



Good Practice Guidance Note: SEA and Integration



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The Front cover image is provided courtesy of Tadhg O'Mahony.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
NPF	National Planning Framework
NHWMP	National Hazardous Waste Management Plan
P/P	Plan(s) and/or programme(s)
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEO	Strategic Environmental Objective
S.I.	Statutory Instrument

1. Introduction

Purpose of the guidance

The objective of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC), as detailed in Article 1, is to protect the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the preparation of plan(s) and/or programme(s) (P/P), thus promoting sustainable development.

This good practice guidance note provides advice on how SEA can be better integrated into the P/P-making process, helping to enhance environmental outcomes and support the delivery of sustainable development. It is intended for use by P/P-makers and SEA practitioners for P/Ps that meet the criteria for SEA under either [S.I. No. 435/2004](#) or [S.I. No 436/2004](#), as amended. This note is not a stand-alone guidance document; rather, it supplements the comprehensive suite of other EPA guidance on SEA (see **Appendix I**).

This good practice guidance note seeks to help P/P-makers and SEA practitioners integrate SEA into the P/P-making process by outlining:

- the benefits and importance of integrating the SEA and P/P-making processes;
- the consequences of not integrating the two processes;
- the current barriers to and opportunities for effective SEA and P/P integration;
- good practice principles for SEA and P/P integration, which are supported by a series of best practice case studies in which P/P-makers and SEA practitioners adhered to good practice in integrating SEAs and P/Ps;
- a checklist to help P/P-makers and SEA practitioners determine whether SEA is being integrated into the P/P-making process;
- the “dos and don’ts” of how to integrate SEA into the P/P-making process.

What does successful “integration” of SEA into the P/P-making process look like?

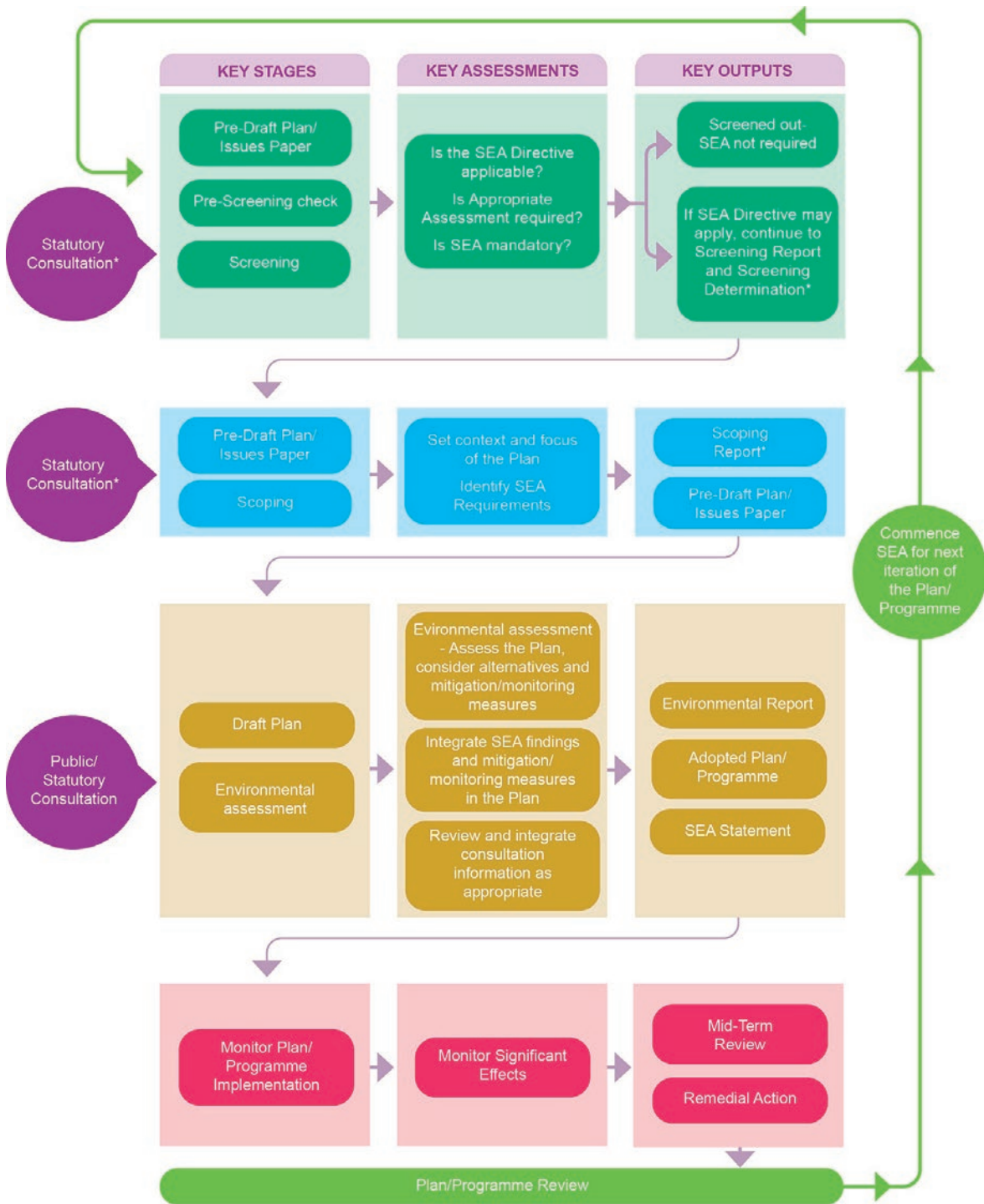
A P/P that has successfully integrated its SEA demonstrates several key characteristics:

- The timeline for the main stages of the P/P-making process is aligned with that of the SEA.
- The reasons for choosing the P/P’s approach over other reasonable alternatives have been informed by the SEA.
- The P/P has undergone an iterative process and has been altered to incorporate the findings of the SEA and its proposed mitigation measures – including policy wording changes or changes to zonings – to enhance positive environmental effects or to prevent adverse effects.
- The P/P is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. climate action) and will result in enhanced environmental conditions (e.g. reduced pollution, enhanced biodiversity).
- The opinions and feedback gathered through the SEA consultation have been considered in finalising the P/P.
- The commitments for monitoring significant environmental effects have been integrated into the P/P.

SEA process

Figure 1 illustrates the process for undertaking SEA of a P/P.

Figure 1: SEA process overview



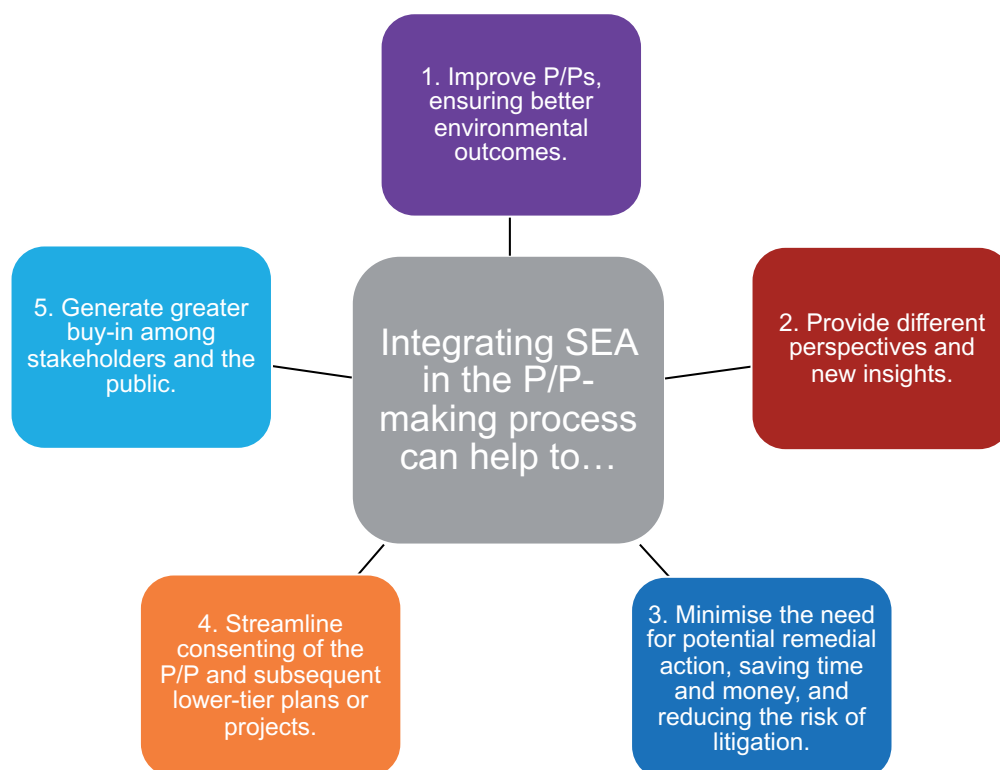
* Statutory consultation relates to Screening Report and Scoping Report

2. Effective SEA and P/P Integration: Benefits, Barriers, Opportunities and Key Stages

Benefits and importance of integrating SEA into the P/P preparation process

SEA can bring significant environmental (and social) benefits if undertaken as an integral part of the P/P-making process, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Benefits and importance of integrating SEA into the P/P-making process



Integrating SEA into the P/P-making process can help to:

Improve P/Ps by ensuring better environmental outcomes

SEA can significantly enhance the environmental outcomes of a P/P, particularly when it begins at an early stage in the P/P's development and where there is an iterative relationship between the drafting of policies/proposals by the P/P-making team and the assessment of policies/proposals by the SEA team.

