



**Ontario Association for
Impact Assessment**

2026 Conference Preliminary Program

**Beyond Assessment:
Shaping the Future of Impact Assessment Through
Innovation and Lifecycle Thinking**

November 3rd & 4th, 2026

Ontario Bar Association

20 Toronto Street, 2nd Floor

Virtual Options Available



OVERVIEW:

Impact assessment does not occur in isolation—it is shaped by decisions made throughout the project lifecycle and, in turn, influences how projects are designed, delivered, and operated. From early policy direction and planning, through design development, approvals, construction, and long-term operations, environmental assessment both responds to and informs project evolution.

This year's theme highlights the importance of life-cycle thinking in impact assessment, recognizing environmental/impact assessment as a dynamic process that guides design choices, risk management and implementation strategies, rather than a standalone regulatory milestone. It explores how policy frameworks, professional practice, and emerging technologies can be better integrated to support informed decision-making, improve coordination across disciplines, and strengthen long-term outcomes. By focusing on the full lifecycle, the conference emphasizes moving beyond assessment for compliance toward assessment as a tool for shaping resilient, implementable, and outcome-driven projects.

2026 OAIA Conference Planning Committee

- ✓ Sabrina Wong, Dillon Consulting Limited: 2026 Conference Chair
- ✓ Alexia Miljus, GFT: 2026 Conference Co-Chair
- ✓ Jessica Wright, Consor Canada
- ✓ Anjala Puvananathan, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
- ✓ Faiza Waheed, Intrinsic
- ✓ Greg McKenzie, Blue Moth Creative

SPONSORSHIP

The Ontario Association for Impact Assessment (OAIA) is a forum for networking, exchanging information and promoting best practices in impact assessment.

OAIA is organizing its annual conference and is now seeking sponsors!

The 2026 conference will take place on November 3rd and 4th, 2026 and will be held in-person (and virtually) at the Ontario Bar Association.

Here are some reasons for sponsoring the conference:

- In recent years the in-person OAIA conference has attracted around 160 participants from every major practitioner of impact assessment.
- Participants come from industry, federal, provincial and municipal governments, Indigenous communities and organizations, and academia. As a sponsor, you can increase your organization's visibility to current and potential clients, partners, rights holders and stakeholders, and network with an audience of impact/environmental assessment professionals.
- Your organization can be associated with other thought and practice leaders in the field of impact assessment, sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Your sponsorship will help demonstrate your commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility in the process of impact/environmental assessment.
- Ensure that your organization's information is forefront during the conference.
- Give your staff the opportunity to network with leading practitioners and experts.

[Click here](#) to become a conference sponsor today!

Pre-Conference Walking Tour at Biidaasige Park

Join Elder Heidi Whetung, OAIA and its Indigenous Knowledge Committee, Waterfront Toronto, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and other experts on a guided tour of [Biidaasige Park](#) on the [Toronto Waterfront](#).

More information and the day's agenda can be [found here](#).



Day 1: November 3, 2026

Day 1 – Day at a Glance

- 8:30 am to 9:00 am Registration and light refreshments
- 9:00 am to 9:45 am Welcome, Elder Traditional Opening and Land Acknowledgement
- 9:45 am to 10:30 am Opening Panel
- 11:00 am to 4:30 pm Presentation Sessions
- 4:30 pm to 5:00 pm Closing Remarks
- 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm Networking & Socializing/Complimentary Appetizers & Cash Bar (off-site)

Day 1 – Session Details

Opening Panel

This panel will explore the place of impact assessment within the project lifecycle. It will explore the various stages from identification of project needs to project delivery by considering design choices, risk management, and implementation strategies. The panelists will consider the optimization of assessment in the context of the lifecycle.

Panelists to be announced in the final program.

Panel facilitator: *Anjala Puvananathan, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada*

Program Area: Pre-Assessment: Shaping Outcomes at the Project Inception

Before the Assessment: Land Relationship Visioning at Project Inception

Michael Jacobs and Kassandra McKeown, Cambium Indigenous Professional Services (CIPS) Inc.

