

**Interim Advisory Review of the
SEA
Coastal Development
Study and Plan
- Albania -**

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**Interim Advisory Review on the SEA for the South Coast
Development Study and Plan, Albania**

Advice submitted to the Albanian authorities, consultants and World Bank,
by a working group of the Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment
in the Netherlands.

the technical secretary



Ineke Steinhauer

the chairman



Klaas Jan Beek

Utrecht, 3 March 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SEA South Coast Development Plan, Albania

The World Bank will support the Government of Albania in capacity building in the area of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) through the assistance of the Netherlands Government under the Bank Netherlands Partnership Programme. One of the activities of this SEA capacity building programme is the undertaking of a specific pilot SEA to familiarise both government and other stakeholders with SEA. For Albania, the so-called South Coast Development Plan was identified as a suitable plan for such a pilot SEA. The idea of the pilot would be to use this as a model to show how to integrate SEA in plan development. The key Ministries involved in this SEA are the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration.

The Draft Interim Report (South Coast Development Study, phase I) has been presented to the Albanian authorities on 16 and 17 January 2006. This Study will form the basis for phase II and III, being the South Coast Development Plan and a so-called Policy Action Plan.

The Interim Report represents the Draft Study and reports on the following activities carried out by the consultants: definition of the planning area boundary, issues analysis, land use planning system and planning documents analysis, resource valuation and land/sea suitability analysis. This Draft Study will be finalized on the basis of the consultations with the stakeholders that took place in January. The Plan (phase II) is under preparation and will present the following: integrated coastal management strategy formulation, land (and sea) use plan, building and design regulations and detailed site plans, strategic environmental assessment, and monitoring and evaluation.

1.2 Involvement of the Netherlands EIA Commission

The World Bank has approached the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment¹ to provide its expertise and services in SEA. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the expected assistance of the Commission are provided in appendix 1 (September 2005).

According to the ToR, the objective of the involvement of the Commission in this pilot SEA for the South Coast Development Plan can be summarised as:

¹ Henceforth referred to as the Commission

- provide independent advice to both the government and its consultants on the implementation of the SEA process and
- carry out an independent quality review of the final SEA report.

The Commission wants to emphasise that it has no opinion on the question of feasibility of existing plans and strategies for the South Coast. The Commission **never** judges the acceptability of projects or plans, but tries to guarantee that all essential environmental (and socio-economic) information has been provided for sound and well balanced decision-making and that a transparent and participative plan development process has been followed, in which this information has been used.

1.3 Approach taken by the Commission

In order to prepare an advisory report on the above mentioned requests, the Commission formed a working group of experts, representing the Commission, comprising of the following disciplines: natural resource management, socio-economic development, land use planning, coastal development and SEA/EIA application. The working group members of the Commission are listed in appendix 3.

The Commission visited Albania from 15-20 January 2006 (see appendix 2, working programme).

The Commission was asked to advise on (i) the SEA process and (ii) perform a quality review of the SEA report. Therefore the Commission deliberately planned its visit to Albania during the presentation of the findings of the Interim report in January 2006 by the consultant to the Albanian authorities and stakeholders. This had the advantage of witnessing an important step in the SEA process, notably having the relevant stakeholders in Albania and consultants discussing the Interim report contents. Another advantage is that through the present advisory report, the Commission is still able to provide recommendations for the development of the actual South Coast Development Plan, which is being drafted at the moment. The Commission has been informed that the overall approach suggested by PAP/RAC was to integrate the SEA into the planning and development process ('be undertaken in parallel to formulation of the ICD Plan and should provide operative inputs into its formulation'). A separate SEA report for the Plan will be submitted as part of the next deliverables.

This implies also that the Commission has not been able to perform a quality review of the final SEA report, because this is not yet finalized. This will take place once the draft Plan/SEA is available (planned for April-May).

In practical terms this means that the Commission has reviewed the Interim report (the 'Study') only.