SEA identifies the policies/proposals in a P/P that are likely to generate significant environmental effects and highlights where there is a need for additional measures to strengthen the protection of the environment and promote sustainable development, i.e. where there is a need for mitigation to be built into a plan. Integrating the findings of SEA into the P/P-making process can therefore help to ensure that policies/proposals are clear, provide robust guidance and support sustainable development.

Provide different perspectives and new insights

SEA can offer a different perspective on a P/P. Integrating SEA into the P/P-making process can help to stimulate creative thinking among P/P-makers around sustainable planning in spatial terms, adding value to the planning process and raising the environmental awareness of P/P-makers and decision-makers. For example, the assessment of reasonable alternatives could identify scenarios that secure wider environmental benefits than the proposed alternatives, which could otherwise have been overlooked.

Minimise the need for potential remedial action, saving time and money, and reducing the risk of litigation

Integrating SEA into the P/P-making process can help avoid the need for late-stage corrective action, such as redrafting or removing policies at a time when the P/P may be near completion and there may be more limited capacity to consider changes. SEA that is fully integrated into the P/P process generally tends to be more efficient and results in fewer legal challenges than SEA being undertaken as a separate process at the end of the planning cycle.

Streamline consenting of the P/P and subsequent lower-tier plans or projects

If significant adverse effects highlighted in the SEA are successfully mitigated at the assessment stage of a P/P, it may lead to a simpler consent or approval process for the P/P. Mitigating significant environmental effects at the higher-tier P/P-making stage may also result in a more streamlined consenting process for lower-tier plans or projects.

Generate greater buy-in among stakeholders and the public

Demonstrating how the findings and mitigation measures proposed in the SEA have been integrated into a P/P enhances transparency and public acceptance of the final P/P, particularly where adverse environmental effects have been identified and addressed.

Consequences of not integrating SEA into the P/P-making process

The potential consequences of not integrating SEA into the P/P preparation process may include:

- **Legal challenge:** Competent authorities could be challenged through the courts, which can be costly and can result in reputational damage to the authority concerned.
- **Environmental damage:** Failing to take proper account of the environment and failing to integrate SEA mitigation measures into the P/P, could result in environmental damage during implementation requiring remedial action.
- **Delays and additional costs:** If the SEA is not undertaken at the appropriate stage, or it is not fully integrated into the P/P, there may be a need for further consultation and reporting, leading to delays in the implementation of the P/P. Corrective action requiring further updates to the P/P and further SEA to be undertaken can be costly and resource intensive. Similarly, there may be additional costs associated with lower-tier plans and projects where significant environmental effects could have been avoided at the higher-tier P/P-making stage.

Barriers to and opportunities for effective SEA and P/P integration

Figure 3 outlines the current barriers to the effectiveness of SEA in influencing P/P development and the opportunities for better integration of SEA into the P/P-making process.

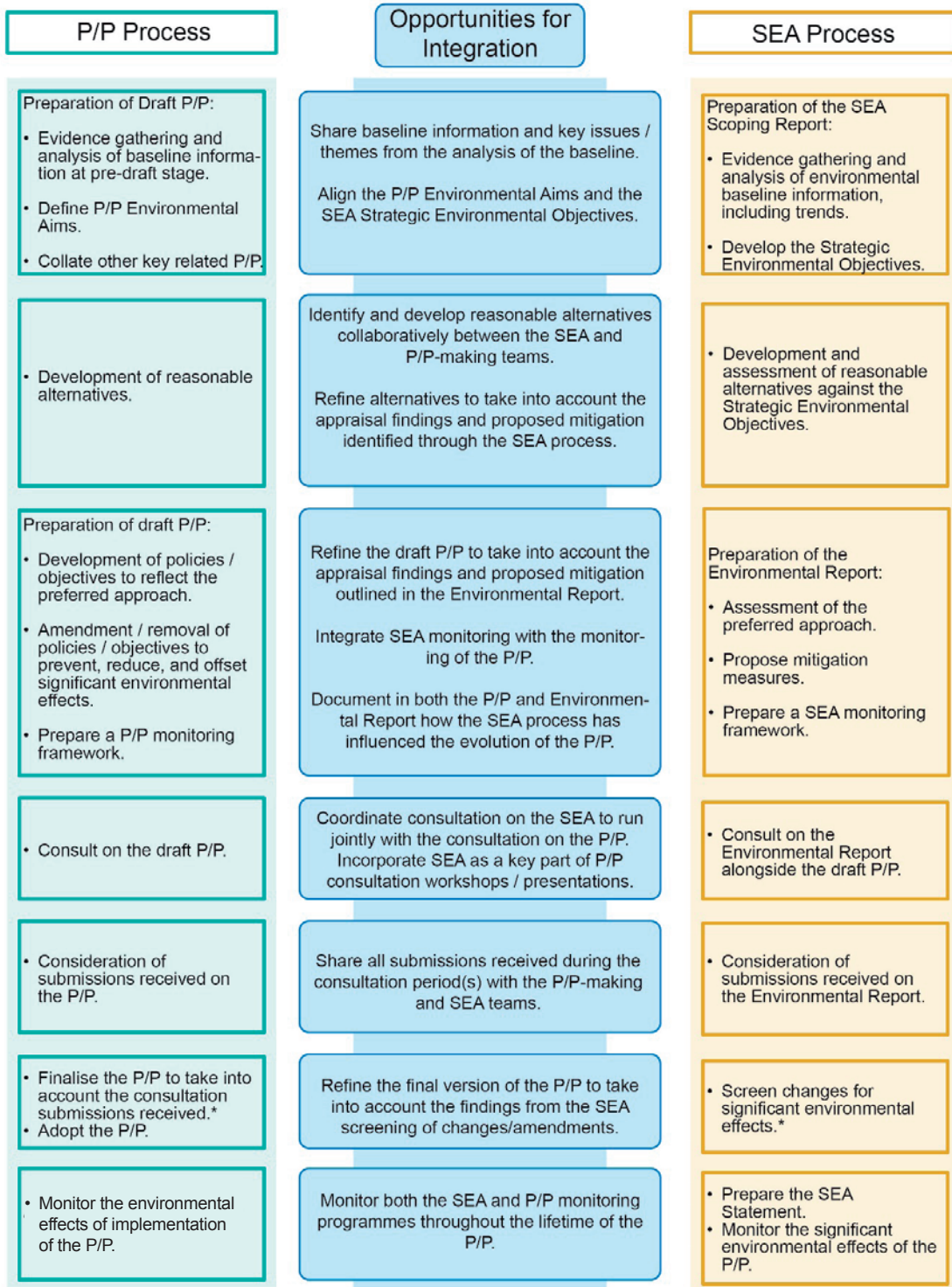
Figure 3: Barriers to and opportunities for effective SEA and P/P integration

Barriers to effective SEA and P/P integration	Opportunities for better SEA and P/P integration
<p>SEA perceived as an administrative burden which adds little value to the P/P-making process.</p> <p>P/P-makers not being open or receptive to the findings of the SEA.</p> <p>Lack of obligation on P/P-makers to act on the SEA findings (requirement only to <u>consider</u> SEA findings).</p> <p>Influence of other drivers more powerful than the SEA.</p>	<p>Take time at the start of the P/P preparation process to explain to P/P-makers or decision-makers the role, benefits, and importance of integrating SEA in the P/P-making process, as well as the consequences of not fully integrating SEA in the P/P-making process. Building understanding among this group can help the SEA be more influential in the P/P-making process.</p>
<p>SEA treated as a separate process to the P/P-making process i.e. as a "bolt on" process rather than being effectively integrated.</p> <p>SEA commenced too late in the P/P-making process to have a meaningful impact on P/P formulation.</p>	<p>Commence SEA at an early stage in the P/P-preparation process and apply SEA as a continuous and iterative process informing the development of a P/P.</p>
<p>Lack of effective communication between P/P-makers and those undertaking the SEA.</p>	<p>Strengthen communication between the SEA and P/P-making teams, particularly where the SEA is being undertaken by an external SEA practitioner.</p>
<p>Limited information sharing between the SEA and P/P-making teams with overlapping tasks required at key stages for both the P/P and SEA being undertaken separately.</p>	<p>Align SEA and P/P-making processes and develop stronger links between the collection of baseline environmental information, evaluation of alternatives, consultation and monitoring requirements for both the P/P and SEA.</p>
<p>Lack of consideration of reasonable and meaningful alternatives with the direction of the P/P determined before the consideration of reasonable alternatives has been completed.</p>	<p>Develop reasonable alternatives collaboratively between the SEA and P/P-making teams. Assess the likely environmental effects of each reasonable alternative with the findings clearly communicated to the P/P-making team to assist in refining the alternatives and selecting a preferred approach for the P/P.</p>
<p>Complexity of SEA Environmental Reports is a key barrier to influencing P/P content. Many Environmental Reports are difficult to understand with the most significant findings and recommended mitigation not easily identifiable. This can significantly hinder the integration of the SEA in the P/P.</p>	<p>Improve simplicity and clarity of SEA reports to allow greater accessibility to SEA findings and recommended mitigation.</p> <p>Clearly summarise the key findings of the SEA, including the recommended mitigation, in a table in the Environmental Report. The actions that P/P-makers need to take to adjust the P/P should be clear.</p>
<p>Consultation comments received on the SEA not being integrated into the P/P.</p>	<p>Work collaboratively to ensure SEA-related consultation comments are integrated into the P/P.</p>
<p>Lack of meaningful monitoring of significant environmental effects of P/P implementation makes it difficult to show whether or not SEA is resulting in sustainable outcomes and preventing adverse effects on the environment.</p>	<p>Work collaboratively to develop and refine a monitoring programme that is tailored to the scale and nature of the significant environmental effects likely to arise from the implementation of the P/P. The overlap between the monitoring that is carried out for the SEA and the broader monitoring undertaken for the P/P implementation should be exploited.</p>

Key stages in integrating the P/P-making and SEA processes

Figure 4 illustrates the key stages in the P/P-making process where there are opportunities to integrate the SEA process.

