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## Abstract

Environmental Impact Assessment in Samoa is regulated by the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2007 (Regulations). The use of the Regulations has meant greater clarity for the Planning and Urban Management Agency (Agency) administering the EIA process, setting out what level of EIA is required, the components required for an EIA and the process for review and approval. To support the application of the Regulations, training was undertaken to increase the understanding for those involved in the EIA process. The training for the Government of Samoa covered the government agencies, service providers, industry and the general public. Each party has a role to play in EIA and the better they understand their role and responsibilities, the better quality the EIA can be. For example, if local villagers understand the principles of EIA, their contribution during consultation can better inform the EIA and mitigation required.

The training was prepared in such a way that on-the-ground training time was as efficient and relevant as possible. A series of distance learning training modules were prepared for The Agency staff who completed these and returned their answer books to the Trainer for marking before training workshops were run. These training modules covered; Introduction to EIA in Samoa, EIA Practice and Process and Train the Trainers. The latter was a capacity building element to the training to enable staff in The Agency to be able to educate future staff or external parties in EIA in the future. This paper discusses, the value of good practice EIA in the Pacific Islands and how best to equip the local people to be able to understand their roles and responsibilities in the EIA process, now and for the future.

## 1 Raising the Bar:

The theme “*Raising the Bar*” for this conference is particularly appropriate for the Pacific Islands Planning Association (PIPA) as that is the essence of everything that we undertake.

The bar – that is the underlying understanding of the community, contractors, consultants and professionals of the environmental assessment process – it has to be said, is not set at a high level and it is very important for the future of environmental assessment, planning and development in the Pacific that this understanding is improved on throughout the community.

Central to improving understanding is engaging with the community at all levels from the villages to the professionals to provide them with a standard of information that is current, not only for the Pacific but that is also Best Practice for New Zealand, Australia, Europe or other areas around the world.

The reason for this is that many Government and Non-Governmental Organisations that provide advance funds, loans or aid money rely on Best Practice standards to manage the projects that they are investing in. In other words they expect that the standards of environmental awareness in Samoa are the same as they would be here in Christchurch.

Key to raising the bar is providing quality training and education in environmental practice, impact assessment, implementation and enforcement, and deliver it to the target audiences in a way that they are able to understand and learn.

Almost as important is that this is done as cost-effectively as possible. Given that much of the information is readily available on web-sites such as [www.unep.ch](http://www.unep.ch) an interactive web-based training environment, at least for the professionals involved, is an obvious solution.

## 2 The Planning and Urban Management Agency (the Agency)

By way of background, The Agency is the lead agency in environmental management for new development in Samoa. The Agency is a Division within the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) that is responsible for administering the Planning and Urban Management Act 2004 (the Act). As part of the statutory responsibility, The Agency reviews (EIA) provided in support of new developments that require development consent under the Act. EIAs themselves must be prepared in accordance with the EIA Regulations 2007.

As you can see the Act and the Regulations are relatively recent pieces of legislation and not everyone fully understands the purpose, let alone the need, for the assessment, consultation and approvals that are required as a result of their implementation. It is part of the job of me and my team to raise the community's awareness of environmental impacts that result from development and to ensure a consistent approach to the implementation of the legislation.

I have a mainly young team of professionals in a society that favours age. I have a number of women on my team in a society that looks to leadership from men. And my team is less experienced in EIA and Review than most professionals in similar roles in New Zealand and Australia simply because we don't get the opportunity to practice our training.

It is important therefore that they are also involved in continuing professional development to enhance their technical and professional standing, knowing when and how they can exercise their professional duties.

It was with these many different requirements in mind that MNRE, with the financial backing of the World Bank, engaged Beca and Keith Frenz to deliver a comprehensive training package on the legislation and the practical delivery of EIA Training to my team, other consultants, contractors and village representatives.

## 3 Experience in Samoa

I have been travelling up to Samoa for nearly 10 years working on the preparation of EIA, mainly in coastal areas, with the communities and with MNRE Planners as well as other professionals responsible for infrastructure in the coastal area.

In this time, the team I have been working with have consulted with nearly 8% of the adult population and I have learnt a lot about Samoan society. Having a good understanding of the society and the culture is essential if training in environmental practices that we in New Zealand accept as the norm can be successfully translated into a Samoan context.

Our work in part preceded the legislation in the Act and the Regulations but was still based on Best Practice impact assessment and it now forms the basis for many development decisions in the coastal area.

My experience in this work also lead me to believe that for the ongoing development of Samoa, raising the bar, it is also essential to transfer our knowledge of EIA process as well as implementation management to the village level as well as to planners, other professionals and contractors involved in development.

