



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Integrating Environment Issues into Planning

- effective Strategic Environmental Assessment

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16th October 2020

How are environmental issues integrated into Planning?

National and International
Environmental Policy and Objectives



Strategic Development Plans
(e.g. National Plans, Programmes)

**Strategic Environmental
Assessment**

Appropriate Assessment

Strategic Flood Risk
Assessment



Applications for planning permission

Environmental Impact
Assessment

Appropriate Assessment

Flood Risk Assessment

What exactly is SEA and where did it come from?

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a *process* which evaluates the likely significant environmental consequences of a plan or programme (P/P) made by a public authority (e.g. Local Authority, Govt Department or Agency).

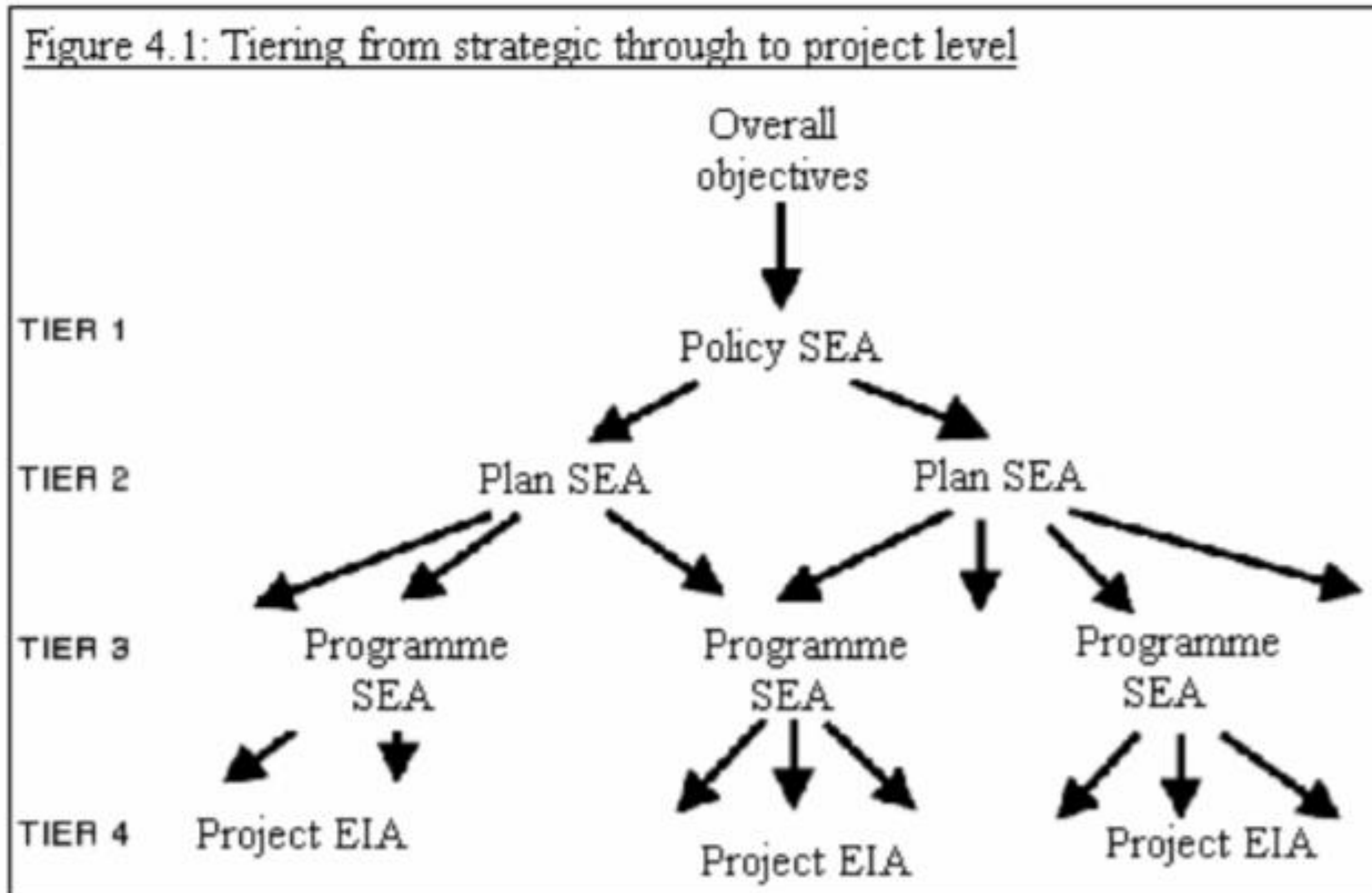
SEA can help us decide what we can do and where we can do it without significantly harming the environment.

