

UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee

UKBSC/03/10
The Ecosystem Approach

29 September 2003

This paper on the Ecosystem Approach was originally presented to the England Biodiversity Group at its meeting on 4 September 03. It describes the main principles of the EA, gives examples of how it is being applied in England and puts forward at paragraph 8 ideas for the further development and application of the concept.

It is presented here to provide background context to the Standing Committee's discussion.

The Ecosystem Approach

Introduction

1. The Convention on Biological Diversity (COP decision V/6) calls on contracting parties to adopt an Ecosystem Approach to the use of resources and the management of land and water. This paper gives an overview of the considerations given to the application of the Ecosystem Approach in the UK so far in the light of this international commitment and makes some suggestions for taking it forward in England. The Appendix is a paper prepared by English Nature that describes its area-based initiatives and invites comments on its future development.

Background

2. The CBD's Ecosystem Approach has established 12 principles which govern its application. In précis they are:-

- (i) The objectives of management of land, water and living resources are a matter of societal choice.
- (ii) Management should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level.
- (iii) Ecosystem managers should consider the effects (actual or potential) of their activities on adjacent and other ecosystems.
- (iv) There is usually a need to understand and manage the ecosystem in an economic context. Therefore ecosystem management should:
 - Reduce market distortions
 - Align incentives to promote biodiversity and sustainable use
 - Internalise costs and benefits in the ecosystem as far as possible
- (v) Conservation of ecosystem structure and function to provide ecosystem services should be a priority.

- (vi) Ecosystems must be managed within the limits of their functioning
- (vii) The approach should be taken at the appropriate scale.
- (viii) Processes and objectives for ecosystem management should be set for the long-term.
- (ix) Management must recognise that change is inevitable.
- (x) Seek the appropriate balance between integration, conservation and use of biodiversity.
- (xi) Consider all forms of relevant information (scientific, indigenous and local).
- (xii) Involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines.

3. The UK Biodiversity Partnership discussed the Ecosystem Approach in May this year. It reflected on the principles and considered four UK case studies of what might be considered to be examples of the approach. A panel discussion fleshed out some of the common issues associated with the application of the Ecosystem Approach in the UK. The case studies and discussion can be viewed on the UKBAP website, www.ukbap.org.uk

The Ecosystem Approach in England

4. Although the Ecosystem Approach is not explicitly referred to in the England Biodiversity Strategy, it is at the heart of its philosophy. Paragraphs 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 encapsulate some key elements of the Ecosystem Approach - as a holistic approach to conserving biodiversity in the wider landscape and realising its value for social and economic as well as environmental purposes. Its principles are also picked up in the visions and objectives for many of the policy and cross-cutting sectors of the Strategy.

5. To a great extent, the Ecosystem Approach it is already part of current good practice in the following sectors:

Water management: catchment, water level and flood plain management planning.

Coastal management: shoreline management plans (SMPs) and coastal habitat management plans (ChaMPs), habitat restoration schemes.

Woodland and forestry management: forest design plans and pilot projects looking at the role of woodland and forests in headwaters and floodplains.

Marine ecosystem management: the Ecosystem Approach already aims to be at the heart of this under OSPAR; it is being tested in the Irish Sea pilot project.

6. The examples of the ecosystem approach presented at the UK Biodiversity Partnership conference included two in England: the Braunton Burrows Biosphere Reserve and English Nature's 'Lifescapes', or area-based initiatives, as well as the UK-wide pilot project in the Irish Sea.

7. However, the concept remains unclear to many. There is a need to increase understanding, exemplify it further through case studies, consciously apply the approach, embed it into policy and practice and feed experience and good practice back into the CBD. The feedback loop should ensure that experience in England helps to influence development of the concept internationally so that it remains relevant to our needs and policies.

8. Further consideration between Defra and JNCC have led to the following ideas for developing the concept and application of the Ecosystem Approach.

- Preparation of a simple explanation or checklist of the Ecosystem Approach which could be used by non-experts and customised for presentation to different audiences. (JNCC)
- Embedding the Ecosystem Approach into the philosophy and language of policy documents, such as the revision of PPG9. (Government and all as appropriate)
- Identification of more case study examples in England, consciously considering the extent to which the principles of the ecosystem approach are being applied already and identifying what works well and less well in an England context. (All – JNCC in lead for UK)
- Developing further pilot projects that apply the Ecosystem Approach *ab initio* more systematically, and appraising the results and effects. (All partners)
- Logging, tracking and pulling together the conclusions of national and international research projects into the Ecosystem Approach and ensuring the findings are fed back into good practice and into the development of the concept at international level. (JNCC – BRAG)

9. There is also the risk, that we have already recognised with the implementation of the EBS, that the Ecosystem Approach will be applied sectorally without the necessary interaction across ecosystem types and landscapes. The challenge for the England Biodiversity Group is to explore the possibilities further within the sectors, but also to join up across sectors. The Local and Regional SIG has already looked at some existing examples in the Regions but has also flagged up in its work programme the need to develop a landscape-scale project in each of the 9 regions of England to demonstrate the integration of biodiversity into social and economic

development. Likewise, English Nature's Area-based initiatives have a strong focus on linking across land uses and delivery organisations to achieve a holistic approach.

Next steps

10. The EBG is invited to:

- Endorse the action for taking forward the Ecosystem Approach concept as set out under paragraph 8 above.
- Ask the policy work stream SIGs to consider actively the application of the Ecosystem Approach in their existing and future work programmes for implementing the EBS and to identify means of working across the sectors.
- Encourage the Local and Regional SIG to develop demonstration projects in each of the 9 English Regions, in particular taking account of English Nature's roll-out of their Area-based Initiatives.

Biodiversity Policy Unit

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