## 4 Training Outline

One of the difficulties in working in the Pacific Islands, or at any location remote from your home office, is that large parts of the budget get taken up in travel and the time spent getting too and from the site.

In this case the site is Samoa and my home office is Tauranga. Initially the Project required that I travel to Samoa three times – once to finalise the inception report and then for two independent sets of training.

In response to this we proposed that we deal with finalising the contract and initiating the project by conference call and email and that the initial round of training could be carried out through a series of distance learning modules before finishing the training on-site.

This electronic-based process allowed a far greater range and depth of training to be entered into and that training could be more interactive with participants actively encouraged to access relevant web-sites, work with each other and to discuss issues with myself or other professionals.

The distance learning modules were split into three sections. The first was an assessment of the basic understanding of the Samoan planning legislation and regulations.

The second was an advanced assessment of EIA techniques and processes and the third module was focussed more on training trainers suggesting techniques that could be used by PUMA The Agency staff in training others.

Ten workshop sessions were programmed in Samoa including two each (basic and advanced) for The Agency staff, other Divisions of MNRE, Public Agencies such as the Samoan Ports Authority, Samoan Water Authority and the Electric Power Authority, as well as for independent contractors and consultants. In addition there were two sessions for the Pulenu'u (mayors), of villages on Upolu and on Savai'i Islands.

The workshops were presented in part by trainers identified from The Agency, who had completed the advanced training distance learning module and workshop. There were also a number of informal sessions and a site visit that can only occur when people are on-site showing the advantage of both distance learning and face-to-face contact.

Local case studies and examples were used as well as international best practice examples and each workshop was tailored to the group attending.

Particular issues addressed included enforcement of conditions and the responsibilities of The Agency officers as well as the contract Principal as the consent holder and the contractor who is required to comply with the consent as a contractual obligation. These are all matters that are taken for granted in New Zealand or Australia where there is a well-trodden implementation and enforcement path but they are not as easily understood in Samoa where often a more consensual environment is expected.

For example, only one enforcement case has been taken to the District Court in Samoa regarding a noise issue. This is probably because one of the positive and also a negative aspect of the Samoan culture is the desire to resolve everything by consensus which can lead to a lengthy period of negotiation before any resolution is reached.

The negotiation phase relies on being able to present the issues and consequences to senior people – contractors, principles and village chief (matai), and sometimes politicians – clearly and with authority. This requires a high degree of confidence and skill in the enforcement staff especially in the art of negotiation and mediation.

There also needs to be prompt and timely responses to complaints because while the consensual approach may take a long period of time the activity triggering the complaint may be more immediate and a contractor can be long gone before a decision is made on whether to take enforcement action.

## 5 Outcomes and Conclusions

Much of the training focussed on achieving greater confidence in the way staff carry out their duties. The interactive nature of the workshops and learning modules helped to give people that confidence in presenting their views to a group and the Trainers chosen were successful in delivering their inputs to the training sessions that followed.

Training is an on-going activity in The Agency as there is a high turn-over of staff in an environment where skilled practitioners are a particularly sought-after resource.

Aside from the training workshops undertaken there were three main outcomes to the Project.

The first was a list of Frequently Asked Questions that came out of the workshops. By compiling these and circulating an agreed response to The Agency team a degree of consistency is introduced in dealing with common queries. Examples of these include:

- *Does Government have to provide an EIA and obtain Development Consent?*
- *How long does The Agency have to process a Development Consent application?*
- *What is the "baseline"?*

These are the same types of issues and queries that occur everywhere and knowing the right answer helps in the educative process as much, or more so, than holding workshops or training lectures.

The second was a review of the Agency's operative Work Instruction and Checklist. This also provides the basis for a consistent approach to reviewing EIAs within The Agency and provides a handy reminder to ensure that no obvious aspects of an application are missed out.

The third outcome is new for Samoa and that is an EIA Review Toolkit that can be completed electronically.

This is a more detailed form of checklist that can be used as a complete record of the actions undertaken in reviewing an EIA, assessing a development proposal and establishing what mitigation is required. This could be used as a quality assessment tool as well as an application assessment tool providing a common base for all applications and enabling a consistent approach for anybody undertaking the assessment.

These three tools combined provide for a significant raising of the bar for Environmental Impact Assessment EIA in Samoa and, along with the training undertaken, contribute to the improved understanding the community, contractors, consultants and professionals have of the environmental assessment process.

What is most important now is that the PUMA Agency staff in particular practice what they have learned and continue to engage with consultants, contractors and village residents to deliver the message that Environmental Impact Assessment EIA is not just another box to tick but that it is an essential aspect of the economic growth of Samoa.