

# **APGA 2022 Conference Paper**

## **Site Environmental Outcomes – Control, influence or merely acceptance?**

Author: Kel Sanson

Position: Senior Environmental Consultant

Organisation: Strategic Environmental & Engineering Consulting  
(SEEC)

## **Introduction**

There are a wide range of factors that impact on how a project manages the environmental side of business during its construction phase. Regulatory attention, contractor culture, community influence or knowledge, and the technical knowledge and leadership capabilities and/or soft skills of on-ground environmental staff are the major contributors. There are several other factors however these ones are the focal points for this paper.

Some of these factors are within our sphere of control, some within our sphere of influence, and others we will just need to accept. Which one of these factors has the greatest impact to site environmental outcomes? Which of these factors can we control, which ones can we influence and which ones do we need to accept? This presentation will seek to analyse and discuss each of the factors and the scale of their impact on site environmental outcomes. Context is provided through a range of previous roles to assess the contribution of various factors to the site environmental outcomes.

## **The Life Spheres**

Stephen Covey (*author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) popularised a term called the 'Life Spheres'. These three spheres exist at all times. They are the sphere of control, sphere of influence, and sphere of concern. These different spheres create perspective for us on how to address the challenges of the present and the future and where you can direct your energy for the best results.

The Sphere of Control is important for the individual (focus is on I). Within this sphere you only have direct control over the following choices in life; your thoughts, feelings, words and your actions.

The Sphere of Influence is important for proactive people (focus is on 'We'). Within this sphere are the things you can influence or affect, but not directly control. They are things like other people, relationships, what happens at work etc. This sphere provides the key for understanding the human condition, authority, soft skills, and relationship building. For a site environmental advisor/officer or similar this one is key to firing up the passion and drive in others to help to protect our environment.

The Sphere of Concern is all about accepting the things you might be concerned about, but cannot control or influence. This is the biggest sphere and is a major source of stress for us in our lives. These are things like Mother Nature (floods, bushfires, and droughts), politics, border closures, covid, lockdowns, competitors' behaviour etc. Basically the actions of nearly of nearly 8 billion other humans exist within this sphere.

## **Environmental Outcomes**

So which spheres do you operate in when it comes to the environmental outcomes on a project? Well it really depends on your role and how you approach it but it will be either the Sphere of Control or Sphere of Influence.

There are numerous factors that will drive the quality of environmental outcomes for a project. There major ones are shown on the graphic below.

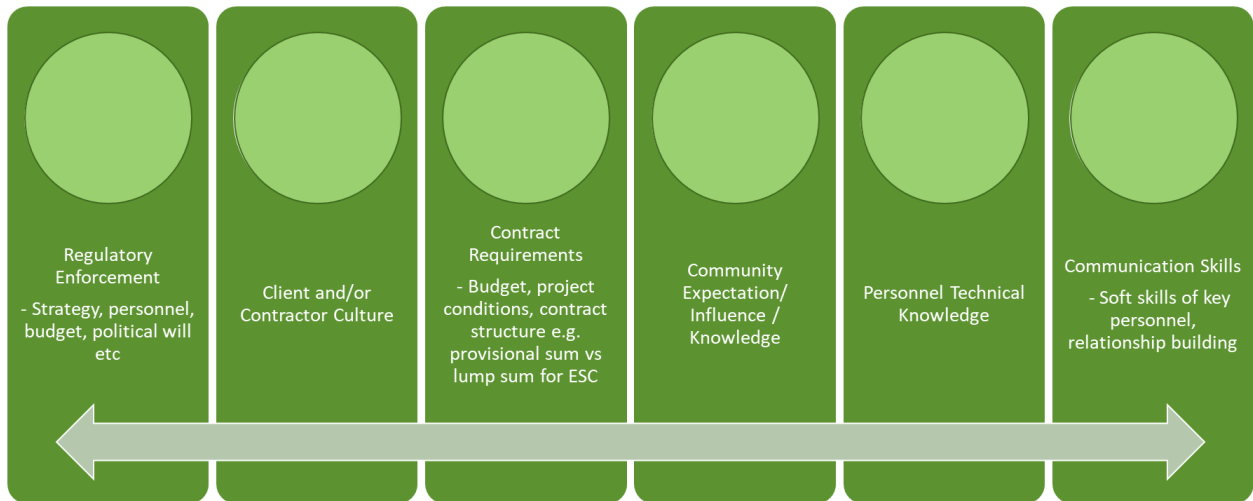


Figure 1 – Major contributing factors to environmental outcomes.

