Foreword

This book deals with an important topic. There is often a major discontinuity between the assessment of the potential impacts of a new project, via Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and the subsequent environmental management of its later construction, operational and decommissioning stages, via Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Yet in essence, both EIA and EMS can be seen as environmental protection tools with clearly complementary purposes. EIA seeks to anticipate and mitigate/enhance the impacts of proposed new projects at the planning and design stage; EMS helps organisations to effectively manage the day to day impacts through the full life cycle of such projects. The importance of the continuum seems obvious, and perceptive writers such as Holling (1978) spotted this many years ago – ‘If assessment continues into the future, then prediction loses its status as a goal and assessment merges into environmental management.’ Yet it rarely happens well in practice, and EIA runs the risk of being of only limited significance unless follow-up measures are carried out. Several writers and practitioners have tried to advance the continuum agenda, but there have been many barriers on the way.

This book deals with this important topic in an innovative way. It brings together an excellent mix of authors from academia, practice and a combination of both. They firstly take a theoretical perspective and explore and develop key concepts, principles and new ways of thinking about the impact continuum. They secondly provide a set of case study examples of innovative practice from several development sectors, and from different parts of the world. Early sections outline some of the barriers to date, but more importantly many of the advantages to be gained from overcoming such barriers. Such advantages include, for example, information efficiency gains, a focus on management capacity in EIA and not just prediction accuracy, and organisational learning and feedback from the project implementation stage into subsequent project planning and design. They also introduce ways forward such as Sustainability Management Systems (SMS), reflecting a more holistic and societal-based
consideration of issues, risks and opportunities associated with project delivery. The case studies focus on key Infrastructure sectors including energy, transport, and water and waste management, with locations ranging from Scotland to Viet Nam, Iran, and especially Australia. Readers will find a wealth of innovative and practical tools contained in these case studies.

The book should be essential reading for the wide range of stakeholders involved in efforts to more sustainably manage a wide range of development activities. It covers well key highlights of current theoretical thinking and practical efforts by those active in the field, and hopefully it will be influential in meeting the editors’ and authors’ aim of driving forward the agenda to achieve an impact continuum.

Professor John Glasson,
Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD),
Oxford Brookes University