Preface

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is now over 30 years old. Born in the United States, it was initially ignored, then (in turn) caused great disturbance and antagonism, began to change people's lives for the better, settled down and learned from experience, became respectable and, eventually, was extensively imitated all over the world. As concern about the environment has grown, EIA has been widely seen as a panacea to environmental problems. It is not. EIA is an anticipatory, participatory, integrative environmental management tool which has the ultimate objective of providing decision-makers with an indication of the likely consequences of their decisions relating to new projects or to new programmes, plans or policies. Effective EIA alters the nature of decisions or of the actions implemented to reduce their environmental disbenefits and render them more sustainable. If it fails to do this, EIA is a waste of time and money.

Interest in EIA has burgeoned and there are now over 100 EIA systems in existence worldwide. While the various EIA systems all differ in detail, their basic principles are similar and demonstrate many common problems. Different jurisdictions have used different means to try to solve these problems and to improve the effectiveness of their EIA systems. There is growing interest in learning from the experience of others whose EIA systems have elements worthy of emulation. South Africa, simultaneously a developed and a developing federal country, has been substituted for the state of California and for the treatment of developing countries in this edition. The book now contains accounts of four federal and three unitary national (and no state) jurisdictions.

While there is a huge literature on EIA, there is no other book which presents an accessible comparative step-by-step review of international EIA procedures and practice. This second edition, by reviewing seven EIA systems in detail (the United States, UK, the Netherlands, Canada, Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) is intended to fill the gap.

As in the first edition, each EIA system is evaluated against a set of criteria which enables comparisons to be made easily. The EIA process is analysed step by step in a succession of chapters. The structure of this edition is identical to that of the first but the text has been greatly modified and extended. Each chapter contains a discussion of appropriate evaluation criteria and methods for the relevant step in the EIA process and then goes on to an analysis of its treatment in each of the seven EIA systems. The evaluation criteria are

intended to be generally applicable and can be (and have been) used to analyse other EIA systems. Only marginal changes have been made to the evaluation criteria in this edition. Numerous tables and diagrams are employed to summarise the comparative findings.

EIA is interdisciplinary and involves large numbers of different practitioners but is most closely associated with the professionals concerned with siting new development. The second edition of this book should therefore again be of interest to practitioners involved in government, development and land-use planning, landscape design, the environment, law and engineering. Hopefully, academics and researchers will also continue to find this edition helpful. In addition, the book is intended for those taking specific undergraduate and postgraduate EIA courses, and short EIA training courses, and for students of land-use planning, law, geography, environmental studies, development studies and engineering.