

## Protocols for Environmental Impact Assessments

Protocols are standardized, official procedures. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) protocols aim to assist participants in different stages of the EIA process. EIA Protocols help assess activities or developments to prevent, minimize and repair any environmental damages they may cause and while assuming the costs that these effects may imply. The protocols thus set standards in terms of high-quality methods (and their implementation) that EIA developers/environmental service providers can (or must) use to complete the EIA.

One main advantage of using protocols in the EIA process is that they provide a useful guidance for EIA developers/environmental service providers on how the different parts of the EIA need to be implemented—such as how to assess impacts of the development on water quality and quantity, on endangered species and biodiversity in general, and how to conduct social impact assessments. The protocols make it easier for any agency evaluating the EIA to assess the quality of the EIA developers' methodologies.

One potential disadvantage of setting protocols is that environmental service providers might not challenge themselves to advance the methodologies, and they will use the protocols as the minimum required. Another limitation is that it is very challenging to design protocols to cover diverse activities that may be included in different developments, as well as cover various possible ecosystems and social groups in one country/region. To address this limitation, countries often have large numbers of protocols for diverse sectors, activities, different components of the environment and types of social groups. This then leads to a substantial effort to develop and test many different protocols before their wider use.

Finally, we can conclude that, while EIA protocols have significant disadvantages in countries where agencies have low capacity to review EIA reports, protocols can help to set clear guidelines and streamline evaluation efforts while improving the quality of EIAs. In order to make protocols effective, it is critical that environmental service providers be aware of—and have access to—the protocols, and that the protocols remain the same so providers can learn how to implement them properly.

### **The role of EIA Protocols to Address Specific Challenges and Opportunities**

The primary challenges facing the EIA licensing process include:

1. Capacity of both technicians and Environmental Service Providers to provide and evaluate EIAs
2. Poor quality of studies
3. Length of time necessary to review and approve the EIAs and grant the environmental licence

Often one of the most limiting factors in the EIA licensing process is the amount of time necessary to review and verify the information in an EIA report. While part of this time is used up through bureaucratic processes, times are often significantly lengthier when EIA reports do not meet the minimum standards set by government to ensure quality reporting. Here, EIA protocols can help in



outline the required minimum standards to be followed during EIA preparation and that government agencies can use to assess the quality of the EIA report.

## Opportunities

Opportunities to improve the EIA process lie within three key areas:

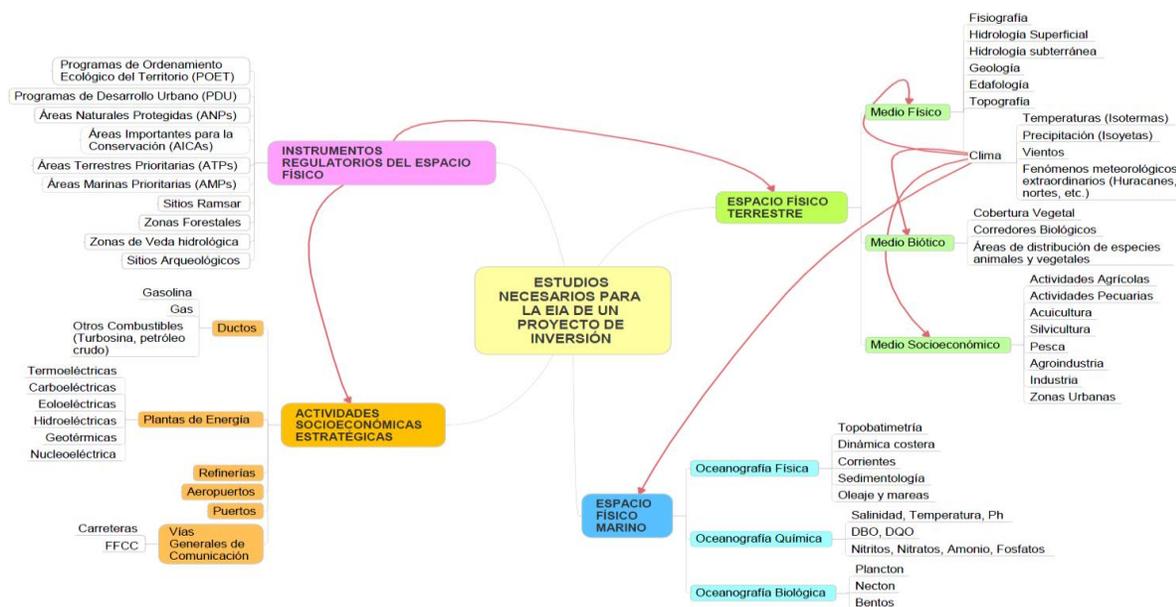
1. Strong administration
2. Legal congruency
3. Environmental compatibility

In the area of administration, there are several avenues that can help to improve the licensing system, some of which are already being taken in Honduras. These include an implementing an effective online licensing system, developing capacity for technicians and evaluators, streamlining environmental laws for transparency and clarity, and setting criteria and standards for EIA studies.