This review has been carried out in close consultation with the lead agency (Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication), running this plan process/SEA, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (in their role of making sure that SEA-s are of sufficient quality) and the consultants that prepared the Plan/SEA. Another purpose of this visit

was to collect project- and site specific information (see appendix 5, list of documents).

The expected outcome of the intervention of the Commission is:

- an interim advisory report, which gives comments on the Interim report and a set of recommendations and guidelines on how to integrate the findings in the ongoing plan process in order to produce a good quality SEA report (phase II and III).
- a final advisory quality review of the SEA report (and final Study and Plan) once available, specifying whether these reflect good SEA practice, both in contents as well as in the process leading up to the report.
- to have a 'hands-on' practical experience with and for main stakeholders on how to do good practice SEA.
- to establish first SEA experience to be used in future training workshops on SEA.

1.4 Outline of this advisory report

The Commission defines SEA as a way to bring people together in the planning process, and to structure and feed their debate on the environmental and, where relevant, other consequences of strategic decisions. More concrete, SEA is a tool to:

- structure the public and government debate in the preparation of policies, plans and programmes;
- feed this debate through a robust assessment of the environmental and, where relevant, social and economic consequences;
- ensure that the results of the assessment and debate are taken into account during decision making.

This means that public participation, transparency and good quality information are key principles. SEA is thus more than the preparation of a report; it is meant to improve the planning process and the quality of information used in the process. In summary, SEA is both process and contents oriented.

The Commission generally considers 10 main steps in integrated “good practice SEA” (see box below):

Screening:

1. get lead and environmental agencies together to decide on the need for SEA

Scoping:

2. identify the stakeholders in the planning process and announce the start of this process
3. develop with all stakeholders a common vision on (environmental) problems, objectives, and alternatives
4. check consistency of the new objectives with those in existing policies through inter-agency cooperation
5. use the results of the above steps to define the Terms of Reference of the SEA

Assessment:

6. carry out the assessment, document its results and make these available
7. organise an (independent) quality assurance of both SEA information and process

Decision making:

8. discuss with stakeholders what the results of the SEA mean for decision making
9. justify in writing the (political) choices that have been made in the finally adopted policy or plan

Monitoring:

10. monitor the implementation of the adopted policy or plan, and discuss outcomes with stakeholders and define actions to deal with unforeseen effects.

Therefore, the Commission chose to structure this advisory report along these 10 steps. In using this review framework, the Commission was faced with the difficulty that the Interim Report in fact cannot be considered as an SEA. Therefore the recommendations at the end of each paragraph are a mix of suggestions for improvement of the SEA process as well as the content of the interim report.

2. SCREENING

2.1 Step 1) Get lead and environmental agencies together to decide on the need for SEA

Article 5.1 of the Albanian EIA law (nr. 8990 January 23, 2003) requires SEA for strategies and action plans in key sectors such as energy, mining, industry, transport, agriculture, forests, natural resources, mining properties management and waste management, and for a variety of national and regional plans for territorial adjustment of urban and rural centres, industrial areas, coastal areas, tourism areas, protected areas and highly polluted and damaged sensitive areas.

The South Coast Development Plan can be considered as either a regional development plan with emphasis on tourism as main driver of economic development, or as a sectoral plan for the tourism sector. From both perspectives the plan would be legally subject to SEA.

The dual perspective of a sectoral and regional plan can be historically explained since the plan originated from the former Ministry of Territorial Adjustment and Tourism. Both regional planning and tourism were under the same Ministry. After the 2005 elections and consecutive change of government, Tourism has been relocated to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. The lead agency for the South Coast Development Plan remains the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications.

The METAP study ('Southern Coastal Region: Priority Assessment Study and SEA as a Tool in Coastal Management in Albania', 2004) already stressed the importance of carrying out an SEA, seamlessly integrated in the physical planning component of the Territorial Development Study and Plan of the Albanian Southern Coast.

The intention to carry out an SEA for the South Coast Development Study and Plan has been added to the original ToR for the Study². The study had to be in compliance with the World Bank environmental and social safeguards, and following Albanian and EU laws on SEA. According to the Albanian EIA law, it is required to compile an SEA report and ask for its evaluation by the Minister of Environment prior to its adoption by relevant agencies. Comments by the Minister are given through an environmental declaration that needs to be published.

