

(PS Those interested in the subject may also like to read a discussion “Finding the balance” in the December/January 2004/2005 issue of the *Company Director* (volume 20) by the Australian Institute of

Company Directors and the recently released Australian Standard AS/NZS 5911(Int):2005 *General guidelines on the verification, validation and assurance of environmental and sustainability reports.*)

## Latest developments ignored

Angus Morrison-Saunders

### ***Environmental Impact Assessment in Australia: Theory and Practice* by Ian Thomas and Mandy Elliott**

The Federation Press, PO Box 45, Annandale, NSW, 2038, Australia, 2005 (4th edition), 272 pages, ISBN 1-86287-538-3, Aus\$49.95 (~£22)

This is the fourth edition of *Environmental Impact Assessment in Australia: Theory and Practice* by Ian Thomas and he is joined for the first time by Mandy Elliott. Ian Thomas is an academic at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Mandy Elliott is currently employed in ‘State government’ (presumably in the state of Victoria).

The emphasis of the book is on “developing understanding of the EIA processes” which is “intended to place the reader in the position of being able to apply these processes to any situation — while being aware of the strengths and limitations of the approaches being used and any assumptions being made”. To understand EIA applications, I would have expected this to be illustrated with appropriate case studies or examples, but the authors clearly state that they have avoided “presenting case studies that could be interpreted as being the only way to go about the assessment; essentially becoming a checklist”.

In the Preface to the book, the authors indicate that the main changes to the content from the third edition are:

- updates on administrative details, especially concerning the Commonwealth of Australia's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), which was still in its infancy when the third edition was published, but also in each of the Australian states and territories;

- linkages to ongoing environmental management (specifically links to environmental management systems); and
- expanded discussion of strategic environmental assessment (SEA).

This review will focus on these elements. However, before doing so, it is worthwhile considering what is new in this edition of the book.

In the Preface, the authors note that “in some respects not a lot” has been “changed since the third edition”, which came out in 2001. This is a gross understatement! Not only are the headings in the entire Table of Contents for all ten chapters exactly the same as those of the third edition, but some chapters (Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9) are word for word identical (the only difference is the addition of dates to the reference citations), while most of chapters 3, 6 and 10 are unchanged.

I have two problems with this. First, I do not see how Mandy Elliott can legitimately lay claim to being an author of a book that simply reproduces previously published work. Secondly, it concerns me that the latest thinking and advances in impact assessment internationally have not been accounted for in the book. This problem becomes evident in chapter 3 when SEA is discussed. For instance, a quote from Wood (1993) is used early on in this section to suggest that, in the European Union: “there is growing interest in the possibilities of using some form of SEA as an integrative instrument in promoting sustainable development”. I am sure this statement was valid back in 1993, but seems absurd in light of the advances since then, especially the advent of the European Commission’s 2001 SEA Directive. Other similar statements about SEA in Australia using literature from the 1990s ignores what has actually happened since the EPBC Act established provisions for SEA in 1999.

I am not qualified to comment on the content of the book outlining the EIA procedures in most of the states or territories of Australia. However, I do know the Western Australian (WA) arrangements intimately and am reasonably familiar with the Commonwealth EIA procedures. Unfortunately, the book does a poor job of describing these.

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At the Commonwealth level, experience with EIA has developed dramatically in the last few years and, in particular, there have been a number of important court cases that have tested elements of EIA practice. These, especially the Nathans Dam case (*Minister for the Environment and Heritage v Queensland Conservation Council Inc. and WWF Australia* [2004] FCAFC 190) have significant consequences for how EIA will be carried out in the future in Australia at the Commonwealth level with presumably a spill-over effect for the states and territories too.

With respect to the Western Australian EIA process, I note that the third edition of this book was based on information sources that were out of date at the time of publication. Amazingly, the fourth edition reproduces some of these sections word for word. For instance, reference is made to the 1993 Administrative Procedures; these have been updated twice since then, with the most recent being 2002.

Similarly, reference is made to various EIA guidance documents that are several years out of date and the web links provided for them do not work (because these documents have been replaced by other guidance materials). Whilst there is brief mention of the environmental planning procedures established in 1996 in the section dedicated to WA in chapter 6, earlier discussion of the SEA arrangements in WA that appear in chapter 3 left these out. Clearly the environmental assessment of land-use plans is a relevant element of SEA. The inadequacies and inaccuracies

in describing EIA in WA makes me wonder how reliable the descriptions for EIA in the other states and territories are.

Whilst the section of the book dealing with environmental management and follow-up has been updated slightly, it is disappointing that the sections reflecting on future directions for EIA have not. The third edition of this book gave a good account of EIA theory and techniques based on literature current at the time and also reflected on future directions, especially the potential contribution of EIA to sustainability, in an informed and appropriate manner. Given the evolution of thinking and experience in this area since then and the explosion of publications on this topic, the fourth edition is now hopelessly dated here.

Overall this book does achieve its aim of developing a basic understanding of EIA processes, but the failure to update important developments in EIA, along with some obvious inaccuracies and the fact that it scarcely deviates from the third edition, means that readers already possessing the earlier edition need not feel compelled to purchase this version.

## References

- Wood, C (1993), "Strategic environmental assessment", *EIA Newsletter*, 8, EIA Centre, University of Manchester, pages 23–24.

## Usin ecological economics to address wetland loss

Lucy Emerton

***Managing Wetlands: an Ecological Economics Approach* edited by R Kerry Turner, Jeroen C J M van den Bergh and Roy Brouwer**

Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, UK, 2003, 336 pages, £69.95, ISBN 1-84376-130-0 (hardback), £23.96, ISBN 1-84542-200-7 (paperback)

The destruction and degradation of wetlands that is occurring throughout Europe represents a significant loss of economic, social, cultural and environmental

goods and services. The authors of this book contend that wetland loss is intimately related to information failures. In turn, they argue that overcoming this gap requires addressing and reconciling the different levels of scale and spatial dimensions, hierarchies of decision-making and policy, and technical disciplines, that underpin wetland use and management.

The book advocates ecological economics as an approach that can contribute to filling this information gap, and as a framework within which to understand, address and mitigate the causes of wetland loss. The essence of such an approach is that it integrates natural science and social science methods, and encourages analysts to take a broader perspective that examines changes in large-scale ecological processes together with the socio-economic forces driving wetland loss.

Moving on from a detailed description of the

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