A computerized systemization of the first stages of an EIA evaluation should be developed to provide a more streamlined approach to the process. Honduras' new online licensing system is a good example of such a system.

It is important that there be specific criteria for environmental service providers and technicians to write and evaluate studies. In Mexico this is accomplished through a series of minimum standards or guidelines for each industry that all EIA studies must meet in order to be accepted by the governing authority. These can be considered as voluntary EIA protocols but will guide the environmental service providers on how to develop the EIA: at the same time they provide flexibility for adjustments based on specific local conditions and developments. A link to these guidelines is available in the box below.

## Necessary Studies to Develop an EIA for an Investment Project



Source: Arriaga, R. (2016). *Foro-Honduras-Canadá Capacitación en EIA. Tegucigalpa, Honduras.*



## Key Protocols in the Context of Specific Types of Projects and Their Natural and Social Impacts

During a two-day event held on March 2–3, 2016 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, international experts gathered with Honduran government technicians and environmental service providers to discuss and share knowledge about environmental impact assessment development and assessment. Experts were invited from Chile and Mexico to facilitate group discussions and provide guidance in the areas of coastal and marine environments, green energy projects and mining and high-impact projects.

Groups were asked to:

1. Identify existing and potential projects that have major social and environmental impacts in each area of focus (mining, green energy and marine and coastal environments).
2. Identify the natural, and sociocultural resources that could be potentially affected within these projects.
3. Explain what guides, methodologies and protocols are used in Chile, Mexico and other countries where the experts have experience.

## List of Protocols, Guides, Standards and Resources for EIA Projects Prioritized During the Two-day Event (all protocols are in Spanish)

### General

- [Criterio de Evaluación para EIAs SEMARNAT](#)
- [Listado de Publicaciones, Guías y Documentos EIA SEMARNAT](#)
- [Centro Nacional de Producción más Limpia de Honduras: Documentos técnicos](#)
- [Perfil Ambiental País de Honduras](#)
- [Código del Trabajo de Honduras](#)
- [Guía para las Mejores Prácticas de Ecoturismo en Áreas Protegidas](#)

### Coastal and Marine Environments

- [Manejo Costero en México, Universidad de Campeche](#)
- [Guía de Campo: Identificación de los Manglares en México 2006](#)
- [Carta Nacional Pesquera](#)
- [Manual para determinar la calidad del agua para el riego agrícola \(México\)](#)
- [Guía de Buenas Prácticas Ambientales para el cultivo de Tilapia \(Honduras\)](#)
- [Manual de Cultivo de Camarón](#)

### Green Energy

- [Listado de Publicaciones, Guías y Documentos EIA SEMARNAT](#)

### Mines and High Impact Projects

- [Alianza Mundial de Derecho Ambiental \(2010\). Guía para Evaluar EIAs de Proyectos Mineros](#)
- [Guía para la Presentación de Manifestación de Impacto Ambiental Minero SEMARNAT](#)
- [Guía para la Presentación de Estudios EIA de Proyectos de Alto Riesgo SEMARNAT](#)



- [Guía de Buenas Practicas en las Relaciones entre los Actores Involucrados en Proyectos que se Presentan al SEIA \(CHILE\)](#)
- [Guía para la Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental Proyectos Desarrollo Minero de Petróleo y Gas \(CHILE\)](#)
- [Calidad del Aire en el Área de Influencia de Proyectos que Ingresan al SEIA \(CHILE\)](#)
- [Ley No. 19.300 Sobre Bases Generales del Medio Ambiente \(CHILE\)](#)
- [Reglamento del Sistema de Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental -D.S. No 40/2012 \(CHILE\)](#)
- [Reglamento de Seguridad Minera Decreto Supremo No 132 \(CHILE\)](#)

**Source: EIA Online Learning Platform - <http://www.iisd.org/learning/eia>**