The 2001 SEA Directive was developed as a response to the weaknesses of project-level Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Terminology is similar and overall function is to support plan-making.

Purpose of SEA

“The objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.....”
(Article 1).

How SEA can protect the environment:



E.g. SEA of National Plans

↓
SEA of Regional Plans

↓
SEA of County Plans

↓
SEA of Local Plans

↓
EIA of projects

Theoretical benefits of SEA

When effectively executed, SEA should reduce the likelihood of third party appeals, lengthy/costly oral hearings and ultimately, reduce environmental degradation.

SEA also promotes good practice in environmental planning:

- SEA involves setting environmental quality goals;
- SEA get local authorities talking to each other;
- Institutional strengthening;
- Baseline data collection and understanding;
- SEA requires monitoring of the effects of plans and programmes on the environment.

Steps in SEA

1. Screening- does it have likely significant effects on the environment (and therefore require a full SEA)?
2. Scoping – what will be assessed and how will it be assessed?
3. Impact Assessment - consideration of alternatives; identification and evaluation of impacts; mitigation measures; reporting (Environmental Report); consultation and public participation.
4. Information on the decision: SEA statement
5. Monitoring of environmental effects.

Scope of application of SEA Directive

SEA Directive implemented via S.I. 435 and S.I. 436 of 2004.

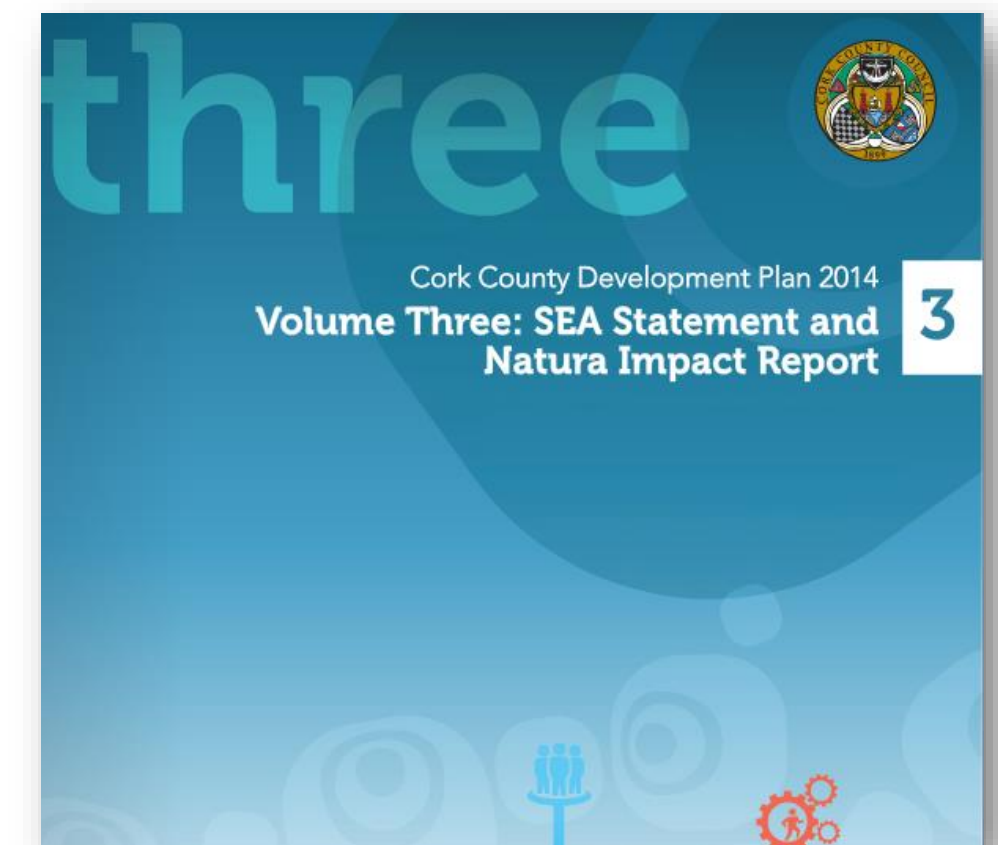
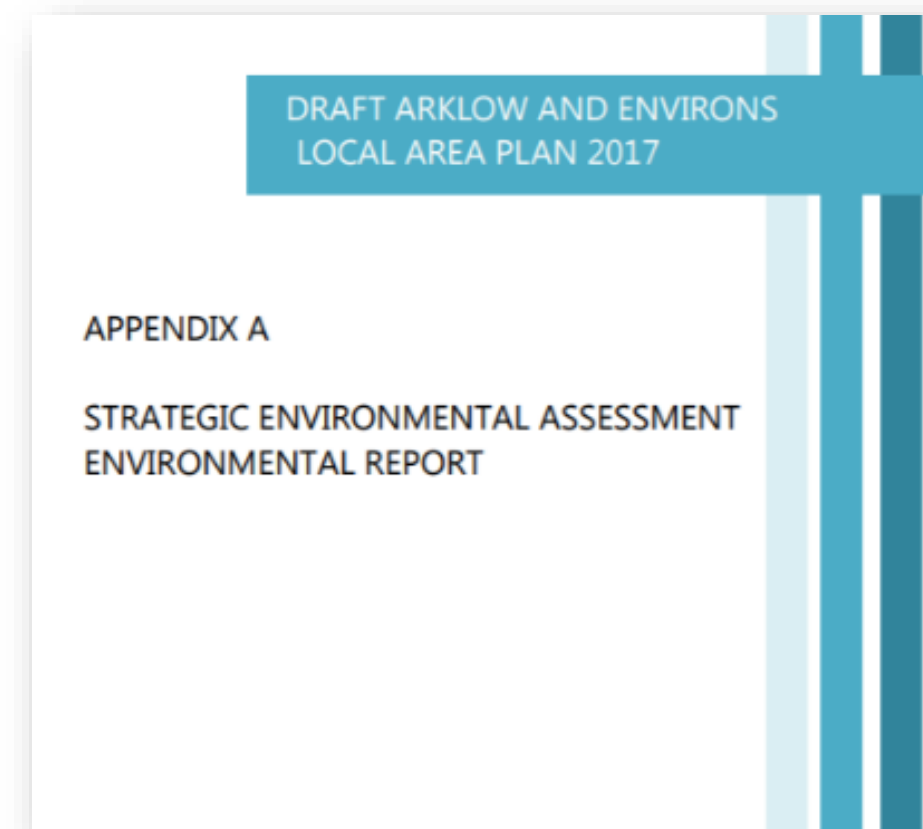
S.I. 435 of 2004 (all plans and programmes), as amended by S.I. 200 of 2011

