

# 1. Definition and Objectives

## 1.1 Definition

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While there are different definitions adopted in different countries, it is generally agreed that SEA is a systematic process for evaluating strategic environmental implications of proposed policies, plans and programmes (PPPs) and alternatives during the early stage of decision-making process. SEA has been widely adopted in many countries as a tool to facilitate integration of environmental considerations into PPP formulation processes and to facilitate the achievement of long term sustainability.

### **What is SEA ?**

“ A systematic process, with multi-stakeholder involvement, for analysing and evaluating environmental implications of proposed policies, plans and programmes, for assisting in strategic or planning decision-making; and for following up strategic or planning decisions. ”

*Source : Mr. Elvis AU , Assistant Director (Environmental Assessment and Noise), Environmental Protection Department, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (2004)*

## 1.2 Objectives of SEA

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SEA is essential for informed decision-making. The aims of SEA are:

- To facilitate the search of sustainable development options or alternatives.
- To provide environmental information (including both adverse impacts and benefits) at the earliest stage of PPP formulation processes within a decision-making framework.
- To inform decision makers and the public about the environmental and sustainability implications of PPPs so as to improve decision making processes.
- To address cumulative environmental impacts that cannot be fully addressed by individual project Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

These aims assist in achieving the following objectives:

- Promoting full consideration and integration of environmental implications at the early planning stage of major strategic PPPs;
- Seizing opportunities to enhance environmental sustainability and quality; and
- Avoiding environmental problems and identifying environmentally-friendly options.

