

The Significance of Significance

IAIAsa National Virtual Workshop
Thursday 19 November 2020
10h00 – 12h30
IAIAsa Members Free
Non-Members R200

<https://forms.gle/fXQWdf5wq6RZN7Db8>



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SIGNIFICANCE

South Africa has had EIA regulations since 1997. Despite many changes in the regulatorily defined process since that time, very little has been done to implement methods for the various process steps. The most significant of those omissions has been how to define significance. In the most recent changes to the EIA regulations, the previously defined guideline of extent, magnitude, duration, reversibility and probability was included in the regulations, meaning that an EIA that is now concluded without such references would be fatally flawed, regardless of the status of the activity for which authorization is being applied. The applications of this approach have been wide and varied, but most practitioners appear to use a rating scale for each of these requirements which are then (often tortuously) combined to define an output significance. Problems abound with this approach of which the most common appears to be sole reliance on the “number” produced by the scoring system without a proper written description of the impact itself, a plethora of “impacts” of different shapes and sizes regardless of their decision-making significance, illegitimate “mathematical” functions and ambiguity about how the proposed mitigation would reduce the significance.

We can surely do better! Please join us for an open discussion on how significance rating in EIA could be improved. Some ideas will be presented followed by a workshop to discuss the applicability of such ideas and to entertain others should they be forthcoming. The workshop will be lead and facilitated by Sean O’Beirne.





Sean O'Beirne, Sustainable Environmental Solutions (Pty) Ltd

Brief Biography

Sean O'Beirne is an environmental consultant and has worked in the field for some 27 years. Sean began his career at the CSIR, where he did a masters in radar rainfall measurement before a sea change in his career saw him move into the emerging field of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Sean also benefitted from early exposure to post EIA implementation when he was seconded to the Hillside Smelter project as today's equivalent of an environmental control officer. Sean started his own consulting company in 2000 and that is where he has been ever since. In 2003 he started working in Russia in combination with two Moscow based consultancies and has been lucky enough to travel to and work in many of the regions in that remarkable country with his most recent trip being to Chukotka where is completing an ESIA for a proposed copper mine. Sean has played a role in many of South Africa's large scale infrastructure projects including Gautrain, Medupi, Kusile and Ingula, Nuclear 1, the AMD project, several bulk water projects, a number of production increases at Sasol Secunda and others. He has also worked on a number of aluminium smelter projects in the Middle East in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE. For the last 5 years Sean has been a short-term consultant (STC) to the IFC and works in that capacity on public private partnership projects as well as a range of other direct investment projects across Africa.

