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**THE ROLE OF MONITORING AND AUDITING IN THE
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) PROCESS
IN AUSTRALIA**

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ABSTRACT

Monitoring and auditing are two important components of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. There has been an increasing global trend to introduce different regulatory and management approaches to EIA monitoring and auditing. However, monitoring and auditing are two of the weakest areas of the EIA process globally compared to other components. The key issues that relate to EIA monitoring and auditing are mainly institutional/organizational in character rather than technical.

Australia is one of the few countries to have legislative provisions for EIA monitoring and auditing. In the last few years legislative changes have been brought to the EIA process both federally and at State and Territory level, yet monitoring and auditing remain weak or neglected within the EIA process. Procedural and institutional approaches to EIA monitoring and auditing vary among different States and Territories. Previously, no comprehensive study has been conducted to evaluate the procedures and practices of EIA monitoring and auditing in Australia.

This study identifies four major areas for analysis and evaluation of current procedures and practices of EIA monitoring and auditing in three Australian EIA jurisdictions: institutional arrangements; public accountability, transparency and community involvement; approaches and techniques; and resources and capacity. Case studies involving EIA projects and surveys and interviews with EIA practitioners were conducted in three Australian States: South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales.

This study reveals that Western Australia and New South Wales implement environmental impact monitoring and auditing both within and outside the EIA framework. In South Australia, monitoring and auditing exist completely outside the EIA framework. Out of a total 51 evaluation criteria set in this research, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales do not meet 39, 28 and 26 of these criteria respectively. Some of the procedural aspects of EIA monitoring and auditing in NSW are better than those of Western Australia although Western Australia is widely recognized as one of the world's well-reputed EIA jurisdictions.

The case studies show that EIA monitoring and auditing occur in all three Australian States but they are not very effective or efficient. Monitoring and auditing are being implemented as

part of the ongoing environmental management of an operation. They are not integrated into the early stages of the EIA process and they do not provide any real feedback to the EIA process for its future improvement. The Australian approach to EIA monitoring and auditing is that proponents should fulfil their commitments, comply with terms and conditions of a development authorisation, and report to regulators on compliance and environmental performance. There is, however, no real enforcement in practice; instead there exists a situation where regulators rely heavily on proponents for information and everything depends on the proponents being committed to doing their job. Environmental monitoring and auditing implemented outside the EIA framework under different regulatory tools are not linked to the EIA process. They complement EIA monitoring and auditing but they do not replace them.

An absence of mandatory legal provisions for EIA monitoring and auditing is mainly responsible for the absence of an appropriate organizational set-up and lack of resources in the relevant government departments. A lack of formal inter-agency coordination in the post-EIA project operation is an obstacle in maximizing the benefits of environmental monitoring and auditing conducted outside the EIA process. Public accountability and transparency in EIA monitoring and auditing also need to be addressed. This thesis suggests two models in order to implement monitoring and auditing both within and outside the EIA framework in Australia. A number of recommendations have also been made to improve the overall situation.

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