Figure 4: Key stages for SEA and P/P integration

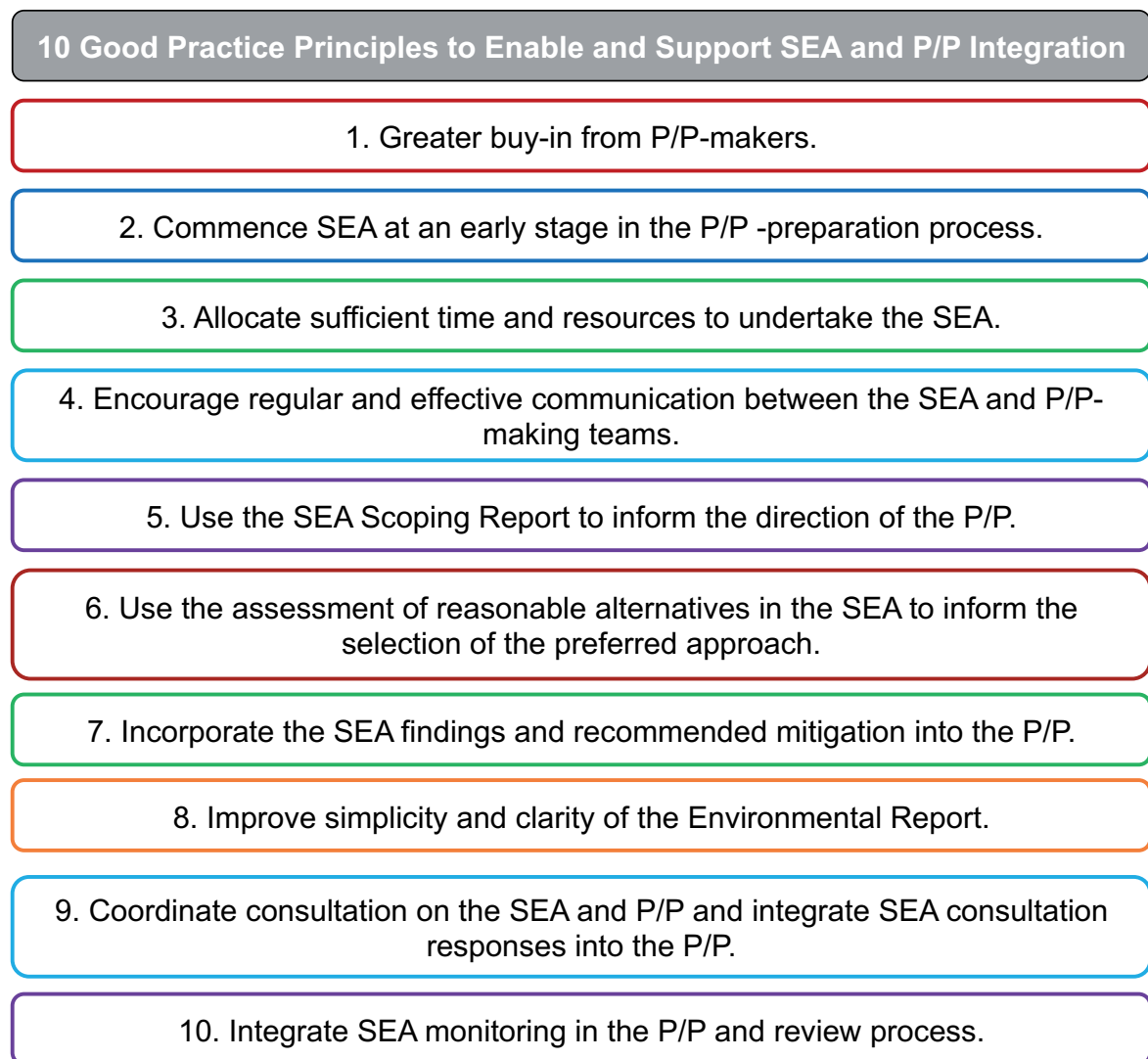


* Assuming no further iterations of the P/P are necessary.

3. Good Practice Principles to Enable and Support SEA and P/P Integration

There are 10 key principles for successfully integrating SEA into the P/P preparation process, as illustrated in Figure 5 and discussed further in this section.

Figure 5: Key principles for integrating SEA into the P/P preparation process



Good practice principle 1: Greater buy-in from P/P-makers

Buy-in from P/P-makers, particularly senior P/P-makers/elected officials, is essential to the success of SEA integration into the P/P-making process.

Greater buy-in from P/P-makers		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy-in from P/P-makers, particularly senior P/P-makers / elected officials, is vital to the success of SEA integration in the P/P-making process. • Without buy-in from P/P-makers, the SEA can be perceived as a separate process to the P/P-making process or as an administrative burden which adds little value to the P/P-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P/P-makers should be open and receptive to the findings of the SEA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time at the start of the P/P preparation process to explain to P/P-makers or decision-makers the role, benefits, and importance of SEA in the P/P-making process, as well as the consequences of not fully integrating SEA in the P/P-making process.

Good Practice Principle 2: Commence SEA early in the P/P preparation process

To ensure the effective integration of the SEA into the P/P, the SEA should begin as early as possible in the P/P's preparation.

A pre-screening check, using the decision criteria set out in the EPA's [Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening](#), should be applied to each P/P to determine if SEA is required.

The pre-screening check is based on administrative questions that can be rapidly checked by P/P-makers to determine whether the P/P should be taken to the SEA screening stage. It will allow rapid screening out of those P/Ps that are clearly not going to have any significant environmental impact and screening in of those that do require SEA. Pre-screening a P/P will mean that, should an SEA be required, there is sufficient time to factor in the procedural steps needed.

When SEA is introduced early, there is a greater chance of the SEA influencing the final outcomes of the P/P, as it helps to ensure that environmental issues are taken into account at the earliest possible opportunity. If SEA commences too late, when the direction, preferred alternative and content of a P/P have already been agreed, the assessment is less likely to add value. Furthermore, assessments that commence late and are added as a separate exercise can cause delays in P/P preparation.

Commence SEA early in the P/P-preparation process	
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All P/Ps should be pre-screened to check if they require SEA. When SEA is introduced early, it has a greater chance of influencing the final outcomes of a P/P. If SEA commences too late, the assessment is unlikely to add value and may result in delays to the P/P-preparation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once a new P/P is being considered, P/P-makers should ask the question “does the SEA Directive apply?”. This question should be asked by P/P-makers across all sectors. P/P-makers should use the pre-screening criteria set out in the EPA's <i>Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening</i> to determine if a P/P requires SEA.

This case study demonstrates good practice in integrating SEA early in the P/P preparation process.

Case Study 1: Example of the early integration of SEA in the P/P-making process	
Plan	Project 2040: National Planning Framework
Context	<p>Preparation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) commenced in 2016, with several preliminary key stakeholder consultation events held to help inform the preparation of the NPF. An Issues and Choices Report was published for consultation in February 2017, alongside the SEA Scoping Report. The draft NPF was issued for consultation in September 2017 and was accompanied by the SEA Environmental Report. The draft NPF was subsequently approved in February 2018. Following the adoption of the NPF, an SEA Statement was prepared summarising how the SEA process influenced the content of the NPF.</p>
Good practice	<p>An SEA Scoping Report was prepared by RPS for the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG), (now Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) and was used to inform the preparation of the NPF's pre-draft consultation report – the Issues and Choices Report.</p> <p>Both the Scoping Report and the Issues and Choices Report included graphics depicting the interactions between the plan-making and environmental assessment processes, highlighting the importance and role of the SEA in the plan's preparation.</p> <p>Both documents were published jointly for consultation in February 2017. Owing to the national significance of the plan, the Scoping Report was issued not only to the environmental authorities but also to relevant stakeholders and the public to highlight the key environmental issues and the key elements of the NPF. In addition, the wider consultation on the Scoping Report was used as a tool to generate comments from stakeholders on the scope and approach of the SEA. An SEA scoping workshop was also held in early 2017 with the environmental authorities and other relevant stakeholders. It included presentations from both the NPF team and the SEA team to inform discussions on the scope and level of detail of the assessment.</p> <p>An Environmental Steering Group was established at an early stage in the P/P preparation process to oversee and ensure the integration of environmental requirements during the preparation of the NPF, e.g. the SEA, Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.</p> <p>In this example, the SEA process commenced at the optimal time to influence the direction and content of the plan. Furthermore, the frontloading of engagement and advice helped to achieve a more efficient and effective assessment that influenced the preparation of the NPF. The establishment of the Environmental Steering Group also helped to ensure that the SEA was an integral part of the P/P preparation process.</p>

Good Practice Principle 3: Allocate sufficient time and resources to undertake the SEA

Sufficient time and resources must be allocated to undertaking the SEA and be factored into the P/P work programme from an early stage of the P/P preparation process to:

1. ensure regular and effective communication between the SEA and P/P-making teams, with meetings/workshops recommended at the following key stages: scoping, alternatives, mitigation and monitoring;
2. prepare the Screening Report (if applicable) and adhere to the statutory timescale for consultation (minimum 4 weeks consultation);
3. prepare the Scoping Report and adhere to the statutory timescales for consultation (minimum 4* weeks consultation);
4. undertake the appraisal of the P/P, adjust the P/P to incorporate the SEA findings and re-evaluate the changes to the P/P;
5. prepare and consult on the Environmental Report (minimum 4 weeks consultation);
6. review submissions, screen changes to the P/P and consult on material amendments, if necessary (minimum 3 weeks for P/Ps that meet the criteria for SEA under [S.I. No 436/2004](#));
7. prepare the SEA Statement.