The ToR for the South Coast Development Study and Plan do not include any further reference to aspects of the SEA contents and process.

The PAP/RAC proposal³, which describes the approach to the SEA, does specify the issues (impacts on protected areas, impacts on the coastal belt, impacts on water quality and marine ecosystems, impacts on green areas and public spaces in urbanized areas, impacts on waste management, impacts on landscape amenity, and impacts on sustainable development of tourism).

Ideally, SEA is undertaken as early as possible in the process of developing policies, plans or programmes. For the South Coast Development Study and Plan, the intention to undertake SEA in parallel with the Plan, as indicated in the PAP/RAC proposal is appreciated.

However, the ToR and PAP/RAC proposal do not give a clear insight in how tasks and responsibilities are distributed, especially in view of the rearrangements of ministerial responsibilities prior to the presentation of the Interim report.

During its visit, the Commission tried to get insight in:

- who is/are the responsible agency(ies): in other words: who are ‘the owners/developers’ of the planning process/SEA?
- are they aware of the objectives of this SEA?
- which are the decisions to be taken in the planning process and when will these be made by whom?

The Commission’s observation is that the relevant agencies and authorities were involved in the process, including the Ministry for the Environment, Forests and Water Administration. The need for a well balanced strategy to prevent negative impact on the environment and improve current environmental quality is widely felt and outspoken. The Commission also noticed that adequate knowledge of what an SEA is, and how this instrument should be integrated in the planning process is largely lacking. After some explanation on the role of SEA in a planning process, some government officials recognised the need for SEA, also in sectoral planning.

² Terms of reference ‘Integrated Coastal Development Study and Plan for the Albanian Southern Coast’ (end 2004) and Minutes of meeting between the Ministry of Territory Adjustment and Tourism and PAP/RAC (February 2005).

³ Form TECH 4 Description of Approach, Methodology and Work Plan for Performing the Assignment: provided to the Commission on 14-2-2006, 4 weeks after its site visit

The Commission found that the authority taking the lead in the process is the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications, which seems to be the Ministry best equipped for this important task. As environmental issues, tourism and economy are dealt with by other ministries close cooperation between various ministries should be given much attention. The existing Steering Committee, consisting of 6 Vice Ministers, appears to be a good vehicle to address this at the decision making level, although cooperation between ministries should also be formally organised at technical levels.

A working group with representation of various organizations at the central and local level was established at the launching of the Study. This arrangement was disrupted after the general elections in July 2005. A new working group has recently been appointed and is involved in the review of the Interim Report.

■ The Commission is of the opinion that the need for and purpose of this SEA should be made more explicit to all actors involved. Therefore the Commission **recommends** clear insight in and agreements on the following: when must SEA results be available in order to facilitate decision making in the planning process? The Steering Committee/working group, running this SEA/plan process, should therefore try to identify moments in the planning process where essential decisions are taken which have environmental implications. This may imply that the SEA report should be available prior to the formal approval of the Plan.

3. SCOPING

3.1 Step 2) Find the stakeholders and announce the start of the process

Public stakeholders are identified, ranging from local authorities to central government. Private stakeholders is a different matter. As landownership is not clear everywhere and tourism related companies are not involved in the planning process yet, this leaves the question if the final policy or plan will be tuned to market feasibility. There has been contact with international Tour Operators.

The consultant has organised several meetings with stakeholders at the start of the process:

- Initial Coastal Stakeholder Committee Meeting, April 5, 2005, in Saranda; 60 participants from Local Government, Local Institutions, intellectual, business and NGO communities.
- Second Coastal Stakeholder Committee Meeting, May 18, 2005: The Commission has been informed that this meeting indeed took place, although the minutes were not part of the documentation provided to the Commission. Apparently, the consultant has these minutes. From a transparency point of view, it is recommended to make these publicly available.

A major outcome of the first meeting was the desire of many participants to have a concrete plan which will be implemented. Too many studies and plans have been made without implementation.

