



FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUR HYDROPOWER PROJECT

A Protocol assessment covers up to 23 topics (depending on the project stage), each of which is scrutinised against five criteria: assessment, management, stakeholder engagement, conformance and compliance, and outcomes. We take a look at each of these criteria and outline some considerations that are commonly overlooked by project developers, giving advice about how to improve a Protocol assessment result.

1. Assessment: collect good baseline data

Insufficient data about the state of the pre-construction project area can make it difficult for developers to fully understand a project's environmental and social impact. To address this, effective baseline monitoring systems need to be in place long before construction commences. Sometimes this is done well, particularly for hydrological records. But often incomplete understanding of – for example – historical water quality makes it difficult to prove that the project is performing well.

2. Management: ongoing monitoring should look for emerging risks and opportunities

Social and environmental impacts and opportunities can arise unexpectedly during the construction and operation of a hydroelectric project. At the 'proven best practice' level, the Protocol requires operators and developers to be able to anticipate and respond to such emerging risks and opportunities. A comprehensive monitoring programme is essential to achieving this. Spotting risks is commonplace in the hydropower industry, but often companies fail to be so attentive to identifying new opportunities to make improvements.



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3. Stakeholder engagement: be sure to engage with hard-to-reach groups

There are many stakeholder groups that can potentially be affected by a project, all of which should be consulted before, during and after project construction. Some stakeholders are easier to access than others, and it is important that the project communicates with hard-to-reach groups as much as it does with those that are highly engaged. So it’s valuable to consider, for example, people who are unable to read, geographically remote, or not eager to engage in a consultation process. It is important to reach these stakeholders as they are often the most vulnerable project-affected peoples.

4. Outcomes: go beyond avoiding negative impacts – create positive change!

Most developers try to avoid negative outcomes, but to achieve a high Protocol score a project needs to create a positive impact. This is why at the ‘proven best practice’ level the Protocol often asks that developers to go above and beyond what they have to do. This might be through biodiversity research programs, bird sanctuaries, improved living standards, access to health services, or improved water quality, for example. Such positive outcomes can be directly linked to a project impact or achieved by improving something completely unaffected by the project, making enhancements to the area.

5. Conformance and compliance: pay attention to internal objectives

Project compliance with national legislation is almost never a problem, because meeting legislation is a legal requirement. However, companies can miss their own internal objectives, and a Protocol assessment will check both. So it’s useful to have processes in place to ensure internal goals are met just as you would with legal requirements; making this the responsibility of compliance managers is also a good idea.