S.I. 436 of 2004 (specific land-use plans only), as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011

Scope of application of SEA Directive

S.I. 436 of 2004 (land-use planning only) requires SEA for

- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).
- County & Town Development Plans (>10,000 popn).
- Local Area Plans above 5000 popn or >50km².
- SDZ Planning Schemes.

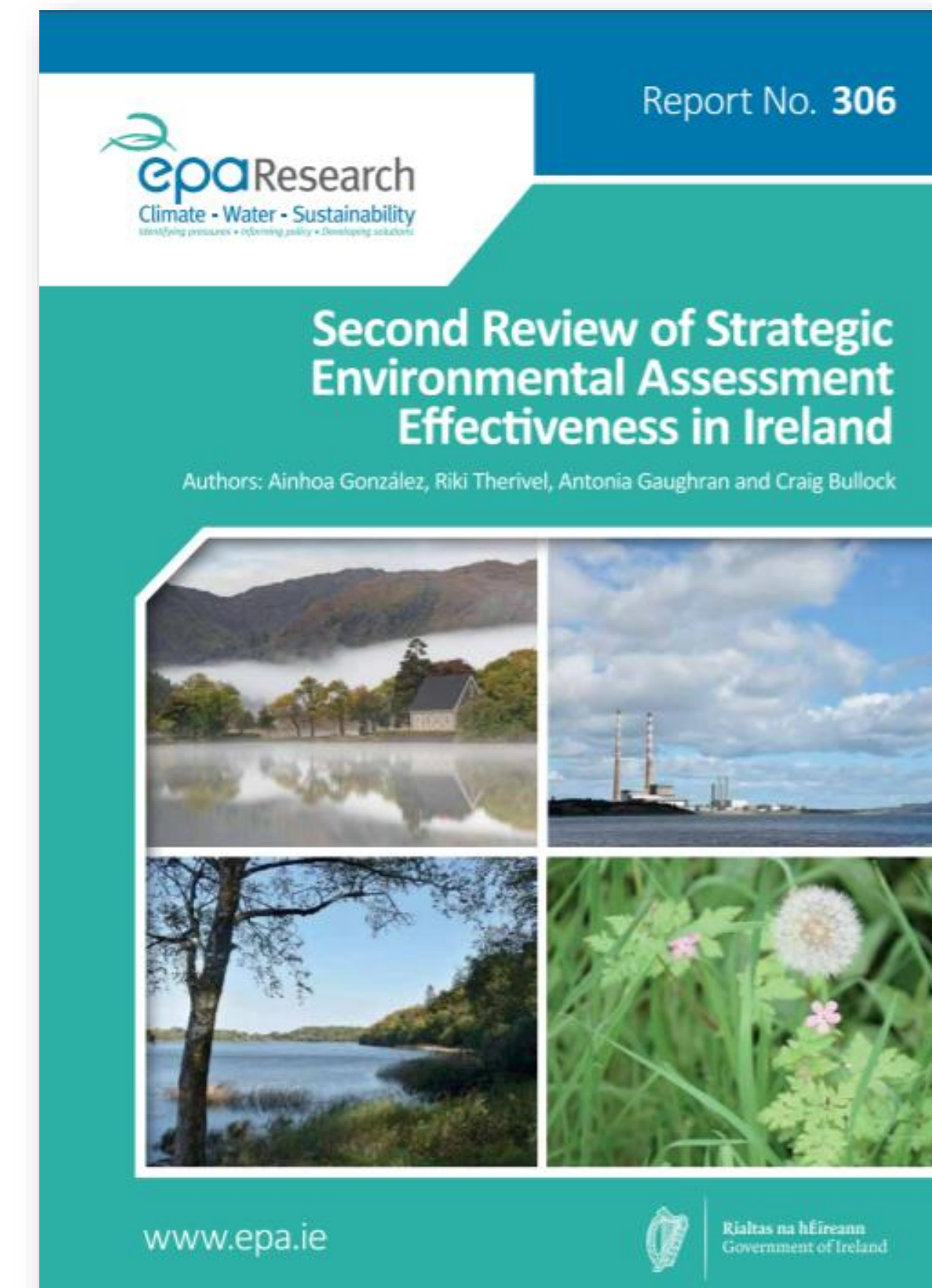


How is SEA performing in Ireland?

Second review of SEA effectiveness by EPA (2020)

Case studies and interviews

Effectiveness criteria: *context, procedural, pluralist, normative, substantive, knowledge and learning, and transactive.*



How is SEA performing in Ireland?

What are we doing well?

“More governmental bodies and sectors have engaged in the SEA process and there is, generally, a greater openness to the process”

“SEA process is being applied across a wider range of plans and programmes than was found in the previous effectiveness study”

“SEA is leading to changes in plans/ programmes through both direct and indirect pathways.”

“...leading to consideration of more environmentally friendly alternatives and changes to policy approaches and policy wording to reduce the environmental impact of the plan/programme”

How is SEA performing in Ireland?

What are the challenges?

“the consideration of alternatives”

“monitoring remains the most significant gap in the procedure, and it is clear from the review that plan-makers and SEA practitioners are in need of clear guidance on how to develop and implement effective monitoring.”

“limited evidence that mitigation measures were integrated into the final plans/programmes,”

“Opportunities exist for better public engagement in both plan-making and the SEA process, as the statutory minimum level of consultation has not been found to be effective at engaging the public”

How is SEA performing in Europe?



Evaluation of SEA Directive under the REFIT Programme

(European Commission's regulatory fitness and performance programme)

“what works and what can be improved, the extent to which the objectives of the Directive have been achieved and why some elements or features are successful or not.”

