

## Scottish EIA Conference 2021: Digital Impact Assessment

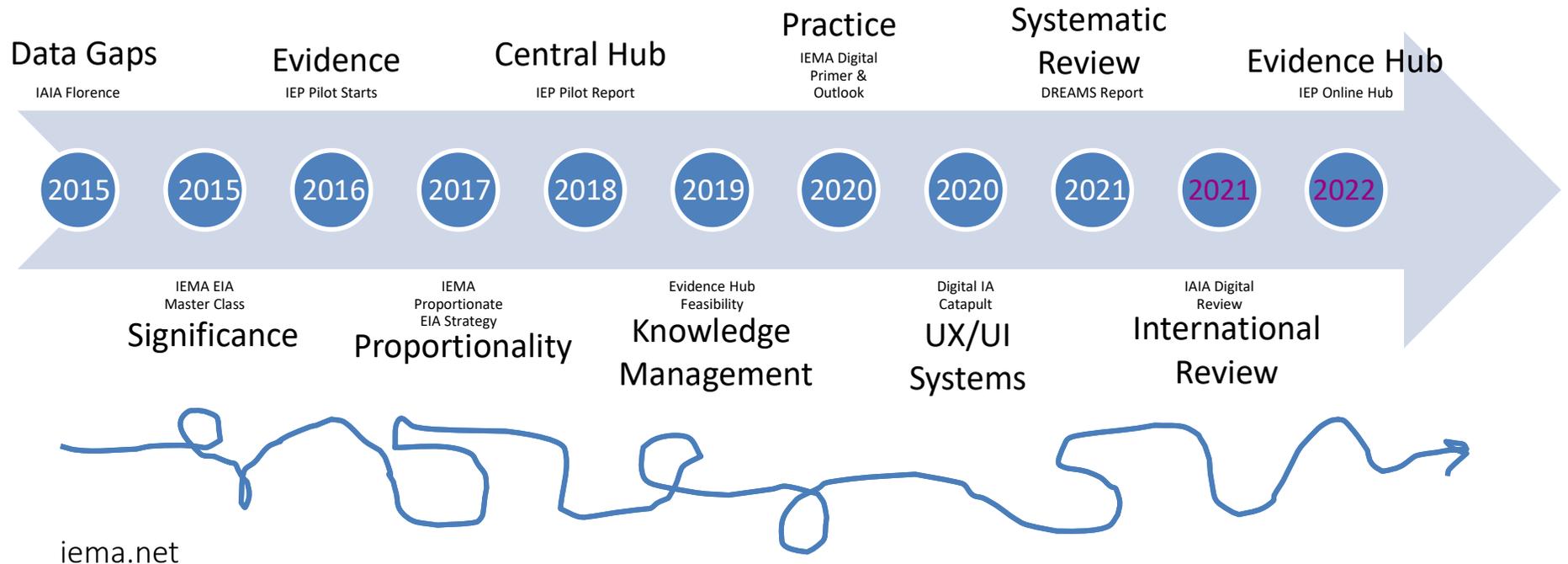
- Key Concepts
- Key Developments
- Key Next Steps



Dr Rufus Howard FIEMA CEnv  
Impact Assessment Policy Lead - IEMA



# My Digital IA Journey



# IA Vision Statement

*“IEMA and its members will work to ensure that IA is widely recognised as supporting better decision-making, positively influencing development outcomes and providing lasting benefits to the environment, communities and the economy”*



Scotland East



Scotland West

## Enhancing People

So that those involved in EIA have the skills, knowledge and confidence to avoid an overly precautionary approach.

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## Improving Scoping

To generate a more consistently focussed approach to this critical activity throughout the EIA process.

## Sharing Responsibility

Recognising that disproportionate EIA is driven by many factors and that enabling proportionate assessment will require collaborative actions that work towards a shared goal.

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## Embracing Innovation & Digital

Modernising EIA to deliver effective and efficient assessment and reporting that adds value to projects and their interaction with the environment.