Allocate sufficient time and resources to undertake the SEA		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient time and resources must be allocated at an early stage in the P/P-preparation process to undertake the SEA. • Avoid constraining the SEA into a pre-determined work programme for the P/P as this makes meaningful integration of the SEA and P/P difficult to achieve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When it has determined that SEA is required, P/P-makers should factor in the time and resources needed to undertake the SEA into their work programme. • Additional time should be allocated in the work programme for procurement of SEA services (if applicable). • P/P-makers should be considerate of the time it takes to prepare SEA documents and of the statutory timescales for consultation of SEA documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-house SEA practitioners should work with P/P-makers to inform the work programme for the SEA and P/P. • External SEA practitioners should highlight, at an early stage, where insufficient time and resources have been allocated at the various stages in the SEA process. This will provide P/P-makers with the opportunity to adjust the work programme early in the P/P-making process.

* For National and significant regional plans, it is recommended that a minimum of 6- 8 weeks apply at the scoping consultation stage and 10-12 weeks at the Draft P/P Environmental Report consultation stage.

Good Practice Principle 4: Encourage regular and effective communication between the SEA and P/P-making teams

The competent authority can undertake the SEA in house, or it can be prepared by external consultants. Regardless of whether the SEA is prepared in house or by external SEA practitioners, the key to the success of SEA integration is *effective communication* between the assessment and P/P-making teams.

The SEA and P/P-making teams must work closely and build strong working relationships early in the P/P preparation process. This requires a commitment from both teams to communicate effectively throughout the P/P-making process. As identified earlier, sufficient time and resources should be allocated in the work programme to allow for meaningful communication between the SEA and P/P-making teams.

There should be regular and effective dialogue between teams, including through informal correspondence, meetings and workshops at key stages (e.g. scoping, alternatives, mitigation, and monitoring). This will allow the P/P-making team to keep the SEA team abreast of emerging issues and changes to the P/P, while the SEA team can provide the P/P-making team with accurate and robust information about the sustainability of options proposed in the P/P.

Encourage regular and effective communication between the SEA and P/P-making teams		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communication is vital to the success of SEA integration. Clarify the roles of the SEA and P/P-making teams at an early stage and identify the key stages for integration of the SEA in the P/P-making process (refer to Figure 4 of this guidance for assistance). Ensure there is regular and effective dialogue between teams throughout the process. This will require a commitment from both P/P-makers and SEA practitioners. Communication between teams should be through correspondence, meetings / workshops at key stages and should be documented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the SEA team is kept abreast of emerging issues and changes to the P/P. Consider assigning a “SEA champion” within the P/P-making team with the specific role of ensuring that full integration of the SEA takes place throughout the P/P-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the P/P-making team receives accurate and robust information with regards to the sustainability of alternatives proposed in the P/P. Consider assigning a “Plan champion” within the SEA team with the specific role of ensuring that the SEA findings and recommendations are clearly communicated to the P/P-making team.

Good Practice Principle 5: Use the SEA Scoping Report to inform the direction of the P/P

The information presented in the Scoping Report should be used to inform the direction of the P/P:

- The policies and proposals set out in a P/P should be based on a thorough understanding of the study area’s needs, opportunities and environmental constraints/vulnerabilities. Therefore, the key environmental issues identified in the Scoping Report should be used to inform the drafting of the P/P.
- The Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) presented in the Scoping Report should be tailored to reflect the environmental context of the proposed P/P. Where possible, the Strategic Environmental Aims of the P/P should reflect the SEOs.

The SEA team should, where feasible, hold a meeting at the scoping stage with the P/P-making team (and other key stakeholders if appropriate) to discuss the key environmental issues, proposed SEOs and potential reasonable alternatives for the P/P. Holding a meeting with the P/P-making team at an early stage in the SEA process can help to ensure that P/P-makers are aware of the key environmental issues that should be used to inform the direction of the P/P.

Use the SEA Scoping Report to inform the direction of the P/P		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SEA Scoping Report should be used to inform the direction of the P/P. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the key environmental issues identified in the Scoping Report to inform the drafting of the P/P. Where possible, the ‘Strategic Environmental Aims’ of the P/P should reflect the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified in the Scoping Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the Draft Scoping Report with the P/P-making team prior to consultation. Hold a meeting with P/P-makers to help ensure they are aware of the key environmental issues for their area / Strategic Environmental Objectives which should be used to inform the direction of the P/P.

This case study demonstrates good practice in aligning the SEA SEOs with the P/P’s Strategic Environmental Aims.

Case Study 2: Example of aligning SEA SEOs with P/P’s Strategic Environmental Aims							
Plan	Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029						
Good practice	The Strategic Environmental Aims of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 were devised (where possible) to align with the SEOs in the Scoping Report and Environmental Report of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 .						
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Strategic Environmental Aims in the development plan</th> <th>SEOs in the SEA</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>To conserve and protect sites that have been designated for their ecological or environmental sensitivity.</td> <td>Protect, conserve, enhance (where possible) and avoid loss of the diversity and integrity of the broad range of habitats, species, wildlife corridors, ecosystems and geological features.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>To promote the creation of an integrated and coherent green infrastructure network throughout County Clare.</td> <td>Promote green infrastructure networks, including riparian zones and wildlife corridors.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Strategic Environmental Aims in the development plan	SEOs in the SEA	To conserve and protect sites that have been designated for their ecological or environmental sensitivity.	Protect, conserve, enhance (where possible) and avoid loss of the diversity and integrity of the broad range of habitats, species, wildlife corridors, ecosystems and geological features.	To promote the creation of an integrated and coherent green infrastructure network throughout County Clare.	Promote green infrastructure networks, including riparian zones and wildlife corridors.
Strategic Environmental Aims in the development plan	SEOs in the SEA						
To conserve and protect sites that have been designated for their ecological or environmental sensitivity.	Protect, conserve, enhance (where possible) and avoid loss of the diversity and integrity of the broad range of habitats, species, wildlife corridors, ecosystems and geological features.						
To promote the creation of an integrated and coherent green infrastructure network throughout County Clare.	Promote green infrastructure networks, including riparian zones and wildlife corridors.						

Good Practice Principle 6: Use the assessment of reasonable alternatives in the SEA to inform the selection of a preferred approach to P/P

The potential direction of the P/P should be informed by the assessment and comparison of reasonable alternatives in the SEA. Reasonable alternatives should be identified during the drafting of the P/P. Alternatives should not be developed retrospectively or influenced by a preferred alternative selected in advance. Alternatives need to be realistic, reasonable, viable and implementable.

By appraising an emerging P/P against reasonable alternatives as it evolves, the SEA can help to inform the selection of a preferred approach that demonstrates a higher degree of environmental sustainability. The appraisal of alternatives in the SEA can provide the P/P-making team with the environmental evidence and justification for choosing the preferred approach over other reasonable alternatives. Therefore, it is imperative that the P/P-making and SEA teams work closely to ensure that the SEA findings are consistently fed into the development and assessment of alternatives.

Initial reasonable alternatives should be identified, where possible, in the SEA Scoping Report. This will provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to provide feedback on the proposed alternatives/generate new alternatives to be considered in the SEA.

An alternatives workshop should be held between the P/P-making and SEA teams. This will provide both teams with the opportunity to identify alternatives and discuss the assessment (and where feasible, other key stakeholders, potential refinement) of alternatives before a decision on the preferred approach is made by the P/P-making team.

The Environmental Report should “tell the story” of how the alternatives were considered, developed and assessed. Documenting this information in the Environmental Report will demonstrate how the SEA process has influenced the evolution of the P/P. The P/P should also include a summary of the “storyline” of alternatives to document how the SEA influenced the selection of the preferred approach.