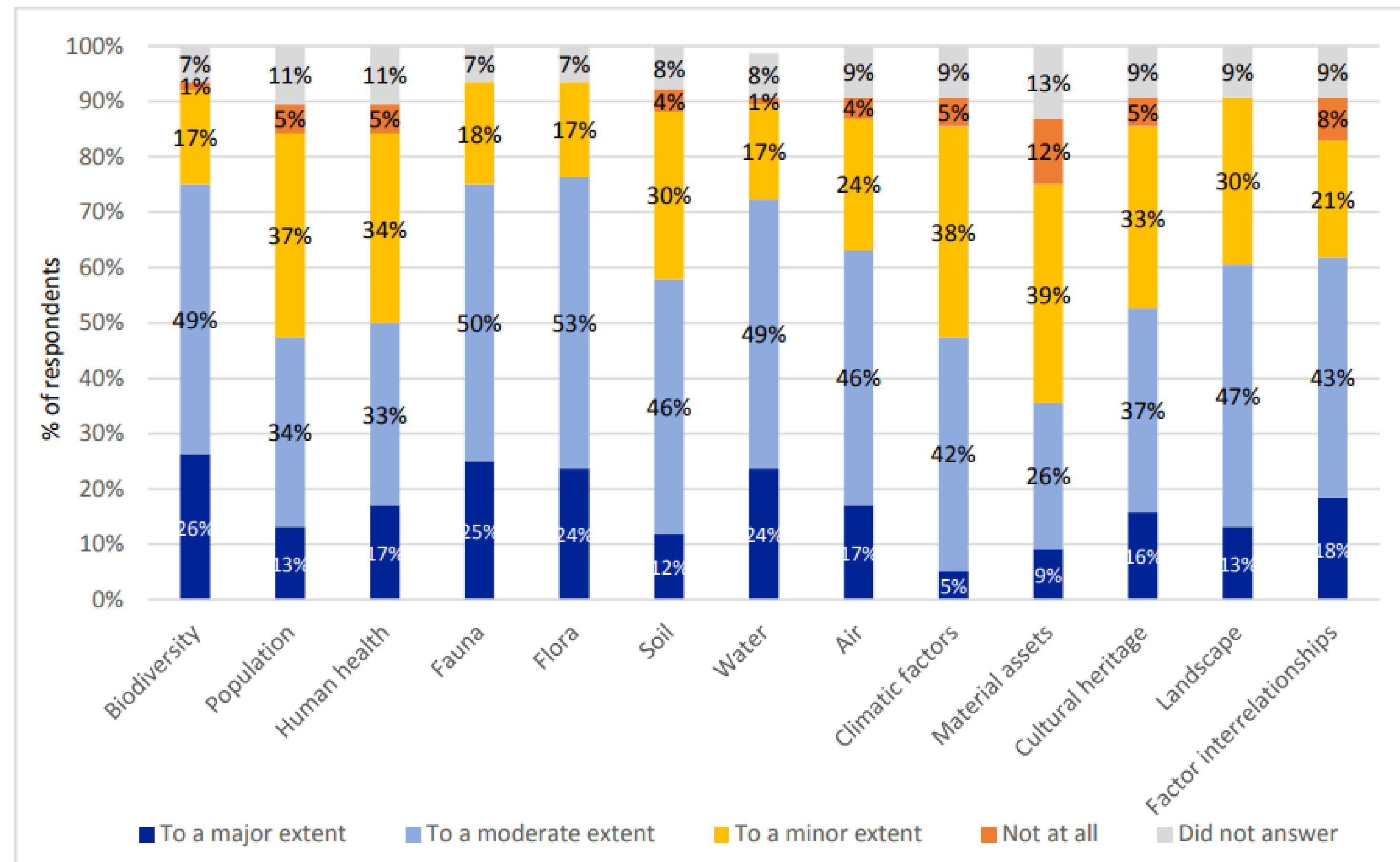
“Fit for purpose”?



How is SEA performing in Europe?

What is being doing well?

Figure 2: To what extent has the SEA Directive contributed to a high-level protection of different environmental issues? [Targeted consultation questionnaire] (share of total respondents, n=76)



How is SEA performing in Europe?

What is being doing well?

Setting mandatory requirements for considering environmental issues in plans and programmes at early planning stages;

Introducing public participation;

*Fostering (intersectoral/interinstitutional/public) dialogue;
Increasing the transparency of planning processes;*

Raising environmental awareness among decision makers.

How is SEA performing in Europe?



What are the challenges?

The scope of the SEA and definition of the terms 'plans and programmes';

The quality of the environmental monitoring;

The ability to address new raising environmental challenges, such as climate change.

How is SEA performing in Europe?

REFIT Conclusions:

The SEA Directive performs effectively.

SEA costs are reasonable and that the benefits of carrying out a SEA outweigh the costs.

