

## Keynote Paper 2

### EIA: The necessary and significant role geologists can play

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Rapid and obvious deterioration of the environment caused by uncontrolled development has compelled the Government to make EIA an integral part of project planning, as important as technical and financial planning. Although the Government has given clear indication about its concern through legislation and awareness campaigns, this concern is sometimes not shared by developers and the significance of the EIA is not fully appreciated by consultants. This situation arises because the developer sees the EIA as one more bureaucratic and financial hurdle. The consultant, on the other hand, usually lacks the integrated knowledge necessary to enable him to see linkages between environmental systems. It is unfortunate that from observation the geological aspect is usually the weakest link in making an EIA effective.

An EIA is a multi-disciplinary and forward-looking predictive process. It starts with a description of the project and the existing environment and ends with providing impact statements, mitigating measures and cost-benefit analysis. Up to now the geologists have played an excellent role in providing information on the existing physical environment. However, it is apparent that the geologist feels that this is his most important role and that is where his contribution ends. What is not realised is that the second and most important part of the EIA is not the purview of any one expert group and the geologists, indeed, have a necessary and significant role to play.

A brief review on the input from geologists in EIA reports in Malaysia reveal the following weaknesses:

- the information given is too academic in nature;
- geological dynamic processes, e.g. mass movement and sedimentation, are not adequately dealt with;
- the full spectrum of geological subfields is not fairly covered, with the report being biased towards one geological expertise;
- the 'standard' reporting format informally adopted by geologists allow non-geologists to provide similar information through a desk-top study;
- there is little committed effort made to link the geological information obtained with the requirements of the EIA.

To overcome these weaknesses the required inputs and outputs should be planned diligently. To accomplish this the geologist has to step out of the traditional geologists' thinking mode. Only then the geologists can play the necessary and significant role that they should.

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