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Addressing Trade-offs and Offsets in IA Decision-making

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[forthcoming
paper in *EIA
Review*]

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Why do trade-offs matter?

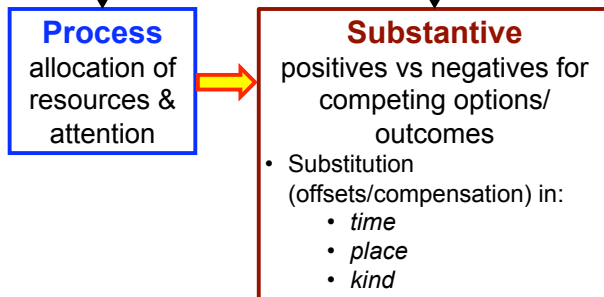
Trends are towards
"deepening unsustainability" (Gibson)

"Jobs vs the environment dilemma" (Glasson)

- environment traded-off for short-term socio-economic gain

IA approval decision-making occurs
"behind closed doors" (Sadler)

TRADE-OFF TYPES



[Glasson 1999, Wood 2003, Gibson et al 2005]

Generic SA process steps

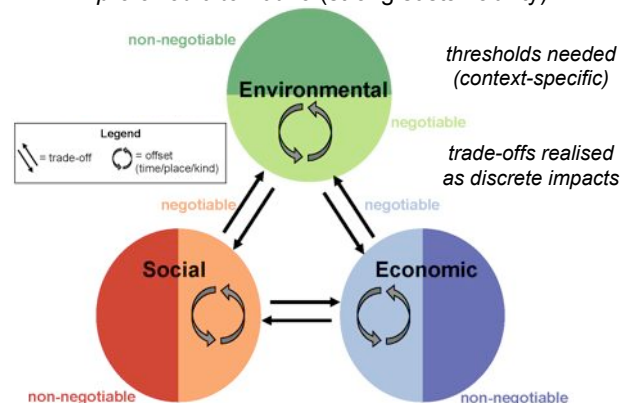
1. Decision to conduct SA (*screening*)
2. Identify desired outcome (decision question)
3. Establish sustainability goals & criteria (*scoping*)
4. Identify alternatives to achieve desired outcome
5. Evaluate impacts of each alternative (*prediction*)
6. Select & enhance preferred alternative (*mitigation*)
7. Approval decision & conditions
8. Implementation & monitoring (*follow-up*)

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Process decisions → **Substantive** trade-off outcomes

Model for acceptable trade-offs when selecting preferred alternative (strong sustainability)



Gibson trade-off rules for *approval decision* (strong sustainability)

1. **Net gains:** must deliver net sustainability gains
3. **Avoidance of adverse effects:** a significant adverse effect only acceptable if all alternatives are worse
4. **Protection of the future:** no displacement of significant adverse impact from present to future
2. **Burden of argument:** proponent must justify
5. **Explicit justification:** all trade-offs must be explicitly justified (context-specific sustainability criteria)
6. **Open process:** stakeholders must be involved in trade-off making

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Substantive test (thresholds)

processes for making trade-offs

South West Yarragadee case study (Australia) example of applying Gibson's decision-making trade-off rules....

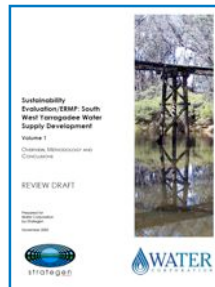
VOLUME 1

OVERVIEW, METHODOLOGY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapters:

1. Introduction, the proposal and regional overview
2. Administrative process for sustainability assessment
3. Sustainability evaluation approach and methodology
4. Environmental impact assessment framework
5. Sustainability commitments and outcomes
6. Assessment against State sustainability principles and Gibson trade-off rules
7. Consolidated environmental commitments
8. References and abbreviations

Proponent's EIS – chapter on Gibson's trade-off rules...



Proponent:

The Gibson trade-off rules provide the basis for dealing with tensions and conflicts that may be identified in the process of applying a well considered set of sustainability principles.

They can be used to guide the evaluation of the acceptability of a proposal within a sustainability context by examining the acceptability of the inherent trade-offs that would be made in approving the process.

They are therefore an extremely valuable tool to aid sustainability decision-making.

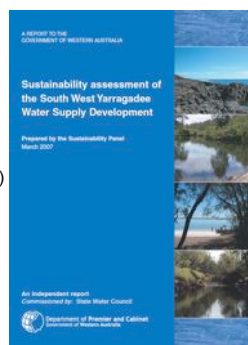
(Stratgen 2006, p6-2)



Regulator:

The Sustainability Panel finds that an evaluation process based on the Gibson rules is sufficient to assess sustainability

(Sustainability Panel, 2007, p13)



Conclusions: Addressing Trade-offs and Offsets in IA Decision-making

- trade-offs need **early consideration** when designing SA processes
- **thresholds** are essential to demarcate acceptable from unacceptable impacts
- **offsets** are a form of trade-off within ESE category
 - in time, place or kind
 - residual impact must deliver net benefit outcome
- Gibson **trade-off rules**: acceptability criteria for substantive trade-offs & process rules for evaluation

Can we directly address & manage trade-offs in IA to reverse trends towards deepening unsustainability?