

Indigenous Values in Analysis and Significance Determination for Assessment

Considerations for Impact Assessment Practitioners to support a Just Transformation



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Introduction

- Standard impact assessment methodologies reflect a colonial worldview, neglect Indigenous perspectives, and rely upon western science to complete analysis, residual effects characterizations and determine significance.
- Alternative approaches are not new, have been consistently asked for in regulatory processes.
- Applying systems thinking for a holistic understanding of ecosystems we are assessing is fundamental to our practice:
 - Aligning with principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
 - Ten Calls to Action for natural scientists from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission
 - Many researchers focusing on principles of Traditional Laws, Indigenous Worldviews, and ways to communicate what Indigenous peoples have lost

So, how do we do this?

Determining Significance: Current Practices

		Sensitivity/Vulnerability/Importance of Resource/Receptor		
		Low	Medium	High
Magnitude of Impact	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
	Small	Negligible	Minor	Moderate
	Medium	Minor	Moderate	Major
	Large	Moderate	Major	Major



Significance of an effect on a valued component is determined based on characterization criteria based in western science



Measurable parameters or metrics: Context, Magnitude, Extent, Duration, Reversibility and Frequency to determine significance



Professional judgement, understanding of the project, regulatory thresholds or requirements to influence characterization



Gaps in understanding from the perspective of an individual, the community, or an entire culture when not considered holistically

Impact Assessment Criteria for the Things We Care About (TWCA)

Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Laws

Balance and Respect (Magnitude)

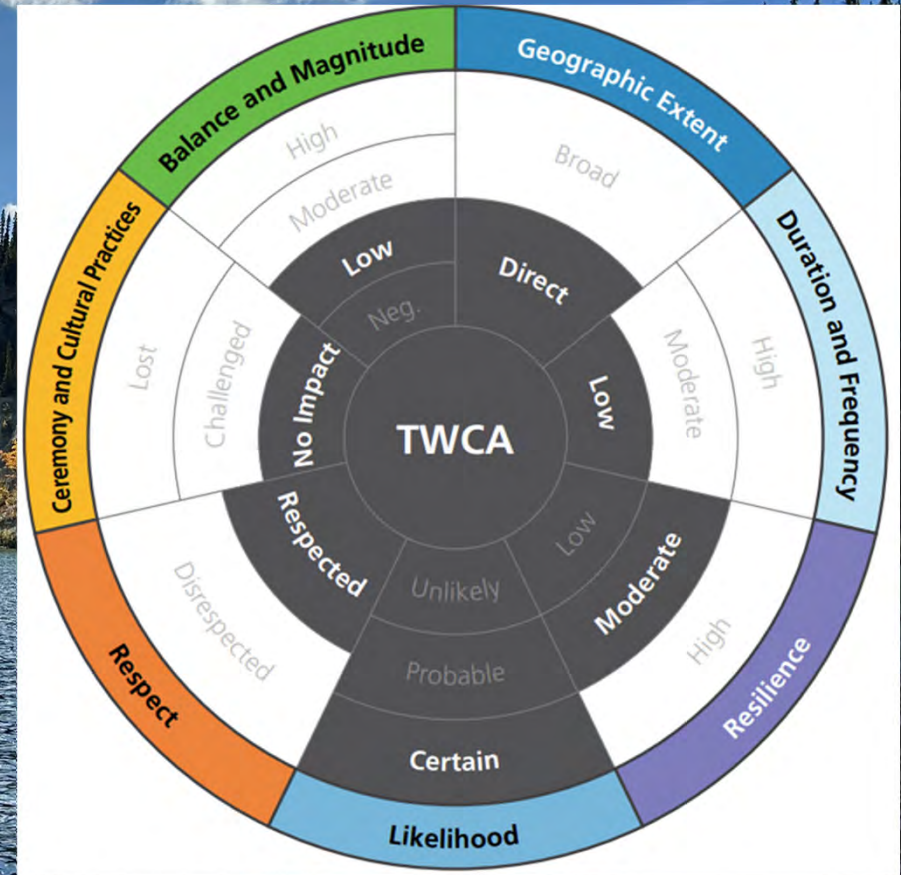
- emphasizes interconnectedness and reciprocity within ecosystems.
- Is the system in “balance” - are the tangible and intangible valued components healthy in the context of a well-balanced system
- Do the plants, animals, people, water still have what they need to be healthy? Are they Respected?

Seasonality (Timing or Duration)

- recognizes the variability of environmental conditions and timing of impact assessment
- do effects occur differently in different seasons and does that coincide with an important seasonal activity?

Ceremony and Cultural Practices (Extent)

- acknowledges the spiritual and cultural dimensions of impact
- how is ceremony and culture impacted by the activity?



Considerations

Adopting and augmenting assessment criteria

- Systematic thinking and understanding of ecosystems
- Adopting a holistic approach addresses historical injustices and advances equity.
- More voices are represented in analysis
- Provides a measurable and meaningful purpose to reflecting Indigenous Knowledge
- Recognizing Indigenous rights and perspectives is essential for genuine reconciliation
- Helps proponents design, construct and operate projects in a better way

Benefits

- Lack of standardized methodology
- Inexperience from regulatory bodies reviewing and providing decision on impact assessment
- Ultimately, co-development, co-assessment is required
- Practitioners are still using a colonial system of analysis and interpretation of Indigenous Knowledge that is not their own
- SMEs are often poorly placed to investigate these criteria
- Extensive consultation and engagement is required

Barriers

Conclusions

- Try!
- Set a higher standard for this expectation within your impact assessment
- Seek to understand the interconnectedness of the people, the land and the water
- Imperative to support Environmental and social justice, and a just transformation
- Genuine collaboration and mutual respect are key to building a more equitable and sustainable future for us all