Due to general elections and a rearrangement of central government structures, there has been a pause in central government collaboration in the process. During the visit of the Commission, the Steering Committee, chaired by the Vice-Minister of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication, reiterated its commitment to the process and reconfirmed that this Steering Committee is in the lead of the planning process.

The Commission has received several complaints about a lack of participation of local stakeholders. It is difficult to assess whether this was caused by a lack of initial interest with coastal communities, a lack of opportunities to participate in the process, or a lack of access to information. The Commission does observe that during the 16-17 January consultations, the interim report was not available in the Albanian language; only the summary has been translated.

- The Commission therefore **recommends** to create maximal access to information by translating the interim report documents in Albanian and to make printed as well as digital copies available. It is advisable to discuss the issue of when in the planning process to involve the views and knowledge of stakeholders from the private sector: In Western Europe it is common practice now to consult private parties to guarantee that plans are realistically tuned to market demand. In Albania however, a more careful approach on the timing to involve the private sector is recommended, because they are coming with unsolicited proposals. Once a draft plan is available, the Government could consider to organize a conference inviting the private sector.

- The Commission also **recommends** that the main findings of the stakeholder meetings, both in terms of process and contents are well documented to enhance transparency and are distributed to representatives of all relevant stakeholders to show appreciation for participating in the process. A response to these inputs as to how they have been dealt with/will be dealt with should be provided as well.

3.2 Step 3) Develop a shared vision on problems/objectives and alternatives

The interim report contains a wealth of information, amongst others on driving forces. It gives a good insight in the existing problems and opportunities of the South Coast. The report does not describe clearly which of these problems are assumed to be solved by realisation of the plan and which not. However, in fact it is too early to judge this part since the plan/policy recommendations have not been developed yet.

Nevertheless, even now it is difficult to identify the exact objectives of the South Coast Development Study and Plan. As stated earlier, the plan is a hybrid regional and sectoral development plan. In the introduction of the interim report, the main purpose is referred to as (i) to take stock of the existing situation, (ii) ensure environmentally and economically sustainable development of coastal municipalities, (iii) reconcile conflicting interests for preserving and revealing the uniqueness of the region, (iv) propose a strategy, policies and a programmatic plan, and (v) provide the basis for the implementation of GIS as a tool for monitoring and management.

These objectives reflect a *regional* development planning exercise. However, the interim report is very much focussed on tourism as the major driving force of development in the area. Tourism activities are planned in great detail; other sectors such as agriculture, fisheries or small industries receive lit-

tle or no attention. Similarly, vital social services such as health and education have not been addressed by the study. Consequently, the interim report reads as a support document for a *sectoral* development plan.

As the actual Plan is being developed at the moment, the Commission feels that now is a crucial moment to make use of the information in the interim report to decide together with the stakeholders identified in 3.1 which are the most important problems, objectives and alternatives the Plan has to address.

- The Commission **recommends** to formulate with all relevant stakeholders a clear definition of the objectives of the proposed plan to enable identification and formulation of alternative scenario's and to furnish criteria for monitoring and evaluation.

- The Commission sees the need to pay attention to tourism as a driving force in generating demand-driven development across sectors (notably agriculture, services, construction, small scale manufacturing). When a regional development perspective would be chosen, the Commission **recommends** to also consider relevant sectors other than tourism in the more detailed master planning at municipal level. For each municipality these may be different.

3.3 Step 4) Check consistency of the new objectives with those in existing policies

The purpose of this step is to check the consistency of the plan with existing policies, plans and programmes, through interagency co-operation. Specifically to avoid as much as possible conflicting objectives, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the new Plan. This requires an inventory of a number of development sectors to ensure that plans are compatible with each other.

The study team has paid sufficient attention to existing studies and policy documents in relation to biodiversity and nature conservation, notably the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. The objectives of the BSAP with respect to proposed environmentally sensitive areas have been treated consistently in the interim report.

A review has been made of all existing land-use plans for the region and inconsistencies have been analysed. This assessment contributes to the overall Plan which will be produced as a next step.