Develop reasonable alternatives early and through close collaboration between the P/P-making and SEA teams		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and develop reasonable alternatives early in the P/P-making process through close collaboration between the SEA and P/P-making teams. An ‘Alternatives’ workshop should be held between the P/P-making and SEA team to discuss the assessment and potential refinement of alternatives. Refer to the SEA Alternatives Checklist outlined in the EPA’s Good Practice Guidance Note on ‘Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss with the SEA team initial proposed reasonable alternatives. Refine the alternatives to take account of the appraisal findings, repeating this iterative process until a preferred approach (which may combine elements from other reasonable alternatives) is determined. The P/P should include a summary of the “storyline” of alternatives, documenting how the SEA influenced the development and refinement of alternatives and selection of a preferred approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the P/P-making team with advice and guidance on early versions of the proposed alternatives to highlight environmental risks. Initial reasonable alternatives should be identified, where possible, in the SEA Scoping Report. Assess and compare the significant environmental effects of the reasonable alternatives. This information should be clearly and succinctly presented to P/P-makers. Reevaluate if there is a need for any new and / or updated assessments arising from changes to the alternatives. “Tell the story” of the development and assessment of alternatives in the Environmental Report.

This case study demonstrates good practice in developing, assessing and comparing reasonable alternatives and using this information to inform the selection of the preferred approach for a P/P.

Case Study 3: Example of developing, assessing and comparing reasonable alternatives	
Plan	Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029
Context	The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 was adopted by the elected members of Clare County Council at a special meeting on 9 March 2023. The draft plan was accompanied by an SEA Environmental Report . Clare County Council, in collaboration with the SEA team, developed and assessed alternative spatial approaches for the Clare County Development Plan. Seven spatial options were developed for the distribution of development over the plan area.
Good practice	<p>Identifying and developing reasonable alternatives were two of the initial key steps undertaken in the plan preparation and SEA processes.</p> <p>The early version of the reasonable alternatives originated from a mind-mapping exercise undertaken by the planning team that captured all the competing constraints, interests and aims influencing the development of the Clare County Development Plan. The reasonable alternatives were also developed within the context of national and regional policy requirements, ensuring that they were realistic, reasonable and viable. These proposed alternatives were presented in the SEA Scoping Report (October 2020). This gave the environmental authorities and key stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed alternatives/generate new alternatives to be considered in the SEA.</p> <p>Each alternative was assessed for its potential environmental effects against the SEOs with the findings presented to the planning team. An alternatives workshop” was then held between the planning and environmental assessment teams to discuss the potential environmental effects of the proposed alternatives and to refine the alternatives.</p> <p>Where decisions about the refinement and elimination of reasonable alternatives were made over the duration of the plan-making process, the processes and reasoning behind these decisions were documented. A comprehensive overview of the identification, consideration and selection of the alternatives, including the preferred approach, was presented in the Environmental Report.</p> <p>This example illustrates how the P/P-making and SEA teams worked in close collaboration to identify, develop and refine reasonable alternatives early in the P/P-making process. The Environmental Report provides a clear audit trail documenting how the reasonable alternatives were developed, assessed and compared. This enabled the Council to select the most sustainable option for growth and development in the county. Following the assessment and evaluation process, the preferred approach selected was to pursue a combination of two alternatives.</p>

Good Practice Principle 7: Incorporate the SEA findings and recommended mitigation measures into the P/P

An iterative process should be followed by the P/P-making and SEA teams to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the P/P as it develops (Figure 6):

1. Develop

- The P/P-making and SEA teams should work collaboratively to formulate reasonable alternatives to the P/P.

2. Assess

- The SEA team should assess and compare the significant environmental effects of alternatives against the SEA's SEOs.
- It is vital that the SEA findings and recommended mitigation measures are clearly and succinctly presented to the P/P-making team in real time during the assessment of the P/P. The assessment findings and recommended mitigation measures should be presented to the P/P-maker as an internal document for review prior to public consultation to enable modifications to be made to the P/P.

3. Revise

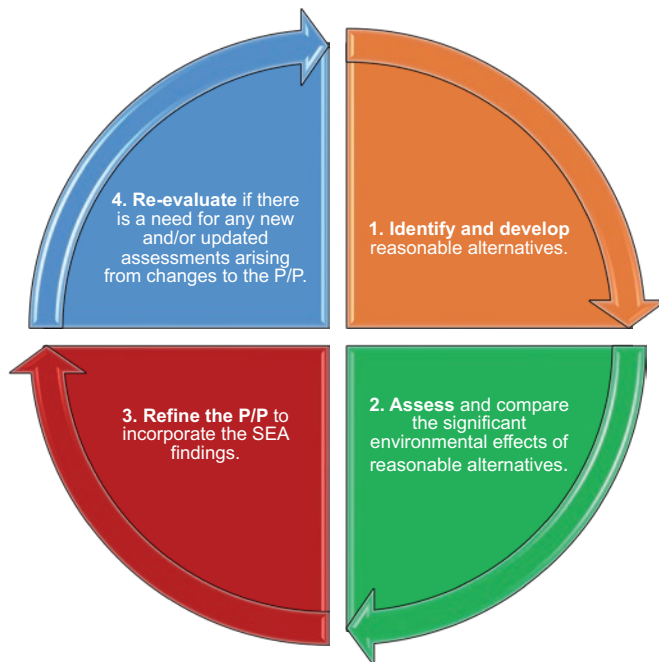
- The P/P-making team should review the SEA findings and recommended mitigation measures and subsequently adjust the P/P to minimise adverse environmental effects or enhance positive effects.

4. Re-evaluate

- The SEA team should share with the P/P-making team information on any new and/or updated assessments arising from changes to the content of the P/P (repeat steps 3 and 4 as necessary).
- The Environmental Report should reflect the draft P/P as published for consultation, documenting where the SEA has influenced the P/P.

This process will ensure that P/Ps are gradually modified and improved as a consequence of the iterative environmental improvement process driven by SEA.

Figure 6: Iterative process for ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated into a P/P



Incorporating the SEA recommended mitigation measures is fundamental to the integration of SEA in the P/P-making process. As outlined in steps 2 and 3 above, the SEA findings from the assessment of the P/P should be fed back to the P/P-makers in real time to ensure that the proposed mitigation is embedded in the content of the P/P. It is recommended that the Environmental Report identifies the following:

- What significant effects are likely to arise from the implementation of the P/P before mitigation is taken into account (sometimes referred to as “policy off”).
- The actions to be taken by P/P-makers and decision-takers to address significant adverse environmental effects or achieve enhancements.
- The residual environmental effects after mitigation is applied (“policy on”).

This approach will help to clearly illustrate to P/P-makers the difference in environmental effects once the recommended mitigation measures are applied to the P/P.

It can also be beneficial for the SEA and P/P-making teams to hold a mitigation workshop to discuss the proposed mitigation measures. This provides an opportunity for the SEA team to describe the rationale for the mitigation measures recommended. The SEA and P/P-making teams should work collaboratively to refine, where necessary, the wording, nature and extent of the proposed mitigation measures.

When SEA is carried out as an integral part of the development of a P/P, it may be difficult to distinguish the changes made as a result of the assessment from those made as part of the normal P/P-making process. Therefore, it is important that the P/P-making team keeps a log of changes made as a consequence of the SEA process.

The P/P should include a section summarising how the SEA findings and mitigation measures have been taken into account in the final P/P. This will demonstrate how the SEA has influenced the P/P.

Incorporate the SEA findings and recommended mitigation into the P/P		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporating the SEA recommended mitigation into the P/P is fundamental to the integration of SEA in the P/P-making process. A 'Mitigation' workshop should be held between the P/P-making and SEA teams to refine the wording, nature and extent of the proposed mitigation measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be open to making changes to the P/P to incorporate the SEA recommended mitigation. Work collaboratively with the SEA team to refine the wording of the mitigation measures. Incorporate the refined SEA mitigation measures and adjust the P/P to minimise adverse environmental effects and enhance positive effects. Include a section in the P/P highlighting where and how the SEA mitigation measures have been incorporated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly illustrate to P/P-makers the likely significant effects without mitigation, and then after mitigation has been applied, to demonstrate the difference in environmental effects once mitigation is applied. Present the proposed mitigation measures as a series of actions to be taken by P/P-makers to avoid or minimise the potential for significant adverse environmental effects. Also capture the actions to be taken by P/P-makers to achieve enhancements where relevant. Present the proposed mitigation measures to P/P-makers prior to the 'Mitigation' workshop.

This case study demonstrates good practice in presenting recommended mitigation measures in the Environmental Report.

