

EA IN DUTCH WASTE MANAGEMENT: FROM POLICY TO PROJECT

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Introduction

In The Netherlands at several levels of waste management planning decisions are taken and assessment of environmental consequences takes place. To prevent overlap and double work it is, of course, important to carefully identify which sort of assessment should take place at which level and how these relate to each other. This paper describes briefly how environmental assessment has been integrated in the planning process for (non-toxic) waste from the policy to the project level.

Planning process

In The Netherlands, as in most countries, in the planning process from the national to the regional and local level at some point the following four questions have to be answered: why do anything, what to do, where to do it and how to do it? The *why*-question deals with the need, objectives and principles of new actions. Once the need has been established, the *what*-question deals with selecting the best methods the capacities needed for each of these methods. The *where*-question is about the location of facilities, installations, etc. The *how*-questions deals with topics such as the detailed design of projects, necessary mitigation measures and compensation issues.

Early days

In the early days of EIA in The Netherlands need, objectives and principles were mostly established at the national level in Cabinet plans, regulation and legislation. For these, no structured assessment process was used. Methods, capacities and locations were dealt with in so-called provincial waste management plans. It was, therefore, for this level that SEA was made compulsory and in the late 80's and beginning 90s approximately 15 SEAs have been carried for these sort of plans. Design, mitigation and compensation were topics for the license, for which an EIA had to be carried out.

New developments

However, in the beginning of the nineties it showed that the situation in which each province took care of its own waste and established its own waste management plans did not lead to an economically and environmentally optimal situation. It created a situation in which some regions had an overcapacity for waste processing, while others had too little. The need was felt for a more national planning of at least the methods for final waste processing and the capacities needed for each of these methods in The Netherlands.

Ten year programmes

This led to the creation of a Waste Management Council (a joint agency of the Environment Ministry, Provincial Authorities and Municipalities), who prepares so-called Ten Year Programmes (TYP). Since it was obvious that the policies set out in the TYPs would have significant - negative or positive - environmental consequences, the WMC decided to carry out SEAs as part of their preparation. Because the EIA-regulation did not foresee in the existence of those plans, the SEAs were carried out voluntarily.

Tiered system

This development, together with the introduction in 1996 of the Environmental Test for new regulation and legislation¹, has led to the planning process as described briefly in box 1. Integrated in this planning process is a tiered system of respectively the E-test, national SEA, provincial SEA and EIA. Because each of these assessments focus on different issues, and the level of detail can be matched to the issues to be solved, overlap, unnecessary work and repeating discussions are avoided.

Box 1: Impact assessment in the Dutch waste management planning process		
National level		
Why do something?		
need objectives principles	<i>legislation/policy plans</i>	<i>E-test carried out by responsible ministries</i>
<i>What to do?</i>		
methods capacities	<i>10 years waste management programme</i>	<i>SEIA by the national Waste Management Council</i>
Regional level		
Where to do it?		
locations	<i>provincial waste management plan</i>	<i>SEIA by provincial government</i>
Local level		
How to do it?		
design mitigation compensation	<i>licensing process</i>	<i>EIA by proponent</i>

Regional level

1 The <E-test>, which is a more simple and less open process as compared to SEA of plans and programmes; see Tonk & Verheem, 1998

In the current situation only rarely an SEA is carried out any more at the provincial level: the (voluntary) national SEA for the TYPs makes this unnecessary. Typically the provincial plans do not contain new policy decisions on waste management. The provinces are part of the WMC and commit themselves to the policies set out in the TYP. In other words, no "new" policy decisions are taken and therefore no SEA is required at the provincial level. Only in cases where a province would want to deviate from the policies set in the TYP or where new locations for new facilities should be fixed, an SEA is carried out.

Advantages

This is, therefore, a clear example in which an SEA at a higher level makes SEAs at lower levels unnecessary. To carry out a joint SEA for a joint plan is more effective than multiple provincial plans. Also, because at an early level on the basis of an SEA decisions are taken on methods and capacities, these issues do not have to be dealt with at the project level. This saves considerable time in the licensing and public participation process.

Future perspective

As stated before, the SEAs for the TYPs are currently carried out voluntarily; the formal SEA obligation still lies with the provincial plans. Because of the success of the new approach, it is felt by all actors in the field of waste management planning that legal arrangements will have to be made in the future to replace the existing regional SEA requirement with a formally required SEA at the national level. Discussions are currently under way to decide what form of legal status should be afforded to the SEA for national waste management planning. One of the ideas is to combine the existing plans for toxic and non-toxic waste and to make an SEA mandatory for this combined plan. At the provincial level SEA would then be mandatory for location decisions only.

More lessons learned

Finally, experience in The Netherlands shows that sufficient methodology is available to carry out useful assessments at the plan and programme level in a reasonable period of time. The SEA for the first TYP, for example, only took 6 months. Also it shows that an open plan process, involving all parties involved in waste management planning, does not only seem possible, but is regarded a prerequisite for a swift assessment and decision making process.