



## EIA: Embracing the blast



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### ABSTRACT

This article marks the handover in Editor for Environmental Impact Assessment Review. It responds to the changes and ongoing challenges set out by the previous Editor-in-Chief for the last 18 years, Eric Johnson, setting out the approaches to open access and increased demand for rapid turnover of articles. The diversity of subject areas that are published in the journal will continue to be welcomed, with clarification of the journal scope to ensure all branches of impact assessment are explicitly accommodated. The challenges of peer review are considered, though not resolved!

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Taking over from Eric Johnson is a somewhat daunting task. As Eric indicates in his final Editorial (Johnson, 2015), he has steered EIA Review through the last 18 years, leaving the journal in pretty good shape and with an excellent reputation. All-in-all, I believe EIA Review is well set to embrace the blast described by Eric in his final editorial, encompassing increasing diversity of assessment tools, an explosion of information, and changing demands for access. These are all changes that he has expertly guided the journal through and I comment on each of them below.

I point to the scope of the journal on Eric's departure – which tries to encompass the breadth of the “splintered discipline” he alludes to (<http://www.journals.elsevier.com/environmental-impact-assessment-review/>):

*“Environmental Impact Assessment Review is a refereed, interdisciplinary journal serving a global audience of practitioners, policy-makers and academics. This audience assesses the **environmental impact of policy, projects, processes and products** and makes decisions based upon these **assessments**”.*

This scope is both vast, and restricted at the same time. It reflects a global audience, all tiers of decision-making, and a diverse stakeholder group (i.e. not just academics). The journal website goes on to specify the type of papers published: “EIA Review aims to publish only pieces that are innovative, topical and coherent”. Thereby setting its stall as a journal which expects originality, with timely communication of research that has the opportunity to influence the direction of research,

policy and practice. My aim is to continue with this scope, although there is one particular word which has led to some reflection in the field of impact assessment, particularly with the advent of sustainable development as an overarching strategy goal of Governments across the world: ‘environment’. As Eric points out, the field includes HIA, SIA, LCIA, and many others. Practitioners in these fields might not agree that they are assessing the environmental impacts and I would not wish their articles to be excluded (and indeed they have been, and continue to be, welcome). And yet the journal title reflects a rich history of impact assessment that dates back to a legal requirement for EIA through the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) in the United States – in this context ‘EIA’ is used generically as a founding example of assessment as a tool for decision making.

My solution: I see no immediate wish to change the title of a journal which is a brand in the field. This would not be wise and does not seem appropriate. The scope of the journal, however, will be changed to:

*“Environmental Impact Assessment Review is a refereed, interdisciplinary journal serving a global audience of practitioners, policy-makers and academics. This audience assesses the **impact of policy, projects, processes and products** and makes decisions based upon these **assessments**”.*

Not a huge change – but important in that it reflects the diversity alluded to by Eric whilst continuing to encompass the journal's global outreach.

It is also important to comment on other changes that Eric alluded to, namely the explosion of information and open versus closed access (Johnson, 2015). The editing process for the journal has changed to reflect the changing publishing environment – much of which reflects an increased demand for greater access to publicly-funded research. EIA Review is available for immediate ‘open access’ to articles subject

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to a publishing fee; it also provides 'green access' allowing draft versions of published articles to be posted on institutional repositories a short period after publication. EIA Review has moved to a system of article-based-publishing whereby, instead of waiting for space in one of the six issues published per year, any accepted article is published in the next issue with no constraints over the number of articles in that issue. This accommodates the explosion of information by removing artificial restrictions on article numbers per issue (although article length is still restricted to ensure innovations are communicated concisely), and means much faster publication – getting innovation to the point of potential influence more quickly.

A final issue raised by Eric is that of reviewer bottlenecks (Johnson, 2015). I have no magic bullet for this. Quality demands expert oversight, and my own experience of being reviewed is that articles usually benefit a great deal from the process. It will continue to be a struggle – success brings with it higher demands in terms of submissions, and therefore higher demands on reviewers. I acknowledge that this needs to be very carefully managed.

I make no predictions about future new directions for the journal. Given its scope, it is almost impossible to predict what kind of innovation might find purchase in any jurisdiction, and from there expand more widely to other jurisdictions. It is not necessarily an innovation that will become the next big research area in impact assessment, it might be an existing field of research into an assessment process which achieves legal status somewhere because of a coincidence of circumstances. The scope of EIA Review remains sufficiently broad to accommodate change within the context of decision-making tools, and embraces that change. My aim is to guide the journal through some more years of success.

#### Reference

Johnson, E.P., 2015. EIA: a splintering, exploding discipline with a massive new constituency. *Environ. Impact Assess. Rev.* 51, A1–A2.