

# Next Generation Environmental Assessment: REA and SEA Considerations



Dr. Cheryl Chetkiewicz

OAIA 2016



# Strategic and Regional Environmental Assessment (SEA and REA)

---

- Cabinet Directive
- REA and SEA practice in Canada
- Changes needed
- Options for implementation
- Lessons for Ontario's EA



© Paul Vecsei/Engbretson Underwater Photography

More Info: *Federal Environmental Assessment Reform Summit: Proceedings*  
available at <http://wcel.org/EASummit>





# The Directive

---

- Official policy on strategic environmental assessment of the Government of Canada
- All Government of Canada departments and agencies that are developing policy, plan and program proposals are obligated to implement the Directive



# Lessons Learned

---

- SEA needs to be codified into law, a legal tool to hold departments accountable from the outside.
- Significant implementation challenges due to capacity and funding of these processes.
- Challenges at the leadership level within federal departments.



# SEA, REA, and RSEA

---

## Constraints of project assessment

- Case-by-case
- wrong context (and process) to assess regional impacts

## Cumulative effects

- appropriate scale and context
- coordinated efforts with land use, policy and planning processes

## Added confidence for decision makers

- whether and in what form effects are acceptable in a region
- setting policy and priorities

## Recognition of limits

- acceptability or maximum tolerable change
- change detection and target setting

## Clearer context for decisions

- context in which development actions can be properly assessed
- setting conditions for development

## Guidance for proponents

- common ToRs, indicators and BMPs for a region
- compliance and process efficiencies





# Case Studies





# How have they been used?

---

- *Assessment Tool*
  - *Assessing the potential effects of cumulative effects, alternative strategic initiatives, and plans or development programs for a particular region*
- *Planning and Visioning Tool*
  - *Identifying where we want to go, the implications of implications of different options, and the governance, policies or other instruments needed to support that vision*
- *Strategic Decision Support Tool*
  - *Facilitating decisions about what development or other actions is appropriate (or needed) when and where and under what conditions*



# Lessons Learned

---

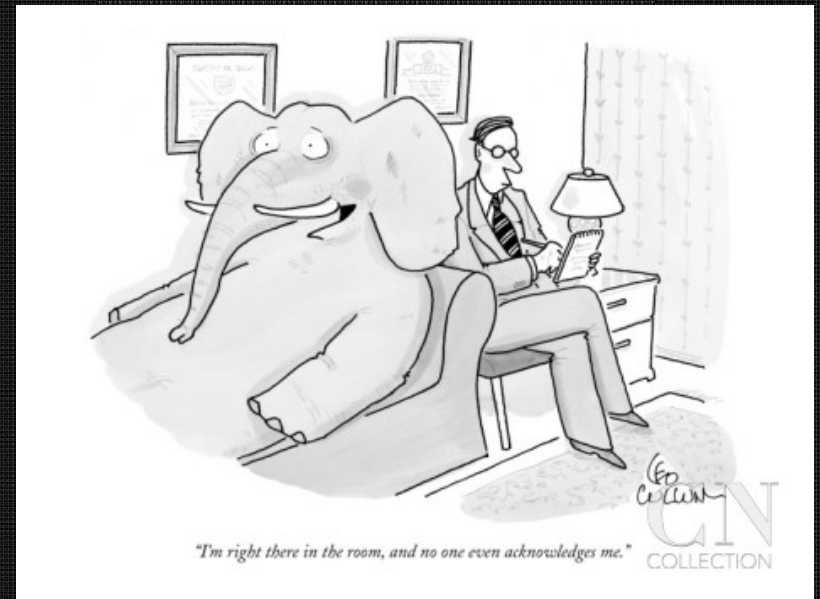
- More data  $\neq$  better assessment or decision-making
- Governance and institutional arrangements are primary obstacles
- Teiring and timing are key
- Collaborative approaches are essential
- Regional assessment is about the future(s) and uncertainties
- Clear mandate and capacity (\$) to implement and sustain over the long-term





# Necessary changes to SEA and REA

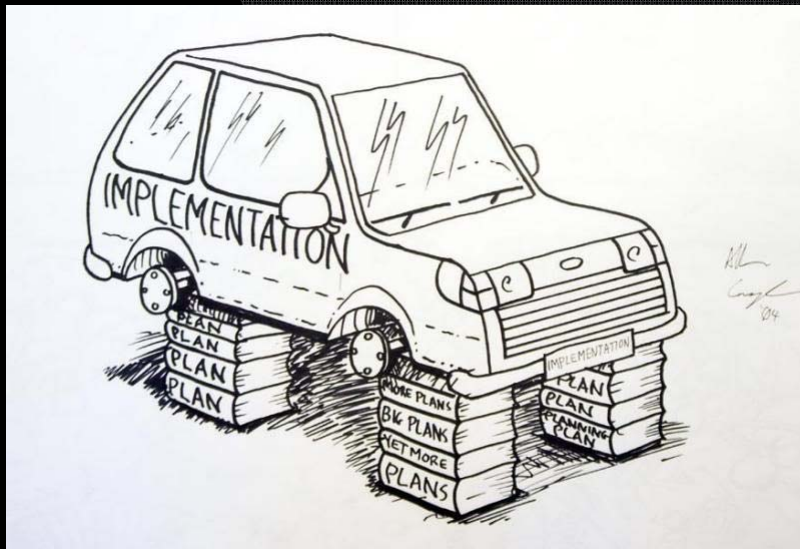
- A mindset change within government institutions
- Higher-level incentives for undertaking SEAs and REAs
- A defined role of the federal government (e.g., as a provider of resources, an overseer and leader)
- A recognition of the importance of assessing cumulative effects at a regional scale
- Indigenous involvement
- Adequate resources, including capacity and training
- Better studies and information
- Better standards and tests





# Implementation:

---



- SEA and REA set out as legislated requirements and frameworks
- Public standing to uphold legal requirements
- Incentives for the government to uphold its obligations
- A working group to develop and feed into government processes



# Further discussion:

---

- How do we encourage provincial SEA and REA and ensure federal process is developed?
- Who has oversight? (i.e., multijurisdictional)
- Who is checking in? (i.e., monitoring and compliance)
- Do we need a legislated recognition of a public trust in the environment to enforce SEA and REA requirements?
- How can we involve others in demanding better assessments of plans, policies and proposals, and project risks in a regional context?



© Brandon Laforest



# Food for thought in Ontario

- Ontario has undertaken some existing SEA- or REA-like undertakings
- Important opportunities for new strategic and regional undertakings (e.g., Ring of Fire, climate change pathways given carbon)
- How to provide the triggers, incentives and disincentives to implement SEA and REA?
- EA reform





# EA Reform for Ontario

---

- Ensure mandatory and meaningful cumulative effects assessment
- Integrate climate change and relationship between projects and Ontario's goals and objectives for mitigation and adaptation
- Ensure SEA and REA is available to support region-opening developments and/or sectors (e.g., energy, infrastructure)
- Expand types of projects that are subject to EA, including private activities

<http://www.cela.ca/publications/briefing-note-need-environmental-assessment-ontario>





# Thank you!



THE W. GARFIELD WESTON  
FOUNDATION

