

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Environmental Planning and Assessment Caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network has worked since the late 1980s on various elements of the development of federal EA. In 1988, the caucus produced a list of eight "core elements" of Environmental Assessment:

1. Legislation must be utilized to establish a mandatory EA process that is reviewed by an independent agency, and which results in a final and binding decision.
2. The legislation must contain a broad definition of environment, and the EA process must apply universally to a variety of initiatives, including governmental policy-making.
3. The legislation must minimize the amount of discretionary decision-making within the EA process, and must establish clear criteria to guide the planning and review of proposals in order to ensure accountability of decision-makers.
4. The legislation must ensure that proponents justify proposed undertakings by demonstrating:
 - That the purpose of the undertaking is legitimate;
 - That there is an environmentally acceptable need for the undertaking; and
 - That the preferred undertaking is the best of the "alternatives to" and "alternative means" considered by the proponent.
5. The legislation must provide for a significant public role early and often in the planning process, and thus, must contain provisions relating to public notice and comment, access to information, participant funding, and related procedural matters.
6. The legislation must establish an environmental assessment process that results in a decision that can be implemented, is enforceable, and is subject to terms and conditions where necessary.
7. The legislation must specifically address monitoring and other post-approval [follow-up] activities, and must ensure that the environmental impacts of abandoning or discontinuing the undertaking in the future are considered as part of the EA process.
8. The legislation must establish an efficient EA process, and must provide for joint federal-provincial reviews where necessary.