So depending on the role you find yourself in, each of these will have a different percentage contribution to the overall environmental outcomes on a project.

To provide context for this discussion I have provided my estimates of these various percentages based on a range of previous roles.

The Regulatory Role -

So as a Regulator what do I believe was the greatest contributor to site environmental outcomes?

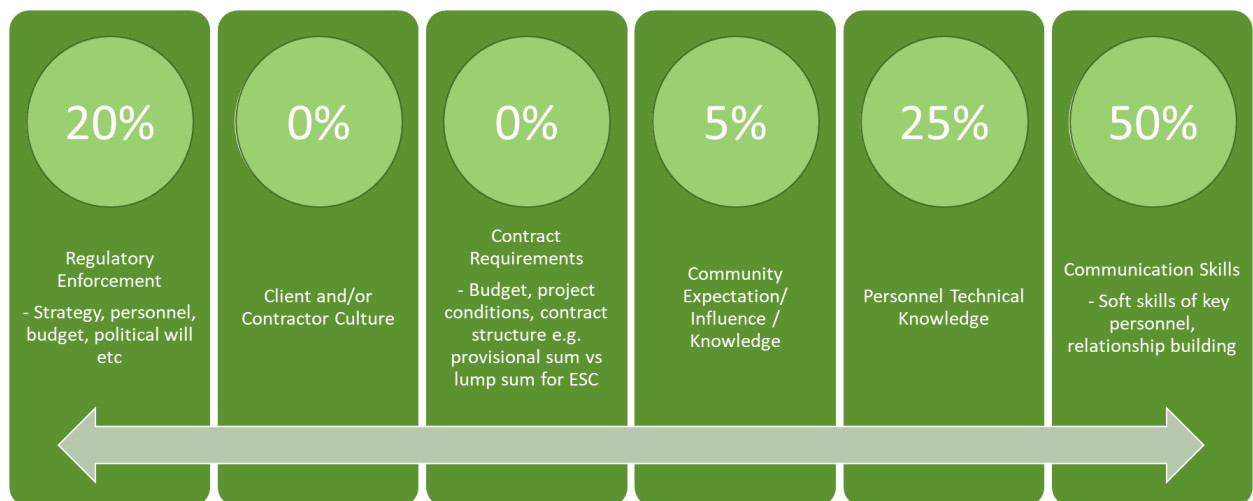


Figure 2 – Regulatory perspective of the major contributing factors (internal perspective).

The communication skills of a Regulator and the ability to influence, build relationships and provide understanding of why and what people need to do in order to be compliant was the key. This all falls within the spheres of control and influence. Since writing this presentation originally for another conference almost a year ago I have reviewed the above and have altered several of

the scores based on the experiences that I have had with Regulators in the last year. So below is my 2022 version based on how I see Regulatory roles (from the outside looking in). If Regulatory enforcement is not occurring then the pattern of compliance tends to be (speaking in broad terms) that larger companies will attempt to be compliant (for the most part) while many others will take the risk that they won't receive compliance action and do limited if any environmental protection at all. As a result of these observations I have significantly increased the percentage contribution of Regulatory enforcement and just how important it is in driving people to protect the environment during works.