# The IEMA Digital Working Group

- ‘Embracing innovation and digital’ is a strategic theme of action of IEMA’s proportionate EIA strategy
- Working group established in 2018
- Cross-industry group of EIA and GIS professionals

**SWECO** 

 **Royal HaskoningDHV**  
Enhancing Society Together

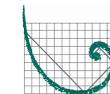
**AECOM**

 **ARCADIS**

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**CAPITA**

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MOTT  
MACDONALD

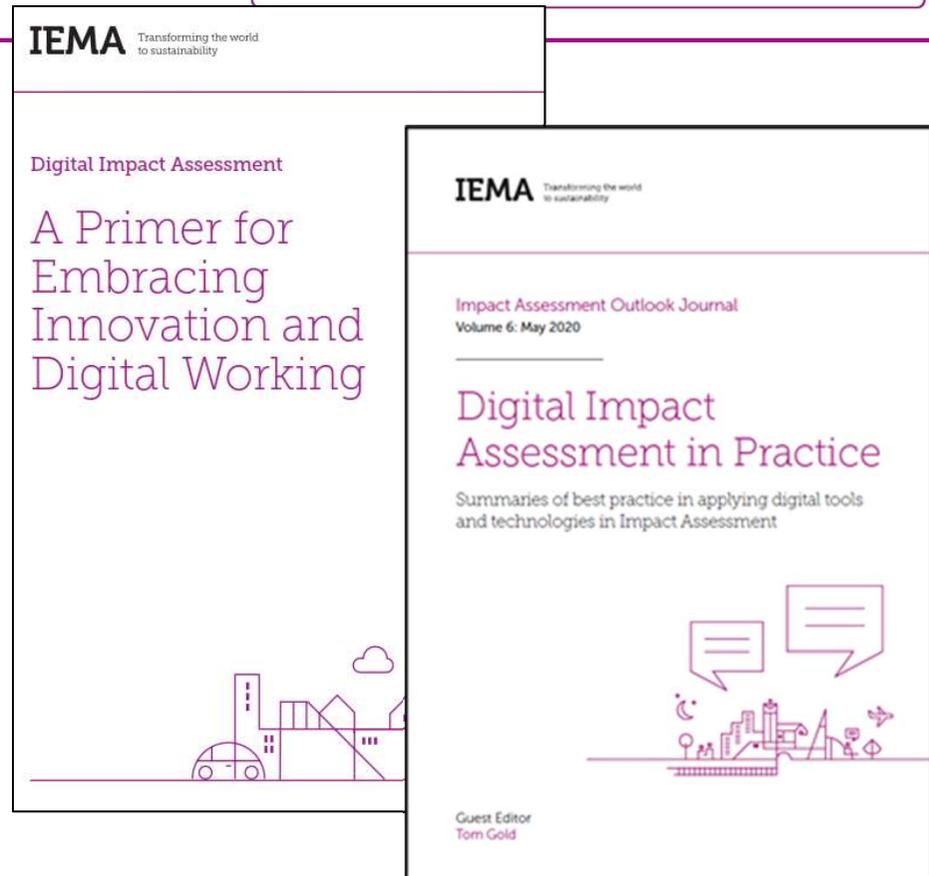
 **Waterman**

**BARTON  
WILLMORE**

# The Primer

- “Digital Impact Assessment: A Primer for Embracing Innovation and Digital Working”
- Thought piece to inform and generate discussion
- Draft principles for Digital Impact Assessment
- Outlook Journal

