

## #5 Northern Environmental Assessment: A Gap Analysis and Research Agenda

by Bram Noble, University of Saskatchewan

An “environmental assessment” (or “EA”) is a process used when a new resource development project is proposed. It is meant to find and help avoid any negative impacts the project might have. By assessing possible negative impacts before they happen, decision-makers can make better decisions about which projects to allow and support. An EA can also point out and avoid environmental damages. Strong EAs serve communities, governments, and developers by helping everyone to understand what the possible effects of a resource development choice.



### Areas for further study:

- ⇒ *What is EA expected to deliver? Is EA the right process to deliver on these expectations?*  
There is very little research about what communities and stakeholders expect from EA processes. Different people will have very different goals and beliefs about what the EA means for the community, and what it can and should deliver.
- ⇒ *Is the EA process fast and flexible enough to reflect a changing Arctic environment? What reforms are needed to make sure that EA is responsive?*  
A process that is tied up in red tape and bureaucracy is not one that is useful to communities. In order for EA to be useful, it needs to be fast, flexible, and responsive to changes in the Arctic.

⇒ *What influence has EA had on development decisions? What lessons can be learned from EA in past projects around the north?*

Sharing the lessons from past EAs and how they have (or haven't) influenced decisions will help us understand how new EAs might influence policy and decision-making.

⇒ *How have past EAs helped communities build the ability to engage with development processes? What is today's capacity of northern communities and indigenous organizations to be meaningfully involved?*

Increasingly, resource developers are required to consult with northern communities. Making it easier for communities to participate in a meaningful way is the goal of capacity building.

⇒ *How can EAs for individual projects help meet the needs of regional planning? What are the implications of climate change for current EA systems and processes?*

EAs usually only address the needs of individual projects. However, many of the things they are measuring concern the wider region. Regional planning, science, and assessment programs are ongoing in the Arctic. Creating relationships between these processes and EAs will benefit both groups.



In order for EA to be useful, it  
needs to be fast, flexible and  
responsive to changes in the  
Arctic

