

**A Reference Guide
for the
Canadian Environmental
Assessment Act**

**Addressing Cumulative
Environmental Effects**

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For example, if the construction of a bridge affects the fish population in the river it traverses, then other stressors on that same fish population, such as those from a nearby mill could be included in the project EA.

Fourth, the Act states that projects or activities that have been *or will be* carried out must be considered. As mentioned above, many environmental assessments already consider the cumulative environmental effects of the project in combination with those of past and existing projects. What is new is that the environmental effects of projects or activities *"that will be carried out"* must now be examined in combination with the environmental effects of the project being proposed. This implies that, at a minimum, (only) projects or activities that have already been approved must be taken into account. The environmental effects of uncertain or hypothetical projects or activities need not be considered. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to consider projects or activities that are in a government approvals process as well. Environmental assessments can take a long time to complete, and approvals for other projects and activities may be given during the assessment of the project in question.

Where projects and activities are not subject to a formal government approvals process but are relevant to the assessment (for example pesticide spraying), they should also be considered if there is a high level of certainty that they will occur. It should be noted that this interpretation of future projects and activities will, in most cases, preclude consideration of a project's growth inducing potential.

When there is insufficient information on future projects or activities to assess their cumulative environmental effects with the project being proposed, best professional judgement should be used. It is not necessary to predict the environmental effects of future projects and activities in detail, but to the extent that is feasible and reasonable under the circumstances. For example, if a plan for a future project has been approved, but the design details and hence the environmental effects are not yet known, then, it is sufficient to give a general idea of the types of cumulative environmental effects that are anticipated.

Fifth, the Act recognises that not everything can be known about how the environmental effects of other projects or activities will combine with the environmental effects of the project. It says *"cumulative environmental effects that are likely"*. Only *likely* cumulative environmental effects need to be considered.

Finally, paragraph 16(1)(b) of the Act requires that every screening, comprehensive study, mediation and assessment by a review panel consider the significance of the environmental effects including cumulative environmental effects. See the document entitled, *Determining Whether a Project is Likely to Cause Significant Adverse*