

# The quality of environmental impact reports for projects with the potential of affecting wetlands in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

In South Africa certain development activities, which may have a substantial detrimental effect on the environment, require an environmental impact assessment (EIA), including projects with the potential of affecting wetlands. A key element of the EIA process is the submission of an environmental impact report (EIR) for review in order to determine whether the report is adequate and/or whether a greater quantity of information is required before the project can be authorised. The information available to decision-makers in the EIR is a major determinant in the outcome of wetland protection and/or destruction.

The quality of 4 environmental impact reports of large projects with the potential of impacting on wetlands was assessed using an EIA report quality review checklist. It is concluded that the quality of the 4 reports was generally satisfactory but certain areas were found to be poorly performed, i.e. identification and evaluation of impacts to the potential detriment of the wetlands for which the EIAs were performed

To improve the quality of the reports for projects with the potential of affecting wetlands it is recommended that a quality review checklist be used by EIA practitioners and authorities as an additional tool to the EIA regulations and the integrated environmental management series. This should assist in ensuring that key aspects are addressed before submission to the relevant authority, and will also contribute to establishing a baseline of EIR quality for evaluation of wetlands EIA practice under the new regulations promulgated in 2006.

**Keywords:** environmental impact report (EIR), environmental impact assessment, quality review, wetlands