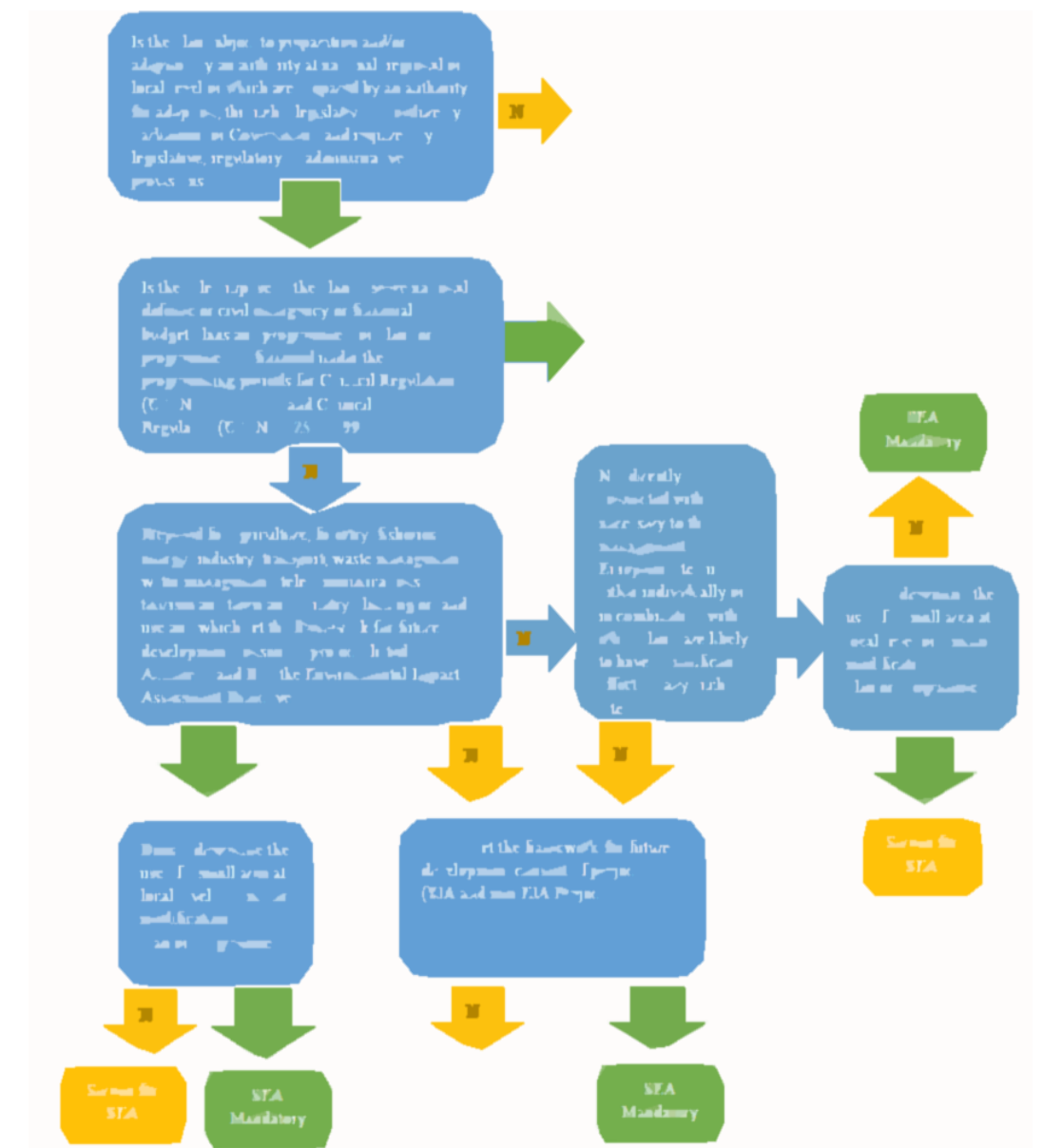
SEA Directive delivers a high level of protection of the environment and sustainable development.

SEA Directive is largely coherent with other relevant environmental legislation and sectoral policies,

SEA Directive can be considered to have added value by providing a systematic approach to assessing the environmental impacts of plans and programmes under its scope and by including a series of mandatory procedural steps, such as public participation and the assessment of reasonable alternatives.

Next steps: Revised SEA Guidelines (DHLGH)

- Section 28 Guidelines.
- Targeted at land-use planning sector.
- Scope is set by SEA Directive and implementing Regulations
- Procedure-oriented.
- Recommend good practice.
- Reflect 15 years of experience.
- Wherever possible, promote the benefits of SEA.
- Proposed changes would be subject to a public consultation
- Opportunity for members of the public, planning authorities, environmental organisations and other stakeholders to make submissions or observations before guidelines are adopted.





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Thank you.

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