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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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**Your ref:** Fol Request  
284/14

**Our ref:** RFI 6402

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Ecosystem Services Approach and Governance Structures**

Thank you for your request for information about the Ecosystems Services Approach and governance structures which we received on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014. As you know, we have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

I enclose details of the information you requested:

**i) Does your department have a Minister or champion for ecosystem services?**

- Defra's Minister for ecosystem services is Lord de Mauley.
- You can read more about Lord De Mauley's portfolio in this web link:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/lord-de-mauley>

**ii) What governance structures or mechanisms are in place to integrate ecosystem services considerations into the decision making processes within your department?**

- In 2011, the Government published the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP), the first White Paper on the natural environment for over 20 years. It recognises that a healthy natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. It aims to improve the state of the natural environment by mainstreaming the value of nature, and ensuring that nature is valued in decision-making.
- Following up the White Paper, Defra and HM Treasury published supplementary guidance to the Green Book in 2012 on: "Accounting for environmental impacts in policy appraisal" at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-book-supplementary-guidance-environment>. This guidance is for