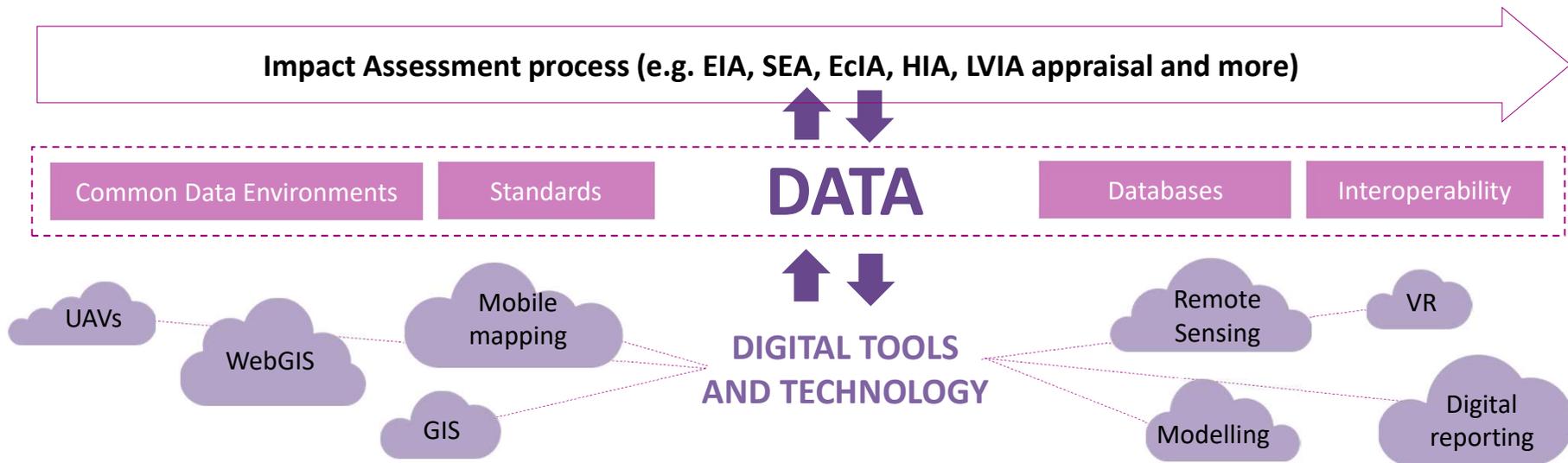
ieema.net





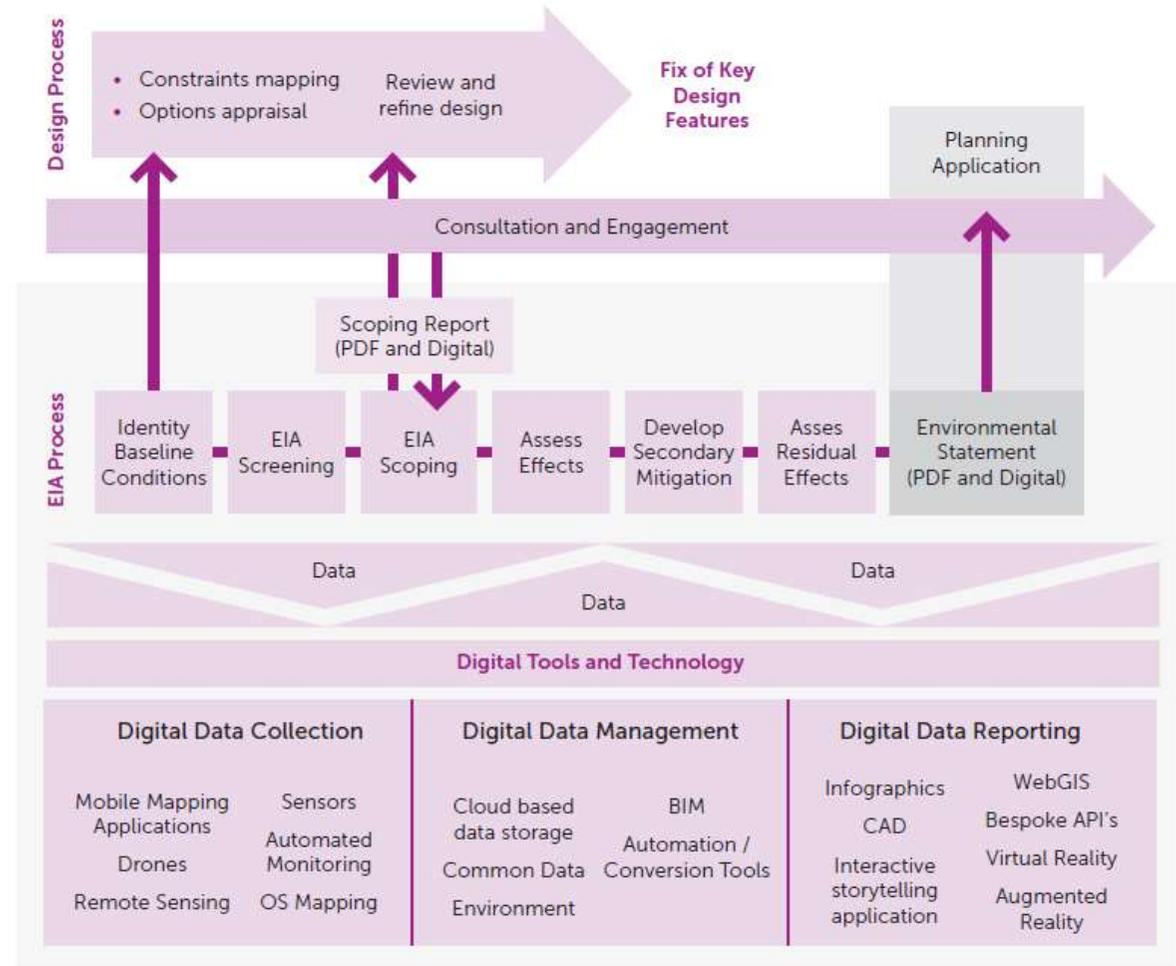
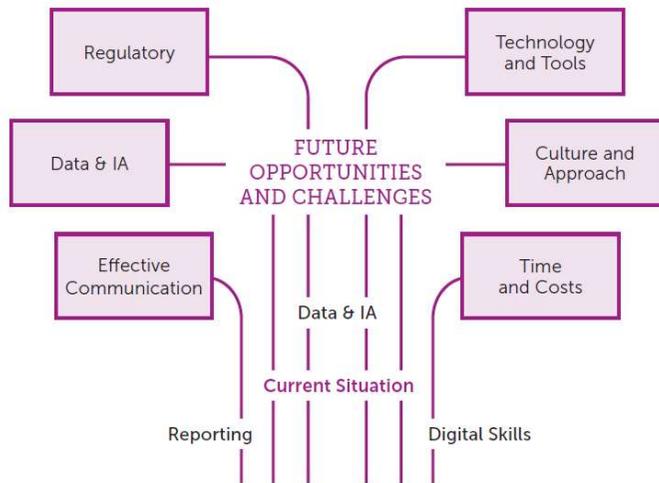
# What is Digital Impact Assessment?

