

## Book Review

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**Environmental impact assessment:  
practical solutions to recurrent  
problems**

Wiley, 2003, 562 pp.  
price £ 95.  
ISBN 0-471-45722-1

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a familiar and widely applied approach to address the environmental impacts of new developments in a variety of settings. Over the years there have been many critiques of EIA methodology highlighting its strengths and weaknesses from a variety of perspectives. This new book by David Lawrence, weighing in at over 500 pages, is a detailed and serious examination of some specific problems in EIA. The author provides both an articulate summary of the evolution and practice of EIA, drawing on over 25 years experience.

This book is very much focused on EIA as a process rather than the more

usual review of specific methods and techniques for EIA. The central argument of the book is that EIA is normally depicted as a linear, sequential and bounded process with the assumption that the values and ethics underpinning the EIA process and application are both understood and agreed by different parties. Lawrence argues, however, that EIA is a normative process and that practitioners have a wide discretion in the sequence in which EIA activities are undertaken, the choice of inputs and outputs and in the interrelations between elements and activities. The book then articulates and promotes the view that greater attention is needed to the management of the process. The book then examines problems and issues within specific EIA stages or activities, such as the process of public consultation. Lawrence provides a thorough and scholarly insight into competing discourses on the role of science, values and ethics in public decision making in general and EIA practice in particular.

The author offers a challenging analysis of EIA as a method and a process and provides many excellent ideas to help support improvements to EIA. The whole book is informed by relevant case studies, which help bring some of the more theoretical discussions to life.

If the book has a weakness it is that at times the sheer number of ideas presented, and large number of flow diagrams and charts, take some digesting.

The natural audience for this book is those practitioners or students who are troubled by the tendency to treat EIA as a neutral decision-making instrument. The book works best as an up-to-date reference book on specific problems within the EIA process.

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