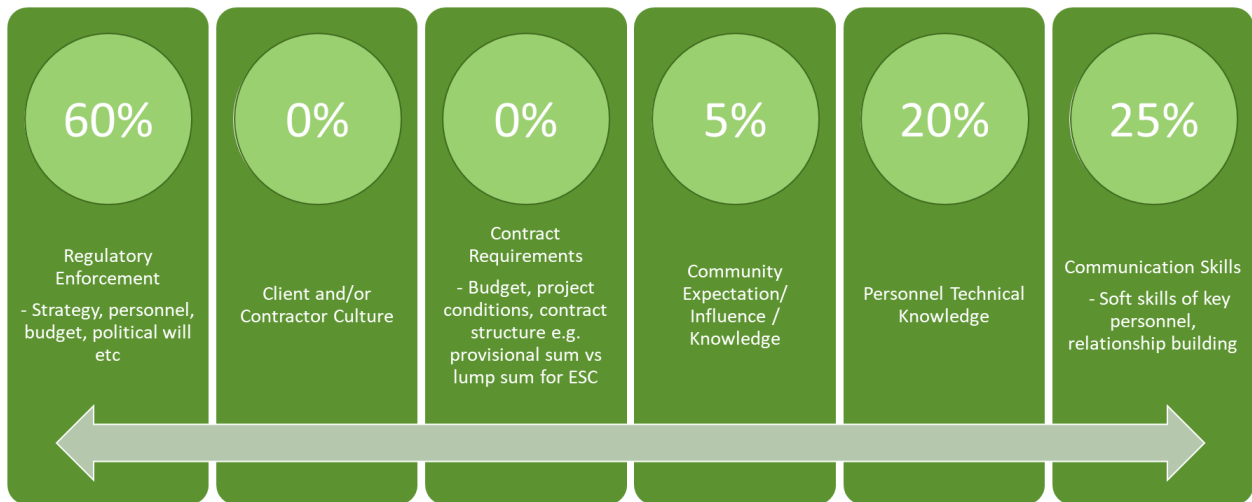


Figure 3 – Regulatory perspective of the major contributing factors (external perspective).

#### Client or Contractor Environmental Advisor Role –

As a Client or Contractor 'enviro', your sphere of influence and subsequent ability to influence environmental outcomes lean heavily towards your communication skills. I like to think of the enviro role as one that revolves around marketing. We are finding the right ways to sell the message of environmental protection, compliance or just doing our corporate duty. If you can nail this down then you are on the right track!

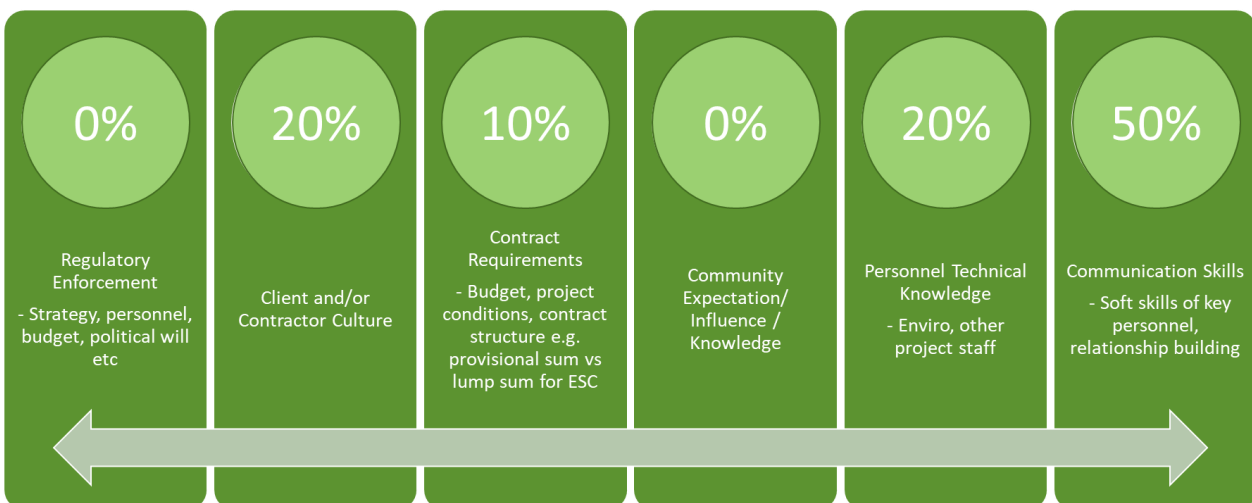


Figure 4 – Client 'enviro' perspective of the major contributing factors.