Critical project decisions are often made before formal environmental assessments begin. This session will introduce Land Relationship Visioning, a First Nations-informed planning approach that allows stakeholders to explore project relationships with the land and local communities before key decisions become fixed.

Drawing on CIPS' experience, the session will provide a structured method combining First Nations perspectives, place-based knowledge, and dialogue to identify significant values, risks, and desired outcomes early in the lifecycle. Participants will examine common pitfalls, such as beginning with predetermined solutions or engaging communities too late.

Laying the Groundwork: Early Engagement on Canada's First High-Speed Rail

Leah Weller, Alto and John MacKenzie, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Major infrastructure projects are often shaped long before formal assessments begin. This presentation explores how early relationship-building, collaborative problem-solving, and informed planning can influence project outcomes, reduce risk, and support more sustainable decision-making.

Alto, a federal Crown corporation, is in the early stages of planning Canada's first high-speed rail network between Toronto and Québec City. Building on a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between Alto and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, presenters will discuss how both organizations are working together to integrate environmental considerations into the early stages of project planning.

Trade Offs and Outcomes: How Criteria Weights Result in Tangible Routing Differences

Jenny Donnelly and Laura Kitchen, Dillon Consulting Limited

Linear infrastructure design is fundamentally a game of trade-offs played out across a landscape. Choosing whether to cut through a pristine greenfield to the east or acquire private residential properties to the west represents a critical decision-making juncture. While environmental assessment practitioners recognize the value of multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) when evaluating fully developed routes, the foundational assumptions made before those routes even exist often escape rigorous scrutiny.

This presentation explores the impact of pre-assessment decision-making using advanced routing technology and MCDA modeling and will involve interactive audience participation.

Open Science & Data in an Evolving Regulatory Environment

Kelly Coulter and Alice Tremblay, Natural Resources Canada

As Canada works to unlock investment, strengthen sovereignty, and demonstrate its ability to build at pace while respecting environmental and reconciliation commitments, there is increasing pressure to identify efficiencies in regulatory processes. At the same time, regulatory decisions face heightened scrutiny and increasingly diverse stakeholder expectations. Effective and inclusive science communication is therefore essential to support credible and transparent impact assessment processes.

This session will demonstrate the functionality of the Government of Canada's Open Science and Data Platform as an example of digital innovation that can help streamline and accelerate major project reviews.

Building Faster? The Impact Assessment Landscape in an Era of Project Acceleration

Diana Weir, Borden Ladner Gervais LLP

Canada is pursuing an ambitious agenda to accelerate major infrastructure, energy, mining and resource development projects. At both the federal and provincial levels, initiatives aimed at reducing regulatory burden, shortening approval timelines and eliminating perceived duplication are driving changes to impact assessment processes. This presentation will examine how the evolving mandate to "build faster" is altering the practice of impact assessment under the federal Impact Assessment Act.

EA Modernization Updates

Peter Brown, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) will provide an update on its ongoing efforts to modernize Ontario's environmental assessment program and advance a faster, simpler, and smarter framework. The session will highlight key initiatives, including improvements to the Comprehensive Environmental Assessment process. Attendees will also receive an overview of the new Streamlined Environmental Assessment for Municipal Infrastructure, which comes into effect in January 2027.

Impact Assessment in an Era of Resource Development & Co-operative Federalism

Faiza Waheed, Intrinsik Corp.; Gary Pritchard, 4 Directions of Conservation Consulting Services Inc.; Patricia Fitzpatrick, University of Winnipeg; Kevin Hanna, UBC

Drawing on experience from major projects, panelists will discuss how effective IA creates value before regulatory decisions are made. Well-designed assessment processes can improve project design, identify and manage risks, strengthen relationships with rights holders and stakeholders, support adaptive management, and contribute to better long-term outcomes. Rather than asking how assessments can simply be streamlined, this panel will explore how they can be designed more intelligently to gain efficiencies from processes that are coherent, well-scoped, collaborative, and grounded in lived experience. The opportunity now is to build an IA system that is lighter where it should be, stronger where it must be, and ultimately more resilient for the peoples and environments it is meant to safeguard.

