  - o A decrease in the extent to which the IA can be relied on in decision making, and/or
  - o Failure to adequately address stakeholder and community concerns.
- Slower assessment processes.
- Increased costs.

### FURTHER READING

IAIA FastTips "Impact Assessment," 2012. [www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/Fasttips\\_1%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf](http://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/Fasttips_1%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf)

Barnes, Hardwick, and Chan, 2010. "IAIA10 Conference Proceedings: The Role of Impact Assessment in Transitioning to the Green Economy." 30th Annual Conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment. 6-11 April 2010, International Conference Centre, Geneva, Switzerland.

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Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, June 2011. "The State of Environmental Impact Assessment Practice in the UK." Special report.

EIANZ Special Interest Section (SIS) on Impact Assessment (IA). "Good practice scoping in impact assessment," 2016. [www.eianz.org/document/item/3302](http://www.eianz.org/document/item/3302)

International Association for Impact Assessment, 2009. "What Is Impact Assessment?" Special publication. [www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/What\\_is\\_IA\\_web.pdf](http://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/What_is_IA_web.pdf)

Western Australia EPA, June 2018. Statement of Environmental Principles, Factors and Objectives. <http://www.epa.wa.gov.au/statement-environmental-principles-factors-and-objectives>

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. Scoping identifies the key matters to be assessed in the IA relevant to the proposed project and the social and legal context in which it may occur.
2. When scoping is undertaken effectively and at the beginning of the IA process, it will guide the rest of the IA process.
3. Early and effective engagement with key stakeholders, including communities and regulatory authorities, is important in identifying key matters.
4. Effective scoping results in a focused and rigorous IA process and less uncertainty.
5. Scoping is a risk based process. A judgement has to be made as to whether the level of risk that a matter presents to the environment justifies further assessment.

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. It is important to understand the context in which the project is proposed to occur (both the environment and regulatory/institutional frameworks).
2. Focus on the matters that need to be assessed—the potential significant effects.
3. Give appropriate time and resources to scoping to ensure it is done well—good scoping results in a more effective and efficient assessment process.
4. Consult with key stakeholders and the community when identifying the matters to be assessed in the IA. Ensure consultation methods are culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of the affected communities. Engage with indigenous peoples and other holders of traditional knowledge in the scoping process in a respectful way.
5. Coordinate scoping with other key approvals to reduce duplication of assessments.

Want to know more?  
[www.iaia.org/fasttips.php](http://www.iaia.org/fasttips.php)

Do you have a suggestion or a request for a FasTip on a different topic? Contact Maria Partidário ([mpartidario@gmail.com](mailto:mpartidario@gmail.com)), FasTips Series Editor.

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