

From the Working Face: Consulting Practitioners' Insights for Improving the Efficiency and Quality of Impact Assessment in Canada

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Outline

- Practitioner engagement methods
- Respondent demographics
- Preliminary results – challenges
- Preliminary results - solutions
- Next steps

Practitioner Engagement Methods

- Survey development (March 15 – May 13):
 - on-line survey using SurveyMonkey
 - draft survey issued to test group and provided to IAAC
 - survey modified based on feedback from test group and IAAC
- Survey deployment (May 14 – July 31):
 - IAIA Affiliate networks (ACAIA, AQÉI, OAIA, IAIA-WNC)
 - LinkedIn practitioner groups
 - Direct emails to contacts
- Interviews (June 24 – August 7):
 - conducted in-person, virtually, by phone, and email

Respondent Demographics

- Total number of respondents: 52
- Of those who disclosed personal demographic information:
 - Most had >10 years' IA experience, more than half had >20
 - Respondents have worked in every province and territory in Canada
 - >60% of respondents predominantly worked on IAs in BC, Alberta, Ontario, NWT
 - Mix of experience in both federal and provincial/territorial IAs

Preliminary Results – Common Challenges

- Barriers to conducting cumulative effects assessment (CEA) most cited as “often” or “always” a challenge included:
 - Insufficient information about the effects of other past, present, and future projects and activities
 - Identifying measures to mitigate cumulative effects caused by other projects and activities [AND reaching agreement with other IA participants about who should be responsible for implementing those measures]
 - Insufficient information about past conditions of valued components that have been cumulatively affected
 - Availability of independently established thresholds for triggering management action for valued components

Preliminary Results - Quality

- Challenges considered to most severely affect the **quality** of IA:
 - Definition of significance thresholds for evaluating cumulative effects
 - Reaching agreement with other IA participants about the significance of cumulative effects and/or the designated project's contribution
 - Insufficient information about the effects of other present or future projects and activities
 - Insufficient information about the current condition and/or trend of valued components that have been, are being, and/or will be cumulatively affected

Preliminary Results - Efficiency

- Challenges considered to most severely affect IA **efficiency**:
 - Availability of independently established thresholds for triggering management action for valued components
 - Insufficient information about past and current conditions and/or trends of valued components
 - Identifying measures to mitigate cumulative effects caused by other projects and activities [AND reaching agreement with other IA participants about who should be responsible for implementing those measures]

Preliminary Results – Other Challenges

- Other key challenges to conducting CEA that were identified included:
 - Fundamental mismatch between expectations and practical reality
 - Inadequate guidance and/or guidance that is not aligned with practical reality
 - Inconsistencies in CEA methods [as well as different views on how CEA should be done]
 - Lack of clarity around benefit of conducting CEA in project-specific context

Preliminary Results - Solutions

- Through open survey questions and interviews, respondents provided diverse feedback on potential solutions to address identified challenges
- Suggested solutions address potential improvements to data and information resources, tools, methods, and guidance
- Suggested solutions consider issues of scope, timeliness, participation, collaboration, governance, responsibility, and capacity

Solutions – Improvements to CEA Guidance

- Guidance needed not only for practitioners
- Establish reasonable objectives and expectations for CEA in context of project-specific assessment
- Need for concise, plain language guidance
- Clarity re temporal and spatial boundaries
- Clarity re determining other projects to include in CEA
- Need to focus scope of CEA on key issues

Next Steps

- September to October 2025 – Data analysis, interpretation
- November to December 2025 – Report drafting
- January 2026 – Draft report to IAAC for review
- February to March 2026 – Incorporate IAAC feedback
- On or before March 31, 2026 – Issue final report to IAAC
- After March 31, 2026 – Disseminate final report