Program Area: Indigenous Perspectives & Experiences

Making Impact Assessments Work: Reflections on Process, Priorities, & Practice

Amy Sen, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

As impact assessment practice continues to evolve, practitioners are increasingly challenged to balance rigorous analysis with efficient, focused processes that meet the needs of regulators, proponents, Indigenous communities, and other participants.

Duty to Consult: From Legal Duty to Meaningful Practice

Speakers TBA

This interactive workshop will explore what the Duty to Consult is, when it applies, and how it is carried out in practice. It will consider the roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of the Crown, Indigenous communities, proponents, stakeholders, and practitioners involved in the consultation process. The sessions will explore lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities.

Day 2: November 4, 2026

Day 2 – Day at a Glance

- 8:30 am to 9:00 am Registration and light refreshments
- 9:00 am to 9:15 am Welcome
- 9:15 am to 2:15 pm Presentation Sessions
- 2:30 pm to 3:15 pm Closing Panel
- 3:15 pm to 3:30 pm Closing Remarks from the President & Elder Traditional Closing

Day 2 – Session Details

Program Area: Assessment Practices: Rebuilding Trust in the Assessment Process

True Collaboration: Fostering Trust Through Partnership with Indigenous Communities

Christie Cestra and Greg Hayes, Dillon Consulting Limited

In the rapidly evolving landscape of major infrastructure development, the traditional approach of environmental assessment is increasingly insufficient to meet the challenges of project delivery. The “decide-announce-defend” paradigm and other rigid, compliance-driven approaches no longer work, particularly for large-scale projects. To navigate the complexities of modern EA practice, we must shift toward inclusive approaches that prioritize early and authentic engagement. This session presents a model for building trust in the EA process by working with Indigenous communities as partners from a project's inception.

During the session, we will examine the transformative potential of partnerships along with lessons learned from recent practical experience. We will share how early involvement can establish a shared understanding of priorities before formal assessments are launched. We will also discuss the efficacy of maintaining continuous, multi-directional dialogue through regular meetings, workshops, and iterative reviews. No EA is without issues, and there is no silver bullet solution. Our aim is to provide a balanced discussion of the challenges and benefits encountered along the way.

Shaping Impact Assessment Through Collaboration: Developing Integrated Guidelines

Julie Lowry, Larry Shuter and Kim Nobel, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, issued the Tailored Impact Statement Guidelines for the integrated assessment of Ontario Power Generation's proposed New Nuclear Project at Wesleyville. This presentation explores how meaningful, sustained consultation with Indigenous Nations, government partners, the proponent, and the public shaped the development of the Integrated Guidelines.

Concurrent Sessions

Panel Discussion: Navigating the First Five Year

Madysen Latinski, Atkins Realis, Sabrina Wong, Dillon Consulting Limited

This panel will explore the pivotal first five years of an environmental professional's career. Early career professionals will share their firsthand experiences navigating a rapidly changing work environment and the critical role of emerging technologies in day-to-day operations.

Impact assessment for Renewable Energy Deployment: Burdens, Benefits, Expectations

Keith Lloyd, University of Saskatchewan

Impact assessment must instill trust that environmental and social impacts will be appropriately managed, yet at the same time does not impose unnecessary

Building the IA Practitioner Toolbox: Practical Lessons for Better Assessments

John Pounder and Lindsay Firth, Stantec

This interactive workshop is designed to create a space to learn from one another and collaboratively develop a toolbox of practical approaches that can support more effective impact assessment practice. Drawing on real-world experiences from participants representing different roles and perspectives, the session will explore what strategies have worked, what have not, and what opportunities exist to improve how assessments and approvals are planned, coordinated, and implemented.

burdens or delays in the pursuit of critical infrastructure projects. This presentation highlights results from a recent survey of actor perspectives on the scope, benefits, burdens, and expectations of IA for renewable energy projects.

Beyond Approval: Lessons from HVDC Submarine Projects for Next-Gen Infrastructure

Ryan Doyle, Sarah Zappala, HDR

As Canada accelerates the deployment of offshore wind generation and expands critical transmission infrastructure, environmental assessments must evolve beyond regulatory compliance to become an adaptive, life-cycle based process that supports the successful delivery of a project. While High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) systems can offer technical and economic advantages for long-distance power transmission, HVDC submarine transmission projects present unique technical, environmental, stakeholder, and constructability challenges that require integrated planning from routing and siting through construction to operation.

