

Review of ecological input in preliminary EIAs for coastal resort development projects in Malaysia

Abstract

In Malaysia, environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been mandatory since 1988 as a proactive tool in environmental management for 19 prescribed activities. Since ecological information is an important component in EIA, this study examined the quality of ecological input in 41 preliminary EIAs for coastal resort development. Twelve criteria relating to ecological data, impact prediction, evaluation of impact significance, mitigating measures, residual impacts, monitoring, communication of the report and consultants were reviewed. Results revealed that only 27 percent of the EIAs were found to be satisfactory, whereas the others were at borderline or poor. In describing the existing environment, the majority of the reports made no mention of the survey methods, some of the data included were found to be not site-specific and up-to-date, and the sources of the secondary data presented in these reports were mostly not quoted. There was a tendency to survey terrestrial habitats more than aquatic, and higher plants are surveyed more than animals. Most of the reports also failed to mention the species status although comprehensive lists of species were present. They also failed to quantify the species present in the impacted areas which could lead to inadequate ecological impact prediction. The study also showed that, though all the reports contained a section on ecology, not all the EIA consultants involved in preparing these reports comprised of a multidisciplinary team that has an ecologist/biologist or environmental scientist.