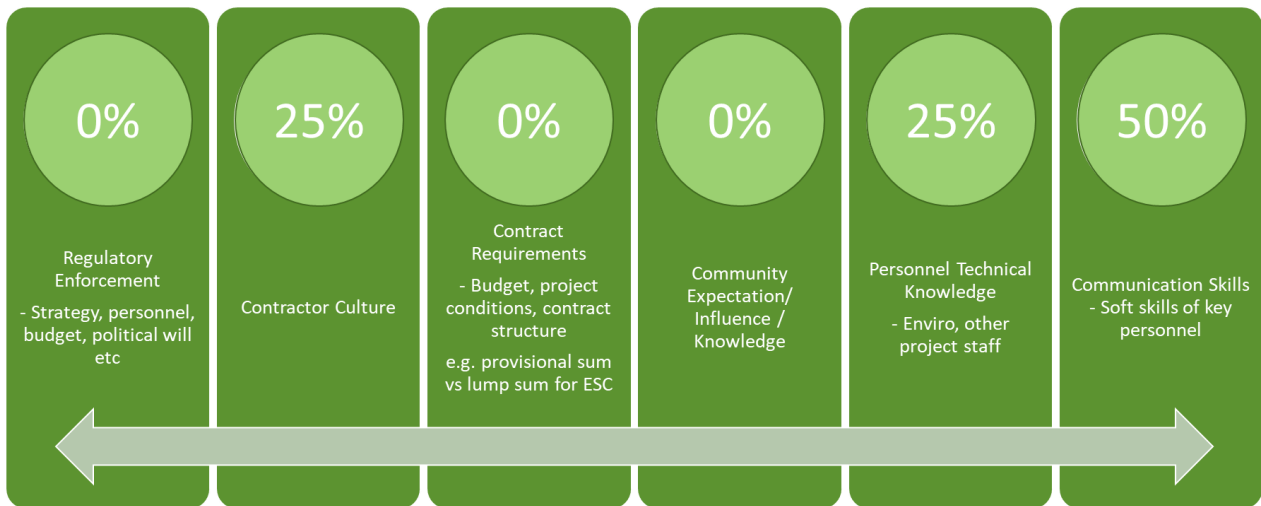


Figure 5 – Contractor ‘enviro’ perspective of the major contributing factors.

### ESC Consultant/Specialist Role –

In my current role as an erosion and sediment control (ESC) consultant or specialist I am fortunate to see a lot of the above in play from a different angle. Consultants are similar to ‘enviros’ in that we rely heavily on communication skills and also technical knowledge to get influence environmental outcomes. We are in a strong position to try and influence client or contractor culture through our on-ground work. Be that in conducting inspections or delivering industry training. I have also been involved with training Regulators in ESC which provides an avenue to both spread awareness, and improve the technical proficiency of regulatory organisations. Consultants do have a large sphere of influence if they so choose and are also very fortunate to be able to work with contractors, clients and Regulators.

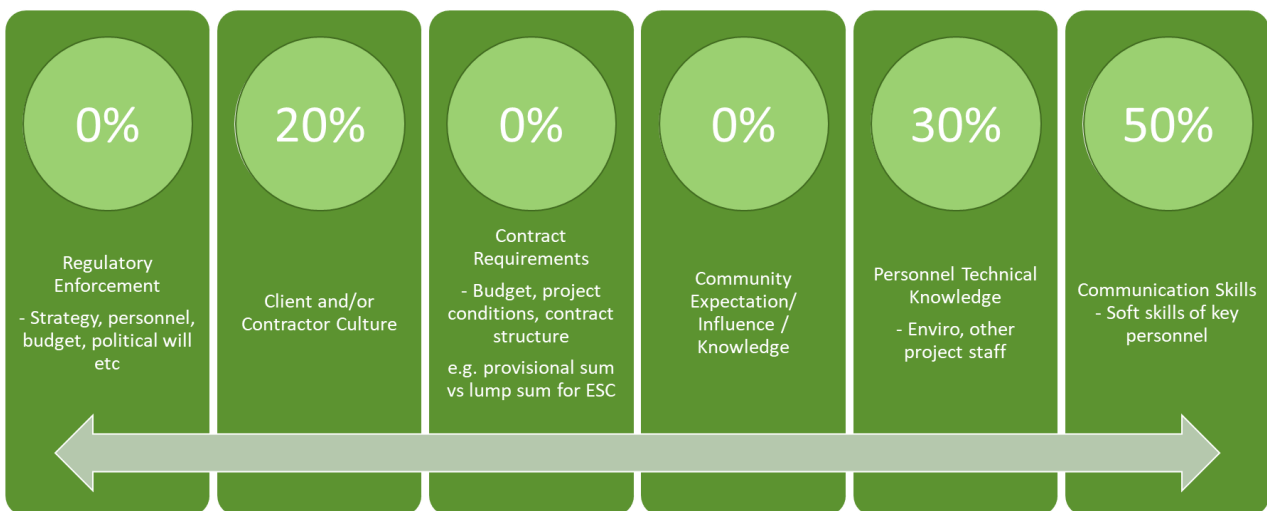


Figure 6 – Consultant or Specialist perspective of the major contributing factors.

### Conclusion

In summary we always need to be aware of which sphere is in play at any given time. We can only control what we think, say and do but we can all have a tremendous influence (if we play our cards

right) over environmental outcomes on a project. The key is understanding where to direct our energy and not to expend energy on the factors outside of our control. It does not necessarily matter which role you may find yourself in, everyone can make a difference. And the underlying goal of all of this should be to ensure our environment is protected and our impacts on it minimised so our kids and their kids can enjoy it like us.