- Digital practices throughout the Impact Assessment process
- No definitive form or process of Digital Impact Assessment



# IEMA

Transforming the world to sustainability

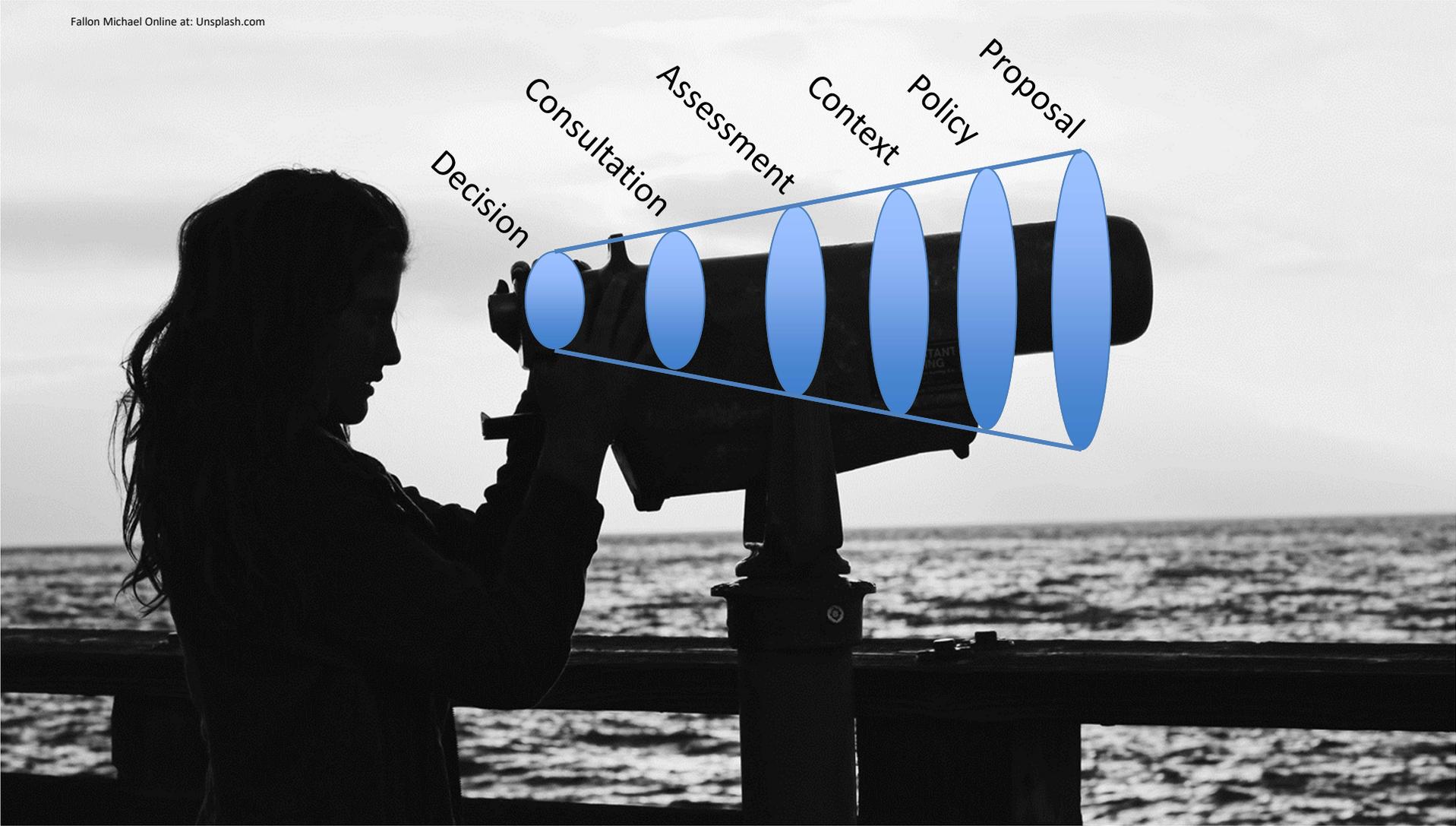


# Vision for the Future of Digital IA...

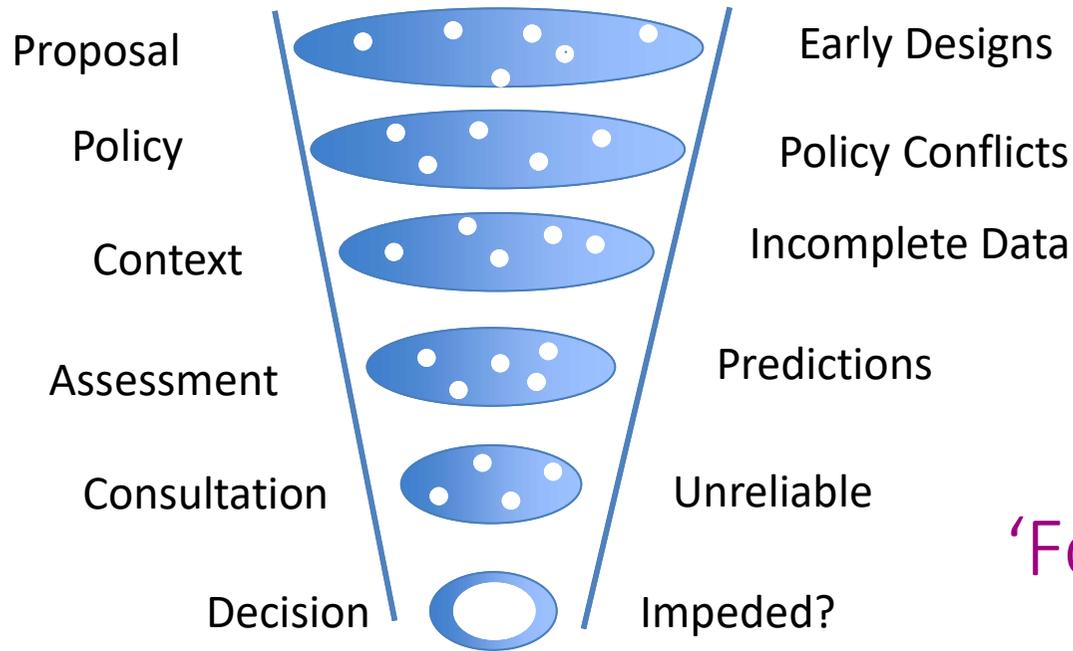
[iema.net](http://iema.net)