Nevertheless the issue of existing policy is confusing as present authorities in Albania are trying to sail a new course and are in the process of searching for the right new structures to end some policies from the past.

This causes some problems with respect to uncertainty on landownership, legalised building activities in wrong places and illegal building activities that have to be stopped. The Commission feels however, that many activities can be put in motion without the ownership issue being completely resolved, e.g. solid and liquid waste management, reconstruction of old villages, tourist trails, management plans for national parks, and for cultural heritage sites, etc. Nevertheless, respondents are very insistent that the landownership issue has to be solved. There is no land ownership map available yet.

The Commission was informed that a National Strategy for Tourism Development has been proposed (and will be adopted soon), covering a 10-year pe-

riod⁴. It envisages a new airport at Gironkaster and coastal transport facilities over sea.

In terms of infrastructure/transport planning, a road improvement scheme is presently carried out for the Vlora – Saranda coastal road, working from the North and South. It is unclear how the finalisation of this road will impact on the development of coastal communities. It is not very likely that present uncontrolled development will intensify as only minor improvements are being made to the road. Clarification on auxiliary infrastructure that needs to be developed to support sustainable tourism will be obtained.

■ The Commission **recommends** that the Plan takes into account the National Tourism Strategy as well as the ongoing infrastructure/transport developments. An analysis should be made of:

- whether these policies/plans/programs support or set conditions for the new Plan for the Development of the South Coast or
- have the potential to conflict with the new plan and, if so, how these conflicts can be solved.

3.4 Step 5) Use the results from the above steps to define the ToR for undertaking the technical assessment

The Commission observes that the South Coast Development Study and Plan is drafted according to the ToR for the Integrated Coastal Development Study and Plan for the Albanian Southern Coast of end 2004. In February 2005 some amendments were made to these ToR, in which parties agreed inter alia that the Study would be in compliance with World Bank environmental and social safeguards, including the requirement for SEA. The amendments stipulate that 'the SEA will follow Albanian and EU laws on SEA'. The technical proposal of the consultant (which was made available to the Commission on 14 February 2006) gave more insight in how the SEA would be linked to the South Coast Development Study and Plan and which impacts would be part of the technical assessment.

The Commission was unable to verify whether the approach to the SEA as described in the consultant proposal was discussed with stakeholders. Ideally step 5): the ToR for the technical assessment (i.e. Activity 4: Strategic Environmental Assessment, p27-29 of the PAP/RAC proposal) should be further refined through including the recommendations for screening and scoping as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. However, in view of the deadlines (The Commission was informed that the Plan will be finalized in April 2006) this will probably be difficult.

■ As the Study is almost being finalised with the presentation of the draft Interim report, and the Plan is underway, the Commission **recommends to** include the recommendations made in chapter 2 and 3 of the present advisory report as part of the SEA report/plan. In practice this implies that the SEA/Plan should be discussed intensively with stakeholders at all levels to enhance ownership of the plan, addressing at least:

⁴ The need for SEA for this strategy has been acknowledged

- Problem analysis, goals and objectives, including criteria for decision making;
- Consistency analysis;
- Proposed solutions/scenarios;
- Expected impacts per scenario (incl. cumulative effects) and a comparison of scenarios from an economic, social and environmental viewpoint. In order to compare alternative scenarios, criteria have to be established on beforehand. Use can be made of multi-criteria analysis;
- Decisions to be made.

4. ASSESSMENT

4.1 Step 6) Carry out the assessment, document its results and make these available

4.1.1 Assessment information

The assessment (at least the 'Study' part of it) has provided a wealth of information, of relevance to future planning and decision making. The consultants have studied the situation extensively. Existing previous study material and new inventory leading to actual information has been used. In this respect, the Commission finds the information in the draft interim report of good quality.

