

## EIA: issues and challenges

LEE HENG KENG

### Laporan (Report)

Mr. Lee Heng Keng delivered his talk on the 17th September 1999 at the Geology department, Universiti Malaya. His talk focussed on the role and implementation of EIA in Malaysia. EIA is essentially a planning tool for preventing environmental problems in a project implementation. It is a study to identify, predict, evaluate and communicate information about the impacts on the environment of a proposed project and to detail out the mitigating measures prior to the project approval and implementation.

This talk was attended by about 30 members and was chaired by Dr. Saim Suratman.

### Abstrak (Abstract)

#### I. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

##### What is Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

EIA is a study to identify, predict, evaluate and communicate information about the impacts on the environment of a proposed project and to detail out the mitigating measures prior to project approval and implementation..

##### Why do we need EIA?

EIA is essentially a planning tool for preventing environmental problems due to an action. It seeks to avoid costly mistakes in project implementation, costly either because of the environmental damage that are likely to arise during project implementation, or because of modification that may be required subsequently in order to make the action environmentally acceptable. In Malaysia, EIA is required under section 34A, Environmental Quality Act, 1974 (APPENDIX 1). EIA when integrated into the existing planning and decision-making machinery, provides additional information towards better decision-making.

##### Which activities are subject to EIA?

Activities subject to EIA are prescribed under the Environmental Quality (Prescribed Activities) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Order, 1987 (APPENDIX 2). A copy of this Order may be obtained from the Government Printers or from any office of the Department of Environment (APPENDIX 3).

##### How to conduct EIA?

To assist you in the preparation of environmental impact assessment reports, you may purchase a copy of "A Handbook of Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines" from the Department of Environment, for RM10.00 per copy.

#### II. THE EIA PROCEDURE IN MALAYSIA

The EIA procedure adopted in Malaysia consists of three major steps. The steps in the EIA procedure, which are shown in Figure 1, can be described as follows:

**Preliminary assessment** relates to the initial assessment of the impacts due to those activities that are prescribed. Preliminary assessment is the stage of the EIA procedure that should normally be initiated at the pre-feasibility study stage of the development of an activity. Project options are identified at this stage and any significant residual environmental impacts are made known. The preliminary report that is prepared is reviewed by a technical committee in the DOE internally. However, where expertise within the Department is lacking, assistance from other government and non-government agencies may be sought.

**Detailed assessment** is undertaken for those projects for which significant residual environmental impacts have been predicted in the preliminary assessment. The assessment should ideally continue during project feasibility, and the detailed EIA Report be submitted for approval by the Director General of Environmental Quality prior to the giving of approval

by the relevant Federal of State Government authority for the implementation of the project. Detailed assessment is carried out based on specific terms of reference issued by an ad hoc Review Panel appointed by the Director General. The EIA Report that is prepared is reviewed by the ad hoc Review Panel chaired by the Director General.

Review of EIA Reports is carried out internally by the DOE for preliminary assessment reports and by an ad hoc Review Panel for detailed assessment reports. Recommendations arising out of the review are transmitted to the relevant project approving authorities for consideration in making a decision on the project. The normal period allocated for a review of a preliminary assessment report is one month while that for a detailed assessment report is two months. The DOE maintains a list of experts who may be called upon to sit as members of any Review Panel established. The selection of the experts depends on the areas of environmental impacts to be reviewed.

Other main features of the EIA procedure are shown in Figure 1 include the following:

**The Approving Authority** is the Government Authority that has the task of deciding, whether or not a project should proceed. The authorities include the following:

1. The National Development Planning Committee for Federal Government sponsored projects;
2. The Regional Development Authorities;
3. The State Planning Authorities for State Government sponsored projects; and
4. The Ministry of Trade and Industry or MIDA for industrial projects.

Recommendations arising from the review of the EIA Reports are forwarded to the relevant project approving authorities. At the completion of the review period for a detailed EIA, a **Detailed Assessment Review Document** is issued by the Review Panel. This document may include:

1. Comments on the Detailed Assessment report;
2. Recommendations to the project proponent and the project approving authority including any specific conditions attached to the project approval; and
3. Recommendation for environmental monitoring and auditing.

Saim Suratman



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## Our Evolving Planet, Earth History in New Perspective: a Review



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