Case Study 4: Example of how to present SEA recommended mitigation measures to P/P-makers

Plan	Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II																						
Context	The Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II is a national-level spatial assessment of the marine environment. It seeks to provide a framework for subsequent assessment for offshore renewable energy within the overarching marine planning framework, including the creation of offshore renewable energy designated maritime area plans.																						
Good practice	<p>The Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II SEA Environmental Report sets out the assessment of the plan’s objectives and renewable energy technology types against the SEA framework. A series of recommendations for mitigation were outlined to reduce, offset and/or avoid likely significant negative effects. The Environmental Report presented the assessment of proposals without mitigation, and then after mitigation had been applied, clearly demonstrating to P/P-makers the difference in environmental effects once mitigation measures are applied.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2" rowspan="2">SEA Objectives</th> <th colspan="2">Bottom-Fixed Wind</th> <th colspan="2">FLOW</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Before mitigation</th> <th>After mitigation</th> <th>Before mitigation</th> <th>After mitigation</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>SEA 1</td> <td>Protect the quality and character of the seabed and its sediments and avoid significant effects on seabed morphology and sediment transport processes.</td> <td>Significant Negative</td> <td>Minor Negative</td> <td>Minor Negative</td> <td>Minor Negative</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SEA 2</td> <td>Protect the integrity of coastal and estuarine processes.</td> <td>Significant Negative</td> <td>Uncertain</td> <td>Minor Positive</td> <td>Minor Positive</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The assessment findings and proposed mitigation measures were presented to the P/P-makers and were subject to discussion at a workshop between the P/P-makers and the SEA consultants. The Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II was subsequently refined to incorporate the proposed mitigation measures.</p> <p>In this example, the recommended mitigation measures and the benefits of applying such measures were clearly demonstrated to P/P-makers. This clear approach enabled P/P-makers to easily identify aspects of the plan that required revision, ensuring that the significant adverse effects identified in the SEA were reduced, offset or avoided.</p>	SEA Objectives		Bottom-Fixed Wind		FLOW		Before mitigation	After mitigation	Before mitigation	After mitigation	SEA 1	Protect the quality and character of the seabed and its sediments and avoid significant effects on seabed morphology and sediment transport processes.	Significant Negative	Minor Negative	Minor Negative	Minor Negative	SEA 2	Protect the integrity of coastal and estuarine processes.	Significant Negative	Uncertain	Minor Positive	Minor Positive
SEA Objectives				Bottom-Fixed Wind		FLOW																	
		Before mitigation	After mitigation	Before mitigation	After mitigation																		
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SEA 2	Protect the integrity of coastal and estuarine processes.	Significant Negative	Uncertain	Minor Positive	Minor Positive																		

This case study demonstrates how the SEA and P/P-making teams worked together to refine the mitigation measures included in the P/P.

Case Study 5: Example of the SEA and P/P-making teams working collaboratively to refine mitigation measures

Plan	EirGrid Grid Implementation Plan 2023-2028
Context	The EirGrid Draft Grid Implementation Plan 2023-2028 for the high voltage electricity transmission system in Ireland (“the grid”) sets out the way in which the grid is likely to be developed over the coming years. The Implementation Plan is a cyclical plan building on the Grid Implementation Plan 2017-2022.
Good practice	<p>An working draft of the EirGrid Draft Grid Implementation Plan 2023-2028 Environmental Report was issued to the P/P-making team prior to consultation, which included a set of recommended mitigation measures to alleviate potential significant negative effects and to further strengthen the policies and objectives of the Implementation Plan. The SEA and P/P-making teams worked collaboratively to refine the wording of the mitigation.</p> <p>The evolution of the mitigation measures was recorded in the Environmental Report (see below; green text denotes the additional text recommended by the SEA).</p> <p>All mitigation was fully integrated into the policies in the Implementation Plan.</p>

SEA Recommendation	Code	Policy or Objective
Amend text	ENVP11	To avoid or minimise impacts on surface, ground, and marine water quality and support achieving objectives of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Water Framework Directive.
Add policy	ENVP23	To protect the water environment, water quality and aquatic ecology in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive, in the development of its transmission projects.
Add policy	BIOD02	To quantify and report losses in habitat area from development and deliver wherever possible, net gain (and if not no net loss) of semi-natural habitats from grid development. Mechanisms will include ecological input to landscape planting so that it functions for biodiversity, enhancement of existing habitats, and as a last resort, off-site habitat compensation.
Amend text	ENVO10	To establish and maintain a Geographic Information System of existing and proposed EirGrid grid development projects onshore and offshore, to assist with the identification of cumulative and transboundary impacts.

This case study demonstrates good practice in documenting where the SEA mitigation measures have been incorporated in the final P/P.

Case Study 6: Example of documenting how the SEA has influenced the P/P		
Plan	National Hazardous Waste Management Plan 2012-2027	
Context	The EPA prepared the fourth National Hazardous Waste Management Plan (NHWMP) for Ireland covering the period 2021-2027. It sets out the priorities to improve the prevention and management of hazardous waste.	
Good practice	<p>The NHWMP documents how mitigation measures from the SEA have refined the policies and objectives in the plan (text in blue denotes the SEA recommended mitigation measures included in the plan). The plan also contains the Environmental Monitoring Programme for monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementing the plan.</p> <p>This approach clearly illustrates the influence of the SEA process on the final plan, highlighting the importance of the SEA in the plan-making process.</p>	
Draft NHWMP Ref.	Proposed Mitigation Measures in the SEA Environmental Report	How this has been addressed in the Plan?
Collection & Treatment	<p>General Mitigation: It is recommended that the following is added to the plan as a specific recommendation: <i>Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the NHWMP are subject to the relevant regulatory environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.</i></p> <p>Actions 9.1 and 9.2 In addition to updating the 2018 capacity report, it is recommended that an economic study / cost-benefit analysis forms part of this review process to examine the economic viability of managing various waste streams in Ireland.</p> <p>The updated review should also consider emerging issues to inform any capacity / infrastructure needs e.g. trends in healthcare risk waste generation and management, the growing uptake in EVs and recycling needs for lithium batteries, etc.</p>	<p>The final plan incorporates the general mitigation through the inclusion of a new Recommendation 20: <i>Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the NHWMP are subject to the relevant regulatory environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.</i></p> <p>The action has incorporated the SEA mitigation and the revised action now reads as follows: <i>Update and maintain inventory of national capacity for storage, treatment and disposal of hazardous wastes. An economic study / cost-benefit analysis should be considered as part of this review process to examine the economic viability of managing various waste streams in Ireland. Emerging issues should be included to inform any capacity / infrastructure needs e.g. trends in healthcare risk waste generation and management, the growing uptake in EVs and recycling needs for lithium batteries, etc.</i></p>
Note: AA, Appropriate Assessment; EIA, Environmental Impact Assessment; EV, electric vehicle.		

Good Practice Principle 8: Improve the simplicity and clarity of the Environmental Report

The influence of SEA in the P/P-making process can be enhanced by significantly improving the clarity and simplicity of the Environmental Report.

Clear, concise and engaging reporting is encouraged as accessibility (and therefore integration) can often be hindered by reports that do not clearly define the most important conclusions of the assessment.

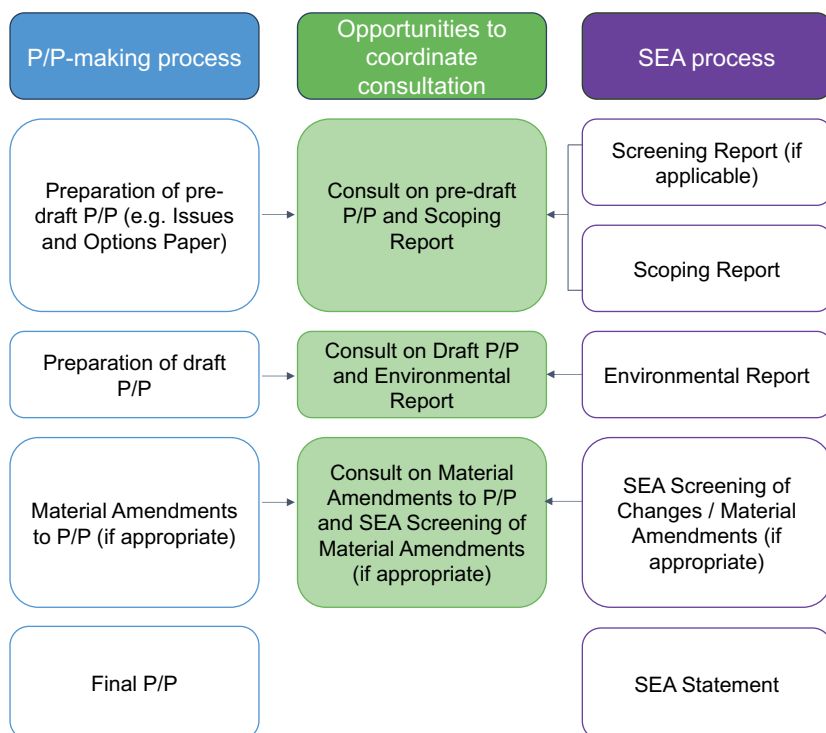
Therefore, the key findings of the SEA, including the recommended mitigation measures, should be summarised in a table in the Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary. The findings should be clear and written in plain English to help P/P-makers understand and address relevant issues in the P/P.

Improve simplicity and clarity of the Environmental Report		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SEA Environmental Report should be clear, concise, engaging and contain a level of detail that is appropriate to the P/P. The most important conclusions of the SEA should be clearly defined in the Environmental Report to help P/P-makers and consultees understand the potential significant environmental effects of implementing the P/P. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate the recommended SEA mitigation measures and monitoring programme into the P/P. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly summarise the key findings of the SEA, including the recommended mitigation, in a table in the Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary. The findings and proposed mitigation should be clear and written in plain English to help P/P-makers understand and address relevant issues.

Good Practice Principle 9: Coordinate consultation on the SEA and P/P and integrate SEA consultation responses into the P/P

Figure 7 illustrates the SEA and P/P-making processes, how they interact with one another and where consultation feeds into both processes.

