

Preface

Commonwealth Heads of Government have given environmental issues a high priority in the context of sustainable development. In response, the Commonwealth Secretariat has built up activities for environmentally sustainable development in areas including biodiversity; forestry; energy; water, coastal, marine and land resources; aquaculture and fisheries; industry; climate change; legislation; health; women and youth. Commonwealth Ministers of Health selected environment and health to be the theme of their tenth triennial meeting held in Cyprus in 1992. In their deliberations they recognised the inter-relationship of health, environment and development and concluded with a list of recommendations for country action and a small number of practical proposals. The regional proposals have since been facilitated by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Development and sharing of methods of environmental health impact assessment (EHIA) was identified as the priority for the Asian and Pacific regions.

In 1993 the Secretariat commissioned the University of Wollongong to develop EHIA manuals for use by health and other professionals and by community groups (particularly women). A draft manual was piloted in 1994 and proposals prepared for further development and application.

Throughout this process the Secretariat maintained contact with, and was greatly assisted by, advice from relevant experts in WHO and elsewhere. It became apparent that many countries and agencies were addressing similar issues and that there was widespread concern about the importance of ensuring the incorporation of health within environmental impact assessment as an integral part of the whole process. In the context of collaboration with WHO and other agencies it was decided to arrange for an expert group to meet and develop a framework for health assessment within environmental assessment and to develop strategies for promoting the process.

The Centre for Environmental Management and Planning, University of Aberdeen, hosted the meeting at which a small group of Commonwealth experts from Asia, the Pacific and Britain along with a consultant (ex-WHO) met to produce the material contained in the following report. The Secretariat is most appreciative of the contribution made by the host institution to the process and outcome of that meeting.

It is the hope of the Commonwealth Secretariat that the work presented here may contribute to the development of strategies, training materials and commitment, at all levels, to incorporating health as an integral component of all environmental assessment processes.