

The Natural Capital Initiative

Advancing the ecosystems approach from theory into policy and practice

The Natural Capital Initiative (NCI) is a partnership between the Society of Biology, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and the British Ecological Society.

NCI was formed in 2009 to support the development of policy and practice aligned with the ecosystem approach; a way of considering whole ecosystems in decision-making which takes account of the benefits they provide for human wellbeing. NCI aims to:

- create a forum for debate that is independent and inclusive
- identify gaps in science, policy and its implementation and facilitate the debate about how to address these gaps
- liaise with and advise other key government and research council initiatives, and
- engage the public and inspire the next generation.

NCI will work with parliament, devolved administrations, agencies, NGOs, the private sector, scientific bodies and the wider public towards the achievement of these aims.

The NCI is managed by a Secretariat comprising representatives of the three partner organisations and guided by a Steering Group of experts in environmental science, health and economics.

Activities

In April 2009, the NCI held a high profile symposium 'Valuing Our Life Support Systems'. The event involved over 250 participants, with many prominent guest speakers from business, academia, NGOs, parliament and government. The discussions generated key messages, which are listed in a report available at www.naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk.

The Symposium was followed in June 2009 by a public discussion on 'Sustainable Cities', organised with the Science Council and the British Library.

NCI Steering Group members have led public discussions on aspects of the ecosystems approach. In addition NCI is involved in supporting other initiatives such as the UK National Ecosystem Assessment.

We have held constructive private meetings with a number of influential individuals and organisations, including Lord May of Oxford, Professor John Beddington, Professor Bob Watson, UK Foresight and the National Ecosystem Assessment, and have found much support for our approach.

Work streams

Valuation of ecosystem services; linking social and natural capital; and the link between ecosystem services and human health.

What difference will this work make?

Current policy and practice by government, business and communities is associated with a decline in many aspects of ecosystems and the goods and services they provide. This impacts our quality of life, our countryside, and the sustainability of our economy. There is great potential for the ecosystems approach to bring about sustainable use of natural capital to increase the wealth and welfare of the UK. Policy makers in Defra already know this, but other government departments, business etc do not. And the policy rhetoric has run way ahead of the ability to put this approach into practice.

The unique contribution of NCI lies in its ability to provide an independent and inclusive forum for debate in the UK concerning the implementation of the ecosystems approach. NCI has a proven capacity to draw together individuals and organisations with diverse interests, to identify practical ways to improve decision making and account for ecosystem benefits, as well as review supporting evidence and highlight knowledge gaps.

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Future work plan

Activity	NCI work theme	Location / time
Habitat banking workshop "Banking on our natural capital"	Valuation	22nd June, Charles Darwin House
NEA Phase 1 Stakeholder Review Workshops	Cross-cutting	June 2010
CSAC Presentation, ecosystem service valuation methods	Valuation	London, autumn 2010
Social and natural capital event Identifying case studies of linkages	Social and natural capital	tbc
TalkScience event on environment and health	Ecosystem services and health	British Library, September
BES-led event at British Science Festival, Landscapes of the Future	Cross-cutting	14th September, Bham