Figure 7: Opportunities for joint consultation on the SEA and P/P documents



Although SEA and P/P-making are covered by different legislative requirements, coordinating consultation efforts and sharing information on consultation outcomes can improve the integration of the P/P-making and SEA processes. The following steps can strengthen the integration of SEA in the P/P-making process at the consultation stage:

- Ensure that the P/P and accompanying SEA documents are published together within the same consultation period.
- Ensure that all consultation documentation is easily accessible on the competent authority's website with clear links between the P/P and its SEA.
- Include a table in the P/P and the Environmental Report/SEA Statement signposting the different stages of consultation and illustrating the links between the two processes.
- Ensure that SEA forms a key part of any in-person or virtual P/P consultation workshops/ presentations.

The P/P-making and SEA teams should work collaboratively to ensure that SEA-related consultation comments are integrated into the P/P:

- The SEA team should share with the P/P-making team the responses received on the SEA consultation and propose mitigation measures to ensure that these responses are integrated into the P/P.
- The P/P-making team should collate all stakeholder comments and share these with the SEA team. It is important that the SEA team is also aware of other issues raised, as these may have an indirect impact on the SEA (e.g. feedback on the shortcomings in the draft P/P may also inform the SEA).
- The SEA consultation process should be described in the Environmental Report. This should include a description of the consultation mechanisms used during the SEA (e.g. scoping workshops, public round tables), time frames and an outline of the comments received during scoping and how these have been integrated into the P/P. The SEA Statement should demonstrate how the feedback received on the Scoping Report and Environmental Report has been integrated into the assessment of effects and mitigation measures and, ultimately, the P/P.
- The P/P should be revised, where necessary, to integrate the SEA-related consultation responses.*

Coordinate consultation on the SEA and P/P and integrate SEA consultation responses into the P/P		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating the SEA and P/P consultation processes can improve integration of the SEA in the P/P-making process. • Ensure the P/P and accompanying SEA documents are published together within the same consultation period. • Ensure all consultation documentation is easily accessible on websites, with clear links between the P/P and its SEA. • The SEA and P/P-making teams should work collaboratively to ensure SEA-related consultation comments are integrated into the P/P. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a table in the P/P signposting the different stages of consultation, highlighting the links to the SEA consultation. • Collate all stakeholder comments and share these with the SEA team. • Revise the P/P to incorporate the SEA-related consultation responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate SEA as a key part of P/P consultation workshops / presentations. • Share with the P/P-making team the responses received on the SEA and propose mitigation measures to ensure these responses are integrated into the P/P. • Review all stakeholder comments to identify whether any of the other issues raised will have an indirect impact on the SEA. • Describe in the Environmental Report the SEA consultation mechanisms. Include a summary of the comments received during Scoping and how these have been integrated into the P/P. • Detail in the SEA Statement how the feedback received on the Scoping and Environmental Reports has been integrated into mitigation measures, and ultimately, the P/P.

* Updates to the P/P in response to consultation submissions should be screened for significant environmental effects.

Good Practice Principle 10: Integrate SEA monitoring into the P/P and review process

It is essential that SEA monitoring is integrated into the P/P and review process, as monitoring:

- Checks that the SEA findings are accurate and allows any unforeseen or more significant effects to be identified and addressed.
- Confirms that mitigation measures are effective, allowing adjustment as necessary.
- Ensures that future P/P cycles will benefit from properly understanding environmental pressures.

The following are recommended:

- The SEA and P/P-making teams should discuss proposals in the P/P that may have significant environmental consequences early in the SEA process.
- The P/P-making and SEA teams should work collaboratively to develop and refine a monitoring programme that is tailored to the scale and nature of the significant environmental effects likely to arise from the implementation of the P/P. The overlap between the monitoring that is carried out for the SEA and the broader monitoring undertaken for the P/P implementation should be exploited.
- A monitoring workshop should be held between the P/P-making and SEA teams to discuss and refine the SEA monitoring programme.
- The Environmental Report should include a specific recommendation for the SEA monitoring programme to be incorporated into the P/P.
- The SEA monitoring programme should be included as a chapter in the P/P so that this aspect is not lost as part of P/P implementation reviews.
- A specific commitment should be made in the P/P for environmental monitoring and reporting, in the form of a specific policy measure. This will help to ensure that the findings from the SEA monitoring are acted upon, where appropriate.
- Resources should be earmarked for collating and reporting on the SEA monitoring programme.

Integrate SEA monitoring in the P/P-making and review process		
General Point(s)	Specific Point(s) for P/P-Makers	Specific Point(s) for SEA-Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating the SEA monitoring programme in the P/P-making and review processes will help to ensure significant adverse effects on the environment are avoided and future P/P cycles will benefit from understanding environmental pressures. P/P-makers and the SEA team should work collaboratively to develop and refine the SEA monitoring programme. A 'Monitoring' workshop should be held between P/P-makers and the SEA team to discuss the SEA-monitoring programme. Refer to the EPA's Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P/P-makers must commit to implementing the SEA-monitoring programme. The SEA monitoring programme should be included in the P/P so that this aspect is not "lost" as part of P/P reviews. A specific commitment should be made in the P/P to undertake environmental monitoring and reporting, in the form of a specific policy measure. Earmark resources, including a defined budget, to collate and report on the SEA monitoring programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include a specific recommendation in the Environmental Report for the SEA monitoring programme to be incorporated into the P/P.

4. Checklist for SEA and P/P Integration

The following is a checklist for P/P-makers and SEA practitioners to help successfully integrate SEA into the P/P-making process. This checklist should be referred to at each stage in the P/P-making process to ensure that the SEA influences the evolution of the P/P throughout the P/P-making process.

Although not a requirement in the SEA Directive, it is recommended that a section is prepared in the Environmental Report, using the checklist questions below as a guide, detailing how the SEA has influenced the P/P. This section can then be expanded in the SEA Statement, where it is a legislative requirement to demonstrate how environmental considerations have been integrated into the P/P.

Integration of the SEA at an early stage

- Has a pre-screening check of the P/P been undertaken at an early stage to determine if SEA is required?
- Was the SEA team commissioned (where applicable) and engaged at an early stage in the P/P-making process i.e. before a draft P/P was prepared?
- Have the P/P-making and SEA teams discussed the key environmental issues, Strategic Environmental Objectives, and initial reasonable alternatives at a scoping workshop?
- Has the P/P-making team used the key environmental issues/Strategic Environmental Objectives to inform the drafting of the P/P?

Iterative development and assessment of alternatives

- Has the SEA team provided advice and guidance on early versions of the proposed alternatives to highlight potential environmental risks?
- Have the P/P-making and SEA teams discussed the assessment (and potential refinement) of alternatives at an alternatives/scoping workshop?
- Have the SEA findings of the assessment of reasonable alternatives been shared with the P/P-making team in a timely manner, allowing it sufficient time to incorporate the findings and adjust alternatives (where necessary)?
- Have the reasons for choosing the P/P's preferred approach over other reasonable alternatives been informed by the SEA?
- Does the Environmental Report "tell the story" of how the alternatives were considered, developed and assessed including outlining where the SEA influenced the development and refinement of alternatives?

Incorporating the SEA findings and recommended mitigation measures to address impacts on the environment

- Have the SEA findings/recommended mitigation measures been clearly and succinctly presented to the P/P-making team in real time during the preparation of the P/P?
- Have the P/P-making and SEA teams discussed how to integrate these mitigation measures effectively, refining the wording where necessary, at a mitigation workshop?
- Has the P/P-making team incorporated the SEA findings/recommended mitigation measures and adjusted the P/P to minimise adverse environmental effects or enhance positive effects?
- Do the final P/P and SEA Statement include the SEA mitigation measures and identify where these have been incorporated into the final P/P?

Integrate SEA-related consultation responses into the P/P

- Have the opinions and feedback gathered through SEA consultation informed the P/P?
- Has the SEA team assessed the proposed changes arising from the feedback to determine if they would result in additional significant effects? Has this information been shared with the P/P-making team prior to finalisation of the P/P?

Incorporate commitments for monitoring significant environmental effects in the P/P

- Have the P/P-making and SEA teams worked collaboratively to develop and refine the SEA monitoring programme at a monitoring workshop?
- Is there a specific recommendation in the Environmental Report for the SEA monitoring programme to be incorporated into the P/P?
- Is the SEA monitoring programme integrated into the P/P?
- Is there a specific commitment made in the P/P for environmental monitoring and reporting in the form of a specific policy measure?
- Has the P/P-making team earmarked sufficient resources to collate and report on the SEA monitoring programme?

Finally ...

- Does the final P/P, compared with the draft P/P, better reflect the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. climate action), and will it result in enhanced environmental conditions (e.g. reduced pollution, enhanced biodiversity)?