The quantity of the information in the interim report, however, is somewhat overwhelming. The report does not clearly differentiate between general and detailed information. Some issues, especially those related to tourism activity planning, have been elaborated in great detail (for example detailed studies of local architecture). On the other hand, the elaboration of the environmental carrying capacity postponed the aspects 'landscape' and 'habitats and biodiversity' to detailed local studies. These issues are particularly important to be treated at strategic level since the sensitivity of landscapes/scenery and biodiversity are important parameters in planning the type of tourism activities to aim for and their distribution over the region.

The interim report provides significant information to be able to make at least a qualitative assessment of the carrying capacity for these aspects. When reading the detailed assessment of tourism development areas and sites (section 4.3.2.2), the report does take into account the ecological and landscape sensitivity of areas and proposes tourism activities adapted to the circumstances.

■ The Commission **recommends** to integrate in the 'carrying capacity chapter' an overview of legal obligations (actual and proposed sensitive areas) and qualitative assessments of vulnerable landscapes and habitats/biodiversity to establish a more coherent set of criteria to be used in (tourism) planning. As a result, a map should be prepared indicating legally protected zones, proposed legally protected zones, and suitability of zones for different classes of tourism development (for example ranging

from high impact - mass - tourism to low impact - eco - tourism), as a basis for the development of the area⁵.

■ The Commission **recommends** to focus the SEA on strategic data, views and conclusions, and delete from the report the more detailed information (this information can be used later in the process of making master plans at local level).

■ Furthermore, the Commission **recommends** to include in the report a specific paragraph on the issue of cumulative impact of various subprojects included in the plan. Even though subprojects by themselves have acceptable effects on the environment, the accumulation of impacts of all subprojects can cause unacceptable impacts for a large part of the Southern Coast. Cumulative impact is an important point of interest for SEA as this issue is specific for the more strategic level.

4.1.2 Assessment process

The Commission has observed some constraints in the assessment process:

- There is no local language version of the available documentation. This omission should be corrected soonest (see 3.1.).
- The study team had no permanent residence in the country, which limited opportunities for direct communication between government and consultant.
- Some relevant government departments considered the interaction with the study team insufficient. Partially this can be attributed to the above mentioned limited possibilities for direct communication. The politically unclear situation during and after the elections also contributed to this situation.
- It is understood that the GIS database will be (or has been) handed over to the Albanian authorities. Some informants were not aware of this.

■ As the major objectives of SEA are to guarantee public participation, transparency and quality of information it is essential that this information is well presented in the Albanian language and in English. Apart from reports, the information should also be given through presentations at meetings held in local offices, like in Himarë and Saranda. The Commission also **recommends** to open a bi-lingual web-site on this pilot SEA to enhance transparency and participation, but also to enlarge the learning effect (and other possible 'spin-off) of this pilot SEA.

4.2 Step 7) Organise an (independent) quality assurance of both SEA information and process

Currently, the Commission provides this assurance.

■ The Commission **recommends** to discuss which group or agency will provide quality assurance in future SEAs. The Commission also **recommends** to provide clarity on the formal role of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration in SEA approval. It is further advised to start capacity building in SEA (and EIA) in order to establish independent quality assurance expertise in Albania for SEA (and EIA).

⁵ This should be done for the sites that will make the final list. So far, the number of sites has been reduced from 62 to 40.

5. DECISION MAKING

5.1 Step 8) Discuss with the stakeholders what the results of the SEA mean for decision making

In paragraph 2.1 the Commission already touched upon the relation between the SEA/plan and decision-making. As the final Plan is currently underway, the Commission is of the opinion that due attention has to be paid to creating 'ownership' of the Plan and its purpose with all stakeholders that will play a role in the implementation of the plan. For the South Coast Development Plan, this implies that stakeholders have to define and agree which type of decisions are taken in this planning process. Generally spoken, several levels of strategic decision-making can be distinguished:

- **Why** plan something? (Refers to the need and/or purpose, long term objectives)
- **What** to plan? (Refers to interventions, technologies and capacities)
- **Where** to plan it? (Refers to locations on interventions)

For the consultant this means that an effort has to be made to manage the SEA process in terms of arranging more frequent contacts with relevant stakeholders in Albania. The Commission suggests that the Project Coordination Unit (and/or the Institute of Urban Planning) at the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication appoints, as owner of the planning process, an SEA/plan process manager, who works closely together with the Albanian consultant of the study team. This person will be responsible for involvement of all actors and building up mutual understanding for and ownership of the results.