This presentation will highlight lessons learned to reduce project risk, improve environmental outcomes, engage stakeholders, communities and Indigenous partners, and enhance schedule and cost certainty for High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) submarine transmission projects.

**Speed Without Shortcuts:
Streamlining Ontario Impact
Assessment While Keeping Rigor**

Ross Mitchell, AtkinsRéalis

This interactive session will explore practical approaches for streamlining impact assessment without compromising quality. Through audience polling, facilitated discussion, and practitioner experience, participants will identify common sources of delay, examine where streamlining has succeeded or failed, and discuss practical strategies for improving assessment outcomes in Ontario.

The session will focus on where assessments commonly lose time, where early project decisions create downstream complexity, and where attempts to accelerate work can weaken trust, engagement quality, or implementation. Participants will reflect on what has worked, what has failed, and what course corrections improved outcomes.

Program Area: Post-Assessment in Practice: From Commitments to Outcomes

Concurrent Sessions

Health in Action: Health-Based Mitigation & Monitoring in Impact Assessment

Lindsay MaCallum, Amica Ferras and Camryn O'Keeffe, WSP Canada Inc.

Drawing on recent project experience in Ontario, this presentation explores how health is increasingly being embedded into mitigation and monitoring frameworks in IA. Examples include the integration of health-based benchmarks into air quality, surface water and aquatic environmental monitoring programs, work camp measures (e.g., dry camp policies, on-site health services, support for land-based activities), health surveys, and community-oriented approaches such as participation in monitoring programs, environmental data sharing, and multi-stakeholder management committees.

Lifecycle Planning for Waste Management Facilities - Beyond the Initial Assessment

Janine Ralph and Sam Huand, HDR Corporation

Ontario has been on the cusp of a crisis for available waste disposal and waste processing capacity for many years. Of all municipal infrastructure, waste management facilities are some of the hardest to successfully steer through the impact assessment and permitting process. One of the most critical issues to address in siting and permitting for these facilities are land use conflicts, and the acceptance (or lack thereof) of these facilities within the community. Our case studies will demonstrate that effective long-term planning that extends beyond the initial facility lifespan of 20 to 25 years, can set the stage for successful future environmental assessments so that this infrastructure can be renewed and support community growth beyond the initial approval.

**Lessons Learned: Translating
Environmental Assessment
Commitments into Construction
Practice**

Alexia Miljus, Chris Murray and James Hartley, GFT

Environmental assessments often culminate in a series of commitments intended to avoid, mitigate, or manage potential environmental effects. While significant effort is devoted to developing these commitments during the assessment process, considerably less attention is given to what happens after project approval and during implementation of the project; It is during detailed design and construction that these commitments are put to the test. The success of an EA is ultimately measured not by the commitments documented in approval reports, but by how effectively they are implemented and whether they achieve the intended outcomes.

The session will highlight common challenges associated with commitment management, including maintaining accountability across long project timelines, ensuring commitments remain visible through project transitions, and balancing environmental requirements with evolving project needs.

**From Rock to Reclamation: The
Aggregate Lifecycle in Practice**

*Caitlin Port, MHBC Planning,
Heather Melcher, Consor Canada
Jennifer DeLeemans, CBM Aggregates, a
division of St. Marys Cement Inc. (Canada)*

Aggregate extraction licensing projects are uniquely positioned to illustrate the full lifecycle of impact assessment—from early land use planning decisions to long-term site rehabilitation and post-closure outcomes.

This panel discussion brings together three complementary perspectives including a planner, an ecologist, and a producer to explore how lifecycle thinking can be meaningfully applied across the aggregate sector.

Closing Panel

This panel will examine how the 2026 OAIA Conference was able to consider the full lifecycle of a project and how assessments can be a tool for shaping resilient, implementable, and outcome-driven projects.

Panelists to be announced in the final program.

Panel facilitator: *Anjala Puvananathan, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada*