

Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment



Quality Assurance through independent EIA Review

EIA Review is the process of establishing whether the environmental information submitted by a developer to a competent authority, as part of an EIA procedure and report, is adequate to inform the decision on authorisation.

Who commissions and reviews EIAs?

Competent (or mandated) authorities usually undertake a review of the EIA report, but often they commission outside organisations or experts to undertake reviews on their behalf.

Funders or developers may find it helpful to undertake an internal review to check the adequacy of the work before they submit the report to the authorities. This internal review cannot guarantee that the competent authority will approve the EIA, but it will very likely improve quality and reduce delays caused by requests for further information. Like competent authorities they may do this themselves or they may commission an independent review.

EIA consultants themselves may also commission a review to ensure that their work is of good quality, and that the EIA report forms a sound basis for decision-making.

Civil Society may request an independent review if they are unhappy about the EIA process, or concerned about the project.

What are the costs and who pays?

Review costs depend largely on the size of the project, complexity of the issues and whether it is controversial or not.

In straightforward projects, the EIA can be reviewed by a small team (2 persons) in approximately a week. More complicated EIAs may require a larger team and more time, whilst EIAs of big, highly controversial projects may require a site inspection and interviews as part of the review.

In all cases, SAIEA will provide a detailed quote for doing a review.

Review costs are usually paid by the proponent or financier.

Benefits of independent EIA review

Improved EIA quality

When EIA consultants know that their work will be reviewed, they usually make an extra effort to improve its quality. Independent reviews are therefore a key tool in EIA quality assurance.

Reduced delays

Usually, an independent review reduces delays because it recommends improvements to the EIA report before it is submitted to the authorities. A good quality EIA seldom gets 'stuck' in the authorities' administrative system.

Cost efficiency

Good quality EIAs usually result in better and faster decision-making, which in turn is beneficial to project planning and implementation. Also, a good EIA usually results in a good EMP, which helps the developer avoid or minimize negative environmental impacts.

Transparency and credibility

EIAs that are independently reviewed (and then improved as needed), are less likely to be contested by stakeholders than those which are not properly scrutinised.



For more information on SAIEA's review system, or to obtain a quote for a review, please contact Dr Peter Tarr at +264 61 220579 or email peter.tarr@saiea.com

For more information about SAIEA – see www.saiea.com

How SAIEA's Review System works.

Irrespective of who commissions the independent review, SAIEA prefers all key stakeholders to agree that an independent review will be undertaken. This reduces the perception that the reviewer is a 'hired gun' for a specific interest group.

Once contracted, SAIEA assembles a small team to conduct the review, using the best available expertise. The review is 'evidence-based', relying on the documentation provided or (in some cases), *in situ* information gathering.

SAIEA's review form, which is a checklist customized for African circumstances, is used in completing the review. The review team scrutinizes the EIA report and accompanying specialist studies, to ensure that it meets best practice standards.

Finally, the reviewers compile a review report, which is presented to the client.

SAIEA does not share its review with anyone other than the client, whose prerogative it is to make the review public or not.

If desired, SAIEA can invite authorities from various sectors within the country to participate in the review, so that they 'learn by doing', and build capacity in their institutions. Thus, the review can double as a training exercise.

In the past 12 years, SAIEA has conducted over 100 EIA reviews in more than 10 African countries. We take pride in having an extremely high rate of repeat clients, who value SAIEA's professional review service.

Regular clients include a growing number of African governments, parastatals, lending and donor agencies, developers, NGOs and EIA consulting firms.