



Netherlands Commission for
Environmental Assessment



The NCEA: our role in the Netherlands

The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) was established as an independent advisory body of experts by decree in 1987. The NCEA advises governments on the quality of environmental information in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) reports. These reports are not written by the NCEA: they are usually written by consultancy bureaus, for private initiators, local or provincial authorities and the central government. The NCEA does not get involved in decision-making or political considerations. In developing countries with which the Netherlands has a formal cooperation relationship, the NCEA provides the same services, in addition to capacity development on both EIA and SEA and advice on strengthening EA systems. See for more information the key sheet: *The NCEA – our international work*.

Principles

The NCEA's work is founded on three principles: expertise, independence and transparency. It is the combination of these three that allows the NCEA to provide an unbiased review of environmental and other information. The NCEA is a statutory body and its duties are laid down in the Dutch Environmental Management Act.

Experts

We can call upon 400 experts with a collective expertise covering all environmental fields and non-environmental disciplines, including social, economic and specific technical issues.

Process

The NCEA establishes working groups of experts for each individual EIA or SEA. The law stipulates that the NCEA has the final say on the composition of the expert groups, recognising that this is a prerequisite for its independence. Nevertheless, for each project the NCEA provides the

competent authority with a list of members of the working group. The competent authority has the right to raise objections to the inclusion of one or more experts in the working group if it has good reason to doubt their impartiality with regard to the activity or the decision concerned. If there appear to be solid grounds for objection, the NCEA usually takes action and replaces the person or persons concerned.

Each working group is chaired by an NCEA (deputy) chairperson, who sees to it that the experts focus their attention on the essential (environmental) issues of the project or plan concerned and stay within the NCEA's mandate. The chairperson communicates the final advice to the competent authority's representatives. Each expert group is assigned a technical secretary who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the expert group's activities and the preparation of draft advisory reports.

Environmental assessment in the Netherlands

At present, two types of environmental assessment (EA) exist in the Netherlands:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) provides the information needed to allow full consideration of environmental interests in decisions on projects likely to have significant environmental impacts. The EIA report shows how proposals will affect the environment and whether there are alternatives that would achieve the goals in a more sustainable way;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has a similar objective to EIA, but focuses on consideration of environmental consequences in strategic decision-making, for example in the design of plans and programmes.

For projects with limited environmental repercussions, a simplified EIA procedure has been designed. EIA for

complex projects, and SEA for plans and programmes, is more elaborate. In such cases, all complex EIAs and all SEAs must be reviewed by the NCEA.

simplified procedure	full procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EIA for simple permits (e.g. Environmental Act) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA EIA for complex projects government is initiator of the project all projects which require an appropriate assessment on the basis of the Dutch Nature Conservation Act

Advisory services

The NCEA advises competent authorities at two stages of the assessment process:

- at the start of the EIA/SEA the NCEA advises on a voluntary basis on the required content of the report
- after finishing the EIA/SEA report, the NCEA verifies:
 - if the report contains all relevant environmental information required for decision making;
 - the quality of the information.

The NCEA can also advice on a voluntary basis in other phases of EIA/SEA procedures. Examples are:

- at the moment of selection of alternatives by the competent authority from a broad range of alternatives;
- the start of public consultation for a concept EIA/SEA report;
- a formal 'pre-check' of a concept EIA/SEA report;
- EIA/SEA-related decision processes, e.g. a monitoring programme.

The NCEA's independent experts assess whether the quality of the environmental information is sufficient for decision taking. To ensure the NCEA's decisions are unaffected by any administrative responsibilities or political considerations, the NCEA acts totally independent of government. On the NCEA's website, all advisory reports (in Dutch) are made public and accessible to everyone.

Other activities

On demand, the NCEA also advises on other occasions, for instance for decisions where EA is not required. Furthermore, the NCEA organises expert groups to discuss new developments relevant to EIA/SEA. These groups consist

of reputable experts from universities, businesses and governments. They discuss the latest developments and advise on how to deal with specific themes in EIA/SEA. Sharing knowledge and making information available is core to the NCEA's work. Expert meetings, presentations, publications and the website are among the key functions of the Knowledge Platform, both for Dutch and international audiences.

Procedure step-by-step	
simplified procedure	full procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proponent notifies competent authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proponent notifies competent authorities (EIA)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> public announcement, start of procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>optional: consultation designated authorities</i> <i>optional: public consultation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultation designated authorities public consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>optional: scoping advice NCEA</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>optional: scoping advice NCEA</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write EIA report, including description of alternatives present report to competent authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write SEA/EIA report, including description of alternatives present report to competent authority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competent authority publishes EIA report and concept decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competent authority publishes SEA/ EIA report and concept decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> public consultation EIA report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> public consultation SEA/EIA report consultation EIA report designated authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>optional: review advice NCEA</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review advice NCEA mandatory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competent authority publishes decision and justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competent authority publishes decision and justification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluation

Contact

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