The Steering Committee, which exists already, is especially meant to guarantee the political back-up and support for undertaking this SEA.

■ The Commission **recommends** to prepare the Plan in such manners that it allows explicit decisions at the strategic level (answering the 'why', 'what' and 'where' questions. The following procedure and tentative time schedule is advised:

- April: acceptance of Final report on study and plan and SEA report
- April-May: consultancy/commentary round with all authorities,
- June-July: Production of Final South Coast Development Plan.
- July: Political Decision making on South Coast Development Plan.
- September-onwards: implementation through master planning at local level.

5.2 Step 9) Justify in writing the (political) choices that have been made in the finally adopted policy or plan

Although the Final Plan is not yet available, the Interim report has been discussed at a:

- National stakeholder meeting in Tirana, 16 January 2006
- Regional stakeholder meeting in Vlora, 17 January 2006.

At the stakeholder meeting in Tirana it was concluded that the Interim report would be accepted, provided the comments (e.g. a financial plan was requested) from the meeting would be properly reflected in the final text.

- As part of good SEA practice, formal decisions should be published (and publication should continue each time as decision-making on next steps has taken place). Therefore the Commission **recommends** the publication of this conditional approval.

6. MONITORING

6.1 Step 10) Monitor the implementation of the adopted policy or plan, and discuss outcomes with stakeholders and define actions to deal with unforeseen effects

Monitoring serves the dual purpose to:

- check whether the regional plan is implemented according to the decisions taken, and
- to verify whether the implementation of the plan results in any unexpected environmental or social consequences which have not been addressed in an environmental management plan. For these impacts it should be discussed whether additional measures consequently are necessary⁶.

The first issue of how to monitor the implementation of the plan has not yet been addressed. This part of the report can also give a view of how to do SEA for the master plans at the local level.

- It is envisaged that some local authorities are not yet up to the adequate standard of knowledge to carry out this process of master planning. Lack of funds can be another negative factor in this field. As master planning forms an important part of the implementation of the South Coast Development Plan, the Commission **recommends** to concentrate the process of master planning initially on one or two municipalities or communes (as is being proposed also by the consultants). These will be pilot master plans that will serve as good examples to other communities along the South Coast. The pilots must be supported financially and by means of capacity building. Apart from monitoring, some form of enforcement is needed to keep developments within the framework of the regional plan. Two levels of compliance are of relevance: compliance of master plans with regional coastal plan and compliance of activities with master plan (licensing).

The second issue of monitoring environmental and social consequences of the Plan is also not yet addressed. This will be done in the next phase (see Activity 5: Monitoring and evaluation, PAP/RAC proposal p. 29). The report announces that for a number of environmental components indicators will be identified to measure the quality of each component. It is unclear who will be responsible for the monitoring and for the implementation of an environmental management plan.

⁶ The Government has committed to follow the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework put forward for the overall project, when implementing recommendations/measures/investments that come from the Plan.

- The Commission **recommends** to have an environmental monitoring plan accompanying the development plan, including a mechanism describing tasks and responsibilities for the implementation of such environmental monitoring plan. It is also important to guarantee sufficient funds for this up front.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission finds that when judging this Interim Study according to the several SEA phases (Screening, Scoping, Assessment, Decision making and Monitoring), in general the Assessment part (the Interim Study) is of good quality. Screening, Scoping and the link to Decision making did not yet receive sufficient attention. Also Monitoring should be further elaborated. This can be repaired however, as the Plan is being developed at the moment.

The Commission has the following overall conclusions and recommendations:

- 1) Information for decision making: the quality of the information is good, however it should be better focused on the decisions to be taken.
- 2) Participation: a good start has been made but especially in Plan development extra efforts should be realized.
- 3) Transparency of the process and decision making: make available the most important information in the Albanian language including the decisions taken.