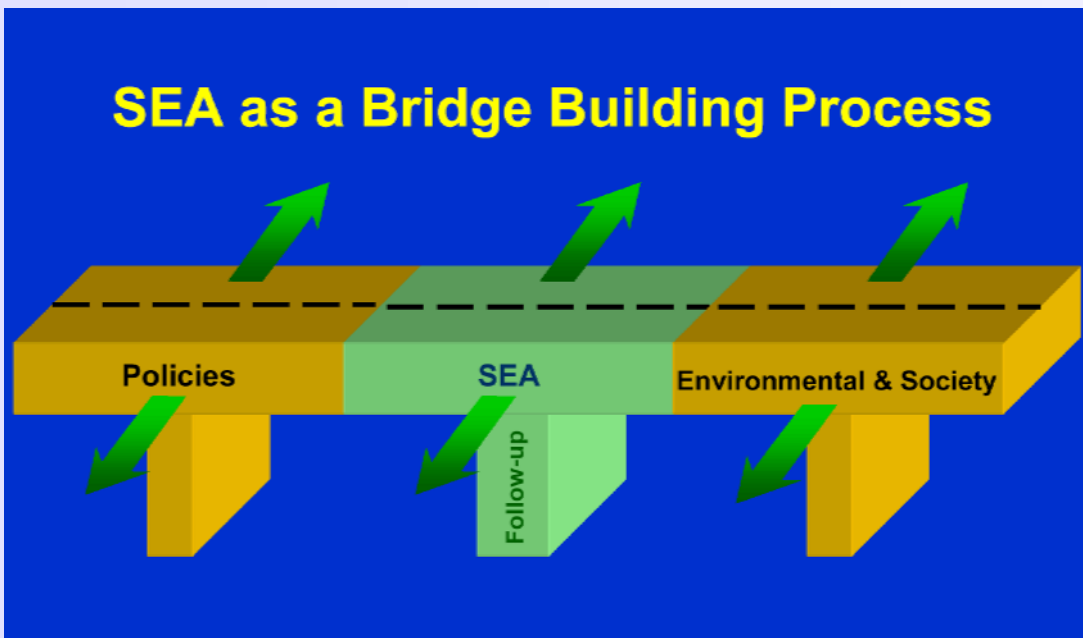
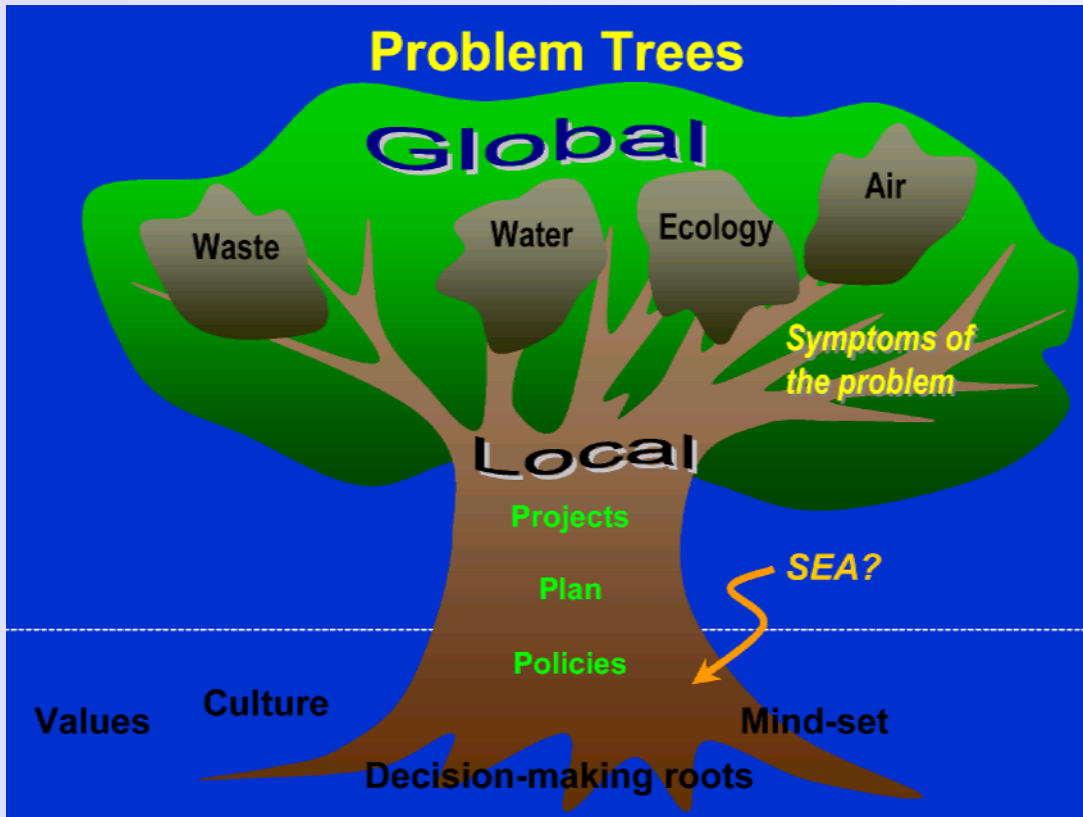
#### **SEA addresses**

- Both environmental impacts and benefits
- Cumulative environmental implications
- Needs and alternatives
- SEA aims to integrate, not just mitigate
- Facilitate policy formulation
- Be an iterative process in most of the cases

#### **Why is SEA Important?**

- SEA serves as a vital step to achieve sustainable developments by incorporating the principles of sustainable developments into PPP and ensuring them being developed on a sustainable manner;
- SEA can test out alternatives at a policy level before proceeding with site specific projects;
- SEA can take up a pro-active role to steer developments toward environmentally “robust” areas or away from environmentally sensitive areas; and
- SEA can oversee cumulative impacts of relevant projects simultaneously at a higher level.

Why and how SEA can make a difference ?



### 1.3 Comparison between SEA and EIA

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SEA	EIA
Usually more proactive	Depends on project proposals
Environmental impacts arising from policies, plans and programs	Environmental impacts arising from projects
Less information available, more uncertainties	More information available, less uncertainties
More solution space	Less solution space
Assess cumulative impacts and environmental benefits	Assess direct impacts
A more iterative process	Usually a more well-defined beginning and end
Under administrative process, except Schedule 3 EIA	Under statutory process