

Quality and effectiveness of strategic environmental assessment (SEA) as a tool for water management within the South African context

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Abstract

The water management sector has been one of the first sectors in South Africa to explore the application of strategic environmental assessment (SEA) during the mid 1990s. This paper presents the results of a performance evaluation on the quality and effectiveness of a key landmark SEA case study, namely the Mhlathuze Catchment SEA. The case study provides an ideal opportunity to gain valuable insights into the interpretation as well as the strengths and weaknesses of SEA as applied within the water management sector. The research results showed that the SEA achieved an 'average' overall input quality performance and a mixed output effectiveness performance. Reviewed against 'direct output' indicators it achieved a 'poor' effectiveness performance results. However, the SEA also achieved significant successes in terms of 'indirect outputs', such as a more holistic approach to water management, facilitated more effective public participation and contributed to broader strategic planning in the department. The paper concludes by making recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of SEA within the water sector.

Keywords: strategic environmental assessment, quality and effectiveness, SEA performance evaluation, water management