5. Dos and Don'ts in SEA and P/P Integration

	Do...	Don't...
General principles	DO explain to P/P-makers and/or decision-makers the role, obligations, benefits and importance of SEA. Building understanding among this group will encourage greater buy-in and will help the SEA be more influential in the P/P-making process.	DON'T assume everyone knows about SEA and how it should be considered in P/P-making and decision-making. Communicating the value and opportunities of SEA to those who have to use its findings will help SEA become an integral part of the P/P-making process.
	DO a pre-screening check of the P/P to verify if it meets the requirements for SEA. Ask the question "Does the SEA Directive apply to this P/P?" as soon as a new P/P is being considered.	DON'T assume that SEA does not apply for a particular type of P/P, as doing so will result in delays in the P/P preparation process if SEA is subsequently determined to be required.
	DO begin SEA at an early stage in the P/P preparation process.	DON'T commence SEA too late in the P/P-making process. This approach may result in the need for new or repeated consultation/reporting, which can be costly and resource intensive.
	DO allocate sufficient time and resources to undertake the SEA at an early stage in the P/P preparation process.	DON'T constrain the SEA into a pre-determined work programme, as this makes meaningful integration of the SEA and P/P difficult to achieve.
	DO undertake SEA as an iterative process that focuses on integrating environmental considerations throughout the P/P process.	DON'T carry out SEA as a separate workstream from the P/P with limited linkages between the two processes.
	DO prepare the SEA Environmental Report so that it is clear, concise, engaging and contains a level of detail that is appropriate to the P/P. The most important conclusions of the SEA should be clearly defined to help P/P-makers and consultees understand the potential significant environmental effects of implementing the P/P.	DON'T prepare an Environmental Report that is too complex/difficult to understand with the most significant findings not easily identifiable.
Communication	DO work closely and build strong working relationships between the SEA and P/P-making teams from an early stage in the P/P-making process. This will require a commitment from both P/P-makers and SEA practitioners.	DON'T limit communication and information sharing between the SEA and P/P-making teams, as doing so will impede the full integration of the SEA into the P/P.
Scoping Report	<p>DO use the key environmental issues/SEOs identified in the Scoping Report to inform the drafting of the P/P.</p> <p>DO hold a workshop at the scoping stage between the P/P-making and SEA teams.</p>	DON'T ignore the key environmental issues/SEOs identified in the Scoping Report.

	Do...	Don't...
Reasonable alternatives	<p>DO identify, develop and assess reasonable alternatives collaboratively between the SEA and P/P-making teams as the P/P is being developed.</p> <p>DO hold a workshop at alternatives stage between the P/P-making and SEA teams.</p> <p>DO appraise and compare each reasonable alternative as the P/P evolves and present this information to P/P-makers in real time during the assessment of the P/P.</p> <p>DO refine the P/P to take account of the appraisal findings, repeating this iterative process until a preferred approach is determined.</p>	<p>DON'T develop reasonable alternatives retrospectively after the P/P has been drafted.</p> <p>DON'T develop reasonable alternatives without consulting the SEA team, as it may highlight why proposed alternatives are not reasonable or identify additional reasonable alternatives that have not been considered by the P/P-making team.</p> <p>DON'T assess only the initially identified reasonable alternatives, ignoring any new/ changes to reasonable alternatives.</p>
Incorporating SEA findings and mitigation	<p>DO consider mitigation throughout the SEA.</p> <p>DO illustrate clearly to P/P-makers the likely significant adverse effects without mitigation, and then after mitigation has been applied, to demonstrate the difference in environmental effects once mitigation measures are applied.</p> <p>DO present the proposed mitigation measures clearly.</p> <p>DO hold a workshop at the mitigation stage between the P/P-making and SEA teams to refine the wording of the mitigation measures.</p> <p>DO modify the P/P, taking account of the proposed mitigation/recommendations in the Environmental Report.</p> <p>DO highlight in the P/P, Environmental Report and SEA Statement where the SEA mitigation measures have been incorporated.</p>	<p>DON'T think of mitigation as something that is added at the final stage in the P/P process.</p> <p>DON'T provide a snapshot of the P/P's impacts without suggesting measures to improve the environmental outcomes of the P/P.</p>
Coordinating consultation	<p>DO coordinate consultation on the SEA and P/P.</p> <p>DO incorporate SEA as a key part of P/P consultation workshops/presentations.</p> <p>DO work collaboratively to ensure that SEA-related consultation comments are integrated into the P/P.</p>	<p>DON'T carry out the SEA and P/P consultations in parallel with few or no links between them.</p> <p>DON'T focus only on presenting and gathering views on the P/P at consultation workshops/presentations.</p> <p>DON'T ignore the consultation responses received in relation to the SEA and focus only on those received on the P/P itself.</p>

	Do...	Don't...
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">DO include a specific recommendation in the Environmental Report for the SEA monitoring programme to be incorporated into the P/P.DO hold a workshop at the mitigation/monitoring stage between the P/P-making and SEA teams to discuss the monitoring programme.DO include the SEA monitoring programme as a chapter in the P/P so that this aspect is not lost as part of P/P implementation reviews.DO include a specific commitment in the P/P for environmental monitoring and reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">DON'T monitor the P/P implementation only and ignore the SEA monitoring programme.

Glossary

Term	Explanation
Competent authority	Refers to the P/P-making body responsible for undertaking the environmental assessment.
Effect(s)	A change (or changes) resulting from the implementation of a plan, programme or project.
Environmental authorities	Authorities defined in section 9(5) of the SEA Regulations, as amended, which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Environmental Protection Agency ■ Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage ■ Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications ■ Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
Environmental Report	An Environmental Report is a document required by the SEA Directive as part of an environmental assessment that identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing a P/P.
Mitigation	Mitigation measures are designed to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse effects on the environment from the implementation of the P/P.
Monitoring	The competent authority is required to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementing the P/P to identify unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and to prompt the undertaking and monitoring of appropriate remedial action.
Monitoring programme	A detailed description of the monitoring arrangements to be put in place by the competent authority to monitor the significant impacts of the proposed P/P on the environment.
Plan(s) and/or programme(s) (P/P)	Plans and programmes are plans and programmes which are subject to preparation and/or adoption by an authority at national, regional or local level or which are prepared by an authority for adoption, through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government, and which are required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions.
Reasonable alternatives	Reasonable alternatives are the different realistic options considered in developing the policies and objectives of a P/P. They need to be sufficiently distinct to highlight the different environmental implications of each so that meaningful comparisons can be made.
Scoping	Once it has been determined that SEA is required, the focus of the SEA is determined. Effective Scoping in SEA ensures that the relevant significant environmental issues are identified, and that the level of detail to which they should be assessed is agreed. The relevant key significant issues are then given the necessary emphasis in the environmental assessment process and in the SEA Environmental Report.

Screening	Process of determining whether SEA is required to be undertaken for certain P/Ps under the SEA Directive.
SEA Statement	Once a P/P has been adopted, an SEA Statement is prepared summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the P/P, how the Environmental Report and the outcome of consultations were taken into account and the reasons for choosing the adopted P/P instead of other reasonable alternatives considered. The measures and arrangements relating to environmental monitoring of P/P implementation are also required to be included.
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	SEA is a systematic decision support process aiming to ensure that environmental and possibly other sustainability aspects are considered effectively in policy, plan, and programme making. SEA evaluates the likely significant environmental consequences of a policy, plan, or programme and its alternatives.
Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs)	Strategic Environmental Objectives are a set of environmental objectives against which the P/P is assessed.

Appendix I

EPA guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment

The publication of the guidance note is an action identified in the [SEA Action Plan 2021-2025](#), which was formulated by the statutory environmental authorities for SEA in Ireland. This note is not a stand-alone guidance document; rather, it supplements the comprehensive suite of other EPA guidance on SEA including:

- [Good Practice Guidance on SEA and Landscape](#)
- [Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring](#)
- [Good Practice Guidance on SEA for the Tourism Sector](#)
- [Good Practice Guidance Note on SEA in the Water Sector](#)
- [Good Practice Note on SEA for the Energy Sector](#)
- [SEA Screening Good Practice 2021](#)
- [Tiering of Assessments](#)
- [Good Practice Guidance on Cumulative Effects Assessment in SEA](#)
- [Integrating Climatic Factors into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland – A Guidance Note](#)
- [Good Practice Note on SEA for the Forestry Sector](#)
- [Good Practice Note on SEA for the Waste Sector](#)
- [GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA](#)
- [Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\)](#)
- [Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) and Climate Change: Guidance for Practitioners](#)
- [Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment. Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes. Best Practice Guidance](#)

Other useful resources include the [SEA Pack](#), the [SEA Process Checklist](#) and the SEA Effectiveness Reviews [2012](#) and [2020](#).



Environmental Protection Agency
An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Headquarters

**PO Box 3000,
Johnstown Castle Estate
County Wexford, Ireland**

T: +353 53 916 0600

F: +353 53 916 0699

E: info@epa.ie

W: www.epa.ie

LoCall: 1890 33 55 99

Regional Inspectorate

McCumiskey House,
Richview, Clonskeagh Road,
Dublin 14, Ireland

T: +353 1 268 0100

F: +353 1 268 0199

Regional Inspectorate

Inniscarra, County Cork,
Ireland

T: +353 21 487 5540

F: +353 21 487 5545

Regional Inspectorate

Seville Lodge, Callan Road,
Kilkenny, Ireland

T +353 56 779 6700

F +353 56 779 6798

Regional Inspectorate

John Moore Road, Castlebar
County Mayo, Ireland

T +353 94 904 8400

F +353 94 902 1934

Regional Inspectorate

The Glen, Monaghan, Ireland

T +353 47 77600

F +353 47 84987

Regional Offices

The Civic Centre
Church St., Athlone
Co. Westmeath, Ireland
T +353 906 475722

Room 3, Raheen Conference Centre,
Pearse House, Pearse Road
Raheen Business Park, Limerick,
Ireland
T +353 61 224764

