

Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) – Local Action, Emerging Implications And What To Do About It



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CIA and Indicators of Concern – 2 little stories...

- ▶ Local knowledges issues emerging/indicating broader system problems for CIA
- ▶ CIA is not happening – impacts are emerging at a local/ground level - no one is watching
- ▶ Local citizens are having to stand in the place of government to get the science done - local knowledge is not being captured – IA and CIA
- ▶ Uninformed decision making– insufficient, biased science to match policy aims = no CIA
- ▶ Short-sighted decisions – considered against long term irreversible environmental/economic costs (including opportunity costs)

CIA – Redirect to Big Questions

- ▶ What do we need CIA to do – where are we missing it most?
- ▶ Where and when does CIA get done? What's the Plan exactly?
- ▶ How do we perceive CIA?
 - ▶ Narrowed by current constructs that cloud innovative thinking?
 - ▶ Interests we represent?
 - ▶ Personal views?
 - ▶ Institutional biases ...?

System Fundamentals

- ▶ Consider:
 - ▶ CIA is simply necessary for informed decision making
 - ▶ Impacts cannot be assessed unless we know the Cumulative Impacts
 - ▶ 'Sustainability' cannot be measured without CIA
 - ▶ Can we plan, risk manage, mitigate, monitor? Where is our rudder?
- ▶ CIA forms part of a larger complex system – we know so much more now...but time passes - law of diminishing returns and excuses
- ▶ If CIA is not integrated effectively, at the right time, perhaps it simply becomes redundant, timed out? Useless....
- ▶ 2 Stories tell a little about local knowledge but quite a bit about system integrity

Story 1 -Mt. Rose Swanson -Armstrong and Spallumcheen Trails Society

- ▶ Mt. Rose Swanson –Wilderness area covering two mountains – limited protection...
- ▶ British Columbia Government is about to approve logging and deforestation – permitting/auctioning fall of 2025
- ▶ Local citizens group, many of which are retired scientists
 - ▶ See the environmental, social value – natural infrastructure/asset

Story 1 cont.

- ▶ Lack of science -cumulative impacts and climate change - Losing trust and growing concerns
- ▶ Seek the missing science IA/CIA themselves to protect Rose Swanson – forest hydrology assessment, wildlife flora/fauna (species at risk)
- ▶ British Columbia Government Process:
 - ▶ Local engagement is a bit amorphous i.e. non-existent
 - ▶ Limited/ not so credible impact /cumulative impact assessment – “science of convenience”

Story 2 - Shuswap River – Unchecked Pollution – ‘Legal Personhood’ BeeSafe – Local Citizen Group

- ▶ Once a “Clean” River
- ▶ Local Citizens lose trust in land use management – local knowledge and river capacity tipping point?
 - ▶ Intensive cattle feedlot operation dumping pollution directly into the river and adjacent properties
 - ▶ Conduct their own water analysis and monitoring – domestic water users/recreational users
 - ▶ Becoming increasingly knowledgeable: public policy and science around water (river) capacity, quality and security

Story 2 cont.

- ▶ Becoming increasingly afraid about impacts/cumulative impacts as they realize little is being done
 - ▶ Land use planning and decision making processes are allusive - no local interest or knowledge engagement
 - ▶ Enforcement (warnings) occur only as a result of their monitoring – no one is minding the store – self regulation reliance
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- ▶ Land Use Management and Enforcement aimed to support entrenched historic policy aims- IA/CIA limited to none
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- ▶ Result: Seeking 'Legal Personhood' for the river– local citizens driven to complex path, involving constitutional issues to solve a matter they thought the government was managing and safeguarding

These Stories Combining With Other Indicators

- ▶ The Courts:

- ▶ Blueberry Case – 2021 Indigenous Treaty Infringement Case – British Columbia Supreme Court Findings:
 - ▶ CIA Framework created by BC Government but no CIA actually happening/informing decisions:
 - ▶ Regulatory framework/systems not integrated - E.g. Forestry – deforestation decision maker does not have jurisdiction to include CIA

- ▶ System built for success?.....

Indicators combining cont.:

- ▶ Scientific Evidence:
 - ▶ Forestry Science – Emerging Credible Science and CIA are not informing decisions
 - ▶ Science of Convenience – designed to match entrenched policy goals
- ▶ Other Key System Indicators – :
 - ▶ CIA project- by- project – patch work– system indicators show: high cost, short cuts, process time lags and uncertainty, limited value for environment/economics

Indicators combining cont.:

- ▶ Life cycle validation –the Value of CIA is only as good as...the system outputs – e.g. permit conditions and enforcement, reclamation and closure
 - ▶ Canada's oil sands – over \$200 billion in liability exposure ...conservative estimate
 - ▶ Abandoned oil wells
 - ▶ Project abandonment patterns of behaviour – back to the public purse
- ▶ Regional Assessments- better but what's The Plan overall – what is the connective tissue that binds?

Indicators: System Reform

- ▶ What then is the value of CIA? We have to nail this or by default it de-values...
- ▶ Watch Surprise events – Tariffs – IA and CIA shelved for fast-tracking – reflects value of CIA...diminishing
- ▶ Tipping points are fundamental to CIA, however if policy and regulatory systems continue to fall behind will we create a tipping point that may make CIA obsolete, timed out, creating CIA's own tipping point of no return?

System Solutions Through System Thinking

- ▶ Indicators show system problems – re-examine systems to do what we need them to do / test/ validate
- ▶ Validate that CIA is of integral value – this must show up in system components reinforcing this at every stage
- ▶ Achieve sufficiency of evidence and integrity of the process
- ▶ Achieve Informed decision making
- ▶ The right system will self validate: environmental and economic value
- ▶ Watch Indigenous system advancements and AI as a tool that can fast track us



Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA25 app.

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