

# The use of Strategic Environmental Assessment on a national spatial plan - DK

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space

## 2. Key Approaches

- Participation
- Knowledge-based

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

A methodology for conducting a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) on a national Spatial plan. It also has relevance for conducting SEAs on regional and local spatial plans and other policy areas where SEAs are required.

## 4. Overview of the case

A Strategic Environmental Assessment was carried out as an integrated part of Danish National Spatial Planning in 1999/2000.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

On 31 May 2001 the European Parliament, and on 5 June 2001 the Council, formally adopted the Directive on Environmental Assessment of certain plans and programmes viz. the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC. The aim of the Directive was to put Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) into the forefront of integrating the environment into strategic decision-making. This is an essential pre-requisite for moving towards sustainable development. Furthermore, it moves beyond the traditional idea of environmental policy being a separate and discrete area of policy.

The formal Danish requirements for strategic assessment apply to bills and other government proposals and the report on national planning is included in the latter category. Reports on national planning are elaborated after parliamentary elections.

### b) Objectives

The 1999/2000 National Planning Report aimed at specifying the objectives and activities on business development, local transport policy and land use that are outlined in the Government's map of visions 2022 from 1997. The intention was to integrate a stepwise process making SEA a part of each of the decision-making phases. The regional administrative units have to design regional development plans which integrate the regional development strategies including education, employment, culture, nature and environment. This will enable the use of the regional development plan to coordinate the various sectors with each other and with their plans geographically and regionally. Furthermore, the discussion about what should the strategic focus be in each region cannot be taken without having a discussion on where the development should take place. In other words: "the future geographical profile" in different parts of the region, its cities, rural and peripheral areas must be taken into account.

## 6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

## a) Management

The Minister for the Environment is responsible for carrying out comprehensive physical national planning that is embraced in this case and for having the necessary investigations undertaken in this connection. The overall legislative framework for the implementation of the Danish policy on spatial planning is formed by the Danish Planning Act. A project organisation responsible for the elaboration of the report on national spatial planning and the SEA process was established. The organisation comprised of a steering committee, a project secretariat, working groups and an independent environmental assessment expert. At the time of the work, Denmark had 13 regional administration units and 270 municipalities. However, on Jan 1st 2007, a Municipal Reform took place which recognised only 5 new regional administrative units with 98 municipalities. The five new units will be responsible for drawing up regional development plans. Therefore, the case still remains representative for the country.

## b) ICZM tools

Denmark has a statutory procedure for the conduct of SEA which includes a checklist of 'headline' questions for screening whether or not a bill or governmental proposal should be subjected to an SEA. The checklist also includes sub-questions which are used in determining the scope of the environmental assessment. Based on the rules, a seven-step procedure was used and can be described as follows:

1. Public pre-consultation
2. Screening of the environmental impact of activities included in a rough frame of the national planning report. The environmental criteria for assessment were identified on the basis of experience gained in SEA at county plan level. They were identified on the basis of a modification of the methods, criteria and procedures used in a previous SEA process that was carried out as a part of the regional planning process in the county of Northern Jutland. The criteria and factors/indicators that were identified included natural resources and specific global, national and local indicators.
3. Scoping - Fixing the scope of the environmental assessment i.e. selecting the activities to be focused on in the assessment of the environmental impacts.
4. Assessment of each selected activity which forms the basis for the evaluation of the need for a revision of the proposal
5. Prediction of the total environmental impact of the plan proposal including impact of each activity, impact related to each area of activities, and the total impact of the proposed plan.
6. Public hearing, the comments of which were to be included in the final environmental assessment of the national planning report
7. Final national planning report

The process took six months from the time of the first public hearing until the first draft national plan was published. The pre-consultation procedure was the first to be carried out as part of the national planning process. The proposal for the National Planning Report focused on the interplay between business development, local transport policy and physical planning by use of maps. These maps had been elaborated on the basis of the selected objectives, proposed activities and the results of the stepwise SEA. The description of the environmental effects of the proposed plan was integrated into each chapter of the plan rather than in a separate SEA report.

## 7. Cost and resources

No information available

## 8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The final or adopted national planning report included some substantial changes that were decided late in the national planning process. The outcome of the final SEA step may have contributed to the changes and it was felt that a better regional land use plan was produced. The final report included an annex emphasising the environmental impacts of the plan. It also pointed out the new issues that had been put on the Agenda during the period from the first draft of the plan to the final version. Environmental indicators are now being developed as parts of SEA systems within the fields of national and regional land use planning.

## 9. Success and Fail factors

The SEA helps integration of the environment in the area of national spatial planning. The strengths of the SEA process relate to the application of SEA at a really early stage of the national planning process. It is important to have a professionally broad SEA team otherwise the environmental assessment will have a narrow scope which will not benefit the planning process.

The public participation dimension of the SEA process seems to have been the weakest part since very few members of the public made comments in the pre-consultation and ordinary consultation processes and the comments submitted from counties and municipalities did not relate to the environmental impacts of the plan. It is thought that the imprecise and broad nature of impact predictions may have left the public with an unclear picture of the linkage between the assessment procedure and the plan procedure. The overall nature of the objectives and activities made the screening and assessment procedures difficult. In some cases the significance of environmental impact could only be judged as positive or negative and trade-offs had to be made at each step of the planning process. Key members of the project organisation emphasised that it had been difficult to predict the environmental impact of the very broad objectives and activities proposed within the different areas of the spatial planning policy. The committee responsible for the development of the SEA concept emphasised that they found the identification of criteria and indicators relating to global issues especially tricky and difficult.

SEA must be integrated through the whole planning process and there should be an assessment of the planning objectives and strategies even if this is a difficult task. Barriers for implementation of SEA were not seen as a matter of methodological difficulties.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

SEA at this level has been documented as enhancing the political debate on environmental protection. The implementation of SEA introduces a new important measure, a new measuring standard, besides the economic instruments, that can be used for the whole land use plan. This implies that, in practice, the environmental dimension will be parallel to the economic dimension. The implementation of SEA highlights the actual political and democratic character of the planning process which becomes clearer. Politicians concluded that they got better overall information on which to base their decisions. NGO's felt that they should participate earlier in the process, preferably as early as the scoping stage.

## 11. Prepared by

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## 12. Verified by

It has not been possible to verify this case.

## 13. Sources

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-  Expereinces of SEA in North Jutland (13.8 KB) 
  -  New Danish regional development plans (270.97 KB) 
  -  SEA at the policy level - Bo Elling paper 1998 (1.15 MB) 
  -  SEA integration-vol 3 (1.33 MB) 
  -  SEA integration\_vol 1 (1.95 MB) 