Gleb Albovsky Online at: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

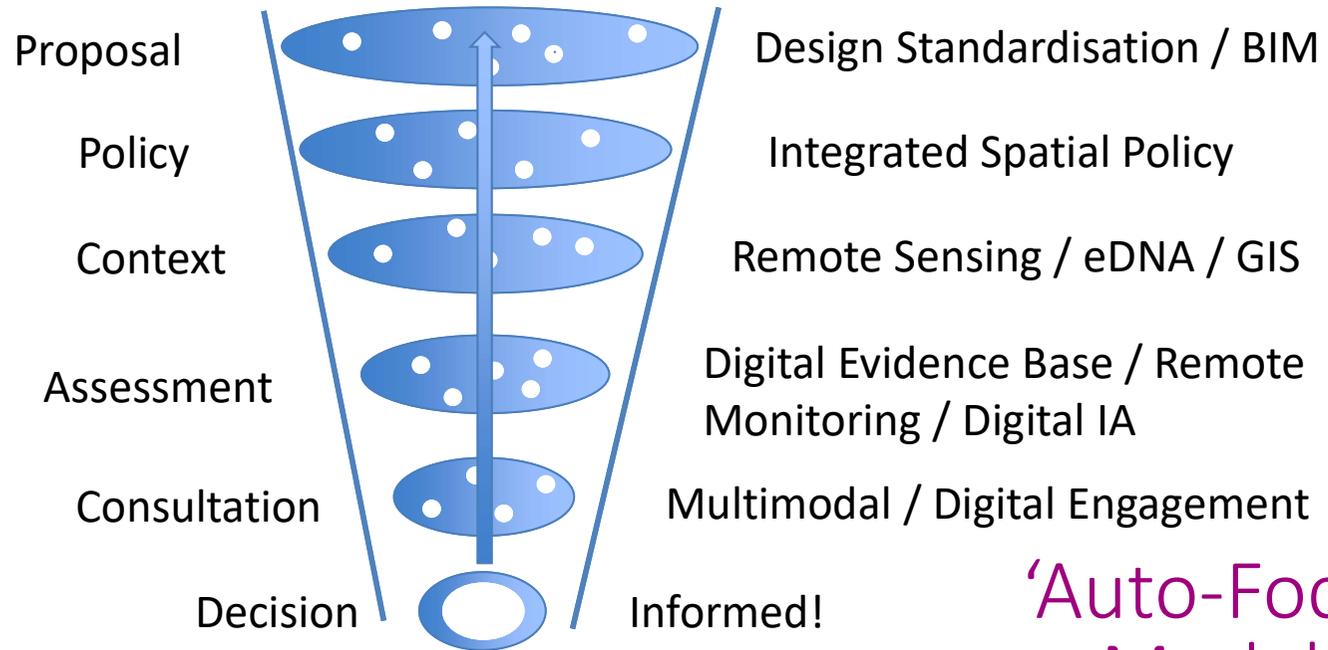


# Status Quo



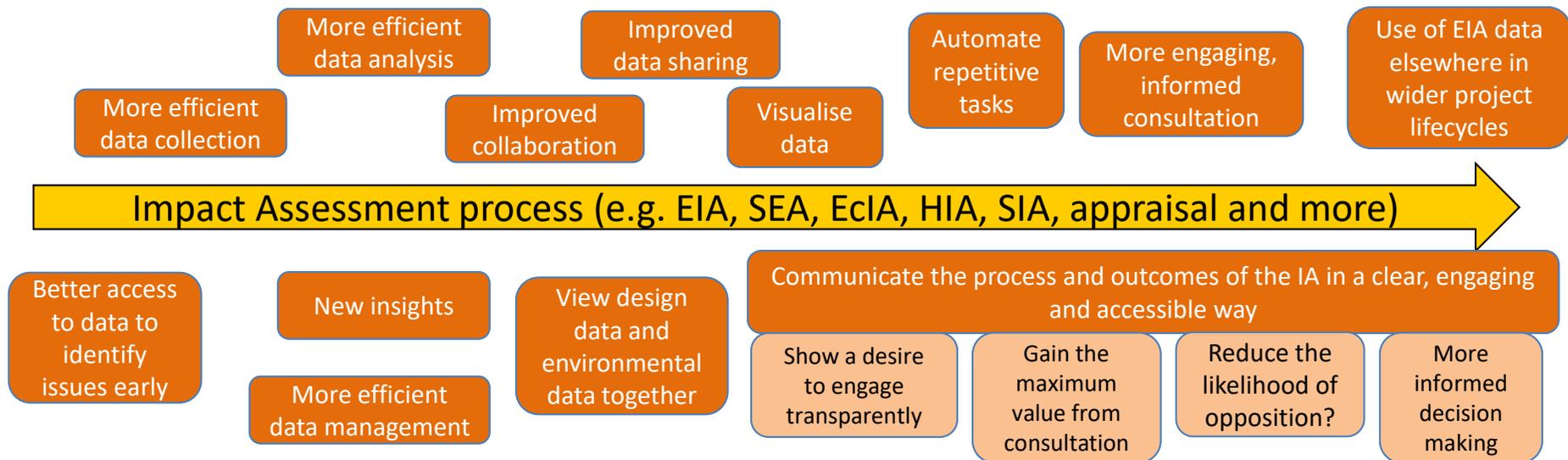
‘Foggy-Lens Model’

# Digital Potential



**'Auto-Focus Model'**

# Potential Benefits of Digital IA...



# Opportunities & Challenges

1. Regulation
2. Data
3. Tech & Tools
4. Effective Communication
5. Culture & Approach
6. Time & Costs



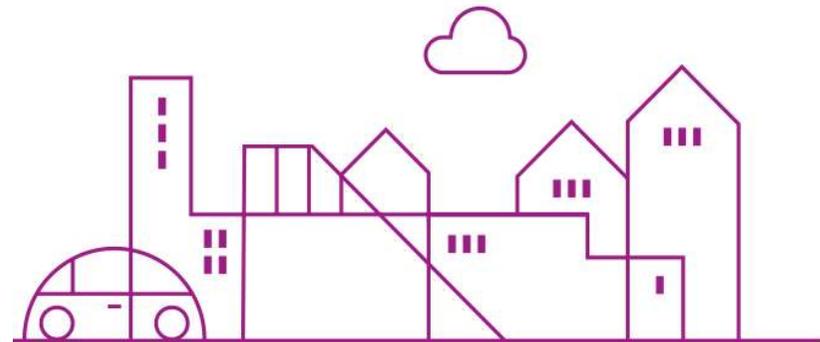
F.Chamaki (2020) Online at: Unsplash

# Draft Principles

1. Technology offers opportunities throughout the IA process.
2. Digital working can create a culture that promotes collaboration.
3. Information management underpins effective Digital IA.
4. Effective communication increasingly necessitates digital technology.
5. Provide accessibility for all needs.
6. Regulation should be carefully considered when defining digital solutions, yet also provides an opportunity to facilitate innovation and digital working.
7. Innovation and collaboration across the IA sector can improve outcomes for all.

# Future ambitions

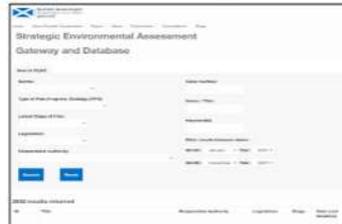
- Regulation changes that facilitate and encourage Digital Impact Assessment
- New industry-wide data standards
- Open-up and process the data collected for IA
- Collaborate with specialists in other fields to bring innovation to practice
- Engage with creative practices to improve ways of communicating IA
- Practical guidance on applying digital working throughout the EIA process





### Collecting and sharing SEA documents: SEA Gateway and SEA database

The SEA Gateway is an online "mailbox" for issuing incoming SEA reporting to consultation companies (NaturScout), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) for commenting. When a responsible authority prepares any form of SEA reporting, it is sent directly to the Gateway, whereby it is distributed to the relevant consultation authorities and following review, it is returned to the Gateway where the comments are then processed, and the report is returned to its original sender. It is following the processing of comments that the reports are uploaded in the SEA database and is openly accessible for all. Systematically storing them in this system guarantees that data from former reports are available and easy to find. The reports and information are updated following the consultation comments for each stage of the SEA process. The consultation authorities are obligated to respond to screening and scoping, and while commenting on the pre-screening and environmental assessment report itself is voluntary, that there is still a 90% response rate. The database only stores SEAs. There are not currently any efforts for creating a similar Gateway for EIAs, as the number is too great, and the resources required to collect and store them would be too demanding.



On the database, the reports can be sorted according to project type. The database also links to the legislation and templates for different report types. Under each case, relevant reporting for every stage of the SEA is uploaded, as well as consultation comments and the original report. They are currently collecting metadata that sorts based on plan type (strategy, plan, program, or legislation), plan stage (pre-screening, screening, scoping and assessment), area, year for submission, and responsible authority. William Carlin suggests that the metadata is not as important to the database as it is to informing other assessments.

A primary motivation for the database is increased transparency of the planning process and being able to involve those otherwise impacted by the plans being approved. In addition, it has also been to minimise the learning curve for SEA reporting and impact assessment by providing information upfront.

"It is a platform for interaction of learning, as well as a platform for the information to be available for the community, who is likely to be affected, and for responsible authorities. It is an extra element of transparency..." - William Carlin

The database was first constructed on a minimal budget, justified primarily by the time it might save on administrative tasks. Currently, it is funded by the Scottish Government and is maintained internally by an IT team. It is cloud-based and therefore does not require funding for additional infrastructure.

- |                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Stakeholders</b>                                                     | <b>Development phase</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Use phase</b>                                                                                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scottish Government</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEA practitioners</li> <li>• Responsible authorities</li> <li>• Consultation authorities</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Wider public</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEA practitioners</li> <li>• Responsible authorities</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Wider public</li> </ul> |

**Takeaway**  
The SEA Gateway has been able to deter the high volume of administrative tasks, such as responding to information requests. Publishing the information publicly allowed for autonomy for the responsible authority in locating and accessing desired data. This saved administrative time for the team, but precise calculation for how much time has been saved has not been possible to calculate.

There are currently ongoing efforts to develop a new National Planning Framework 4, which will develop options for shared platforms that host local development plans for responsible authorities and allow for more interactive access to information. However, any digital solution developed will also need to ensure that it complies with legislation and is accessible to the wider public. The National Planning Framework 4 will be finalised in 2022 and if this proves successful, there may be ambitions to link the local plan databases with SEAs. Nevertheless, more immediate future plans are aimed at tracking the user statistics, quantifying the number of visitors and the frequency with which certain search items are being searched for.

Lastly, there are no experiences regarding opposition to freely accessible planning information, most likely because it has been so integrated in the legislation for planning development. Antonia Georgieva also highlights, "The fact that the legislation lays public plans and as they affect Scotland's people, the public should have access to whatever has factored into decision-making" - Antonia Georgieva.

Although outside of the domain of the Scottish Government, the interviewees introduced Scotland's Environment Web, which stores data for different environmental topics and makes this data freely available to all.

### Scotland's Environment Web

Scotland's Environment Web is an online portal that provides open access to various data that helps to inform SEA and other environmental assessment and is external to the Scottish Government. Data from the monitoring process that the consultation authorities perform feed into the database, but other stakeholders are also able to upload their data to the system. The database also draws from citizen science. The platform is a collaboration between Scotland's environmental agencies.

- |                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Stakeholders</b>                                                                                                       | <b>Development phase</b>                                                                                                                                              | <b>Use phase</b>                                                                                                                                                      |
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**Takeaway**  
There is a need to pay particular attention to how granular the available data is, meaning whether it is available on national, regional, local and site levels, in order to use the data. It was beneficial to produce guides for environmental topics such as climate change, soil and water, that aim to make the data understandable for all and inform the relationships between data and how it should be interpreted.

"We are trying to get to a point where this is not necessarily the domain of specialists" - William Carlin

### Background and source: Scottish Government

Implemented in 2005, the EA Scotland Act sets stricter requirements for the formal documentation of environmental impact of plans than otherwise mandated by the EA Directive. Through this act, all plans, programmes and strategies are required to consider environmental effects, with at minimum a pre-screening where environmental impact is minimal. Where some effects are likely but are not considered significant, a screening might be more appropriate, and where effects are considered significant, a scoping and assessment report is obligatory. As a result, the Scottish Government has experienced a high volume of SEA reporting, most of which are the pre-screening documentations. In order to be transparent about the SEA plans that were conducted and in order to more easily be able to access former reports, the Scottish Government developed the SEA Gateway and the SEA database.

### Meet the interviewees:



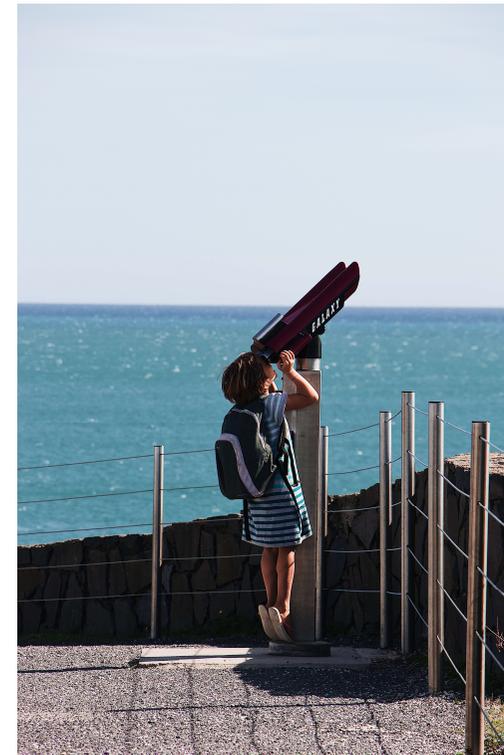
Antonia Georgieva is an Environmental Assessment and Policy Officer in the Scottish Government.



William Carlin is a Senior Policy Manager for Environmental Assessment in the Scottish Government.

# Concluding Thoughts

- IA protections hard won.
- IA is a critical tool for sustainability.
- Global climate and ecological crisis.
- Gross underinvestment in IA over 30 years.
- £483 Billion pipeline.....0.1% £48million
- Investment £ in: Central bodies, Institutions, IA staff in StatCons and LPAs, IA systems, International Leadership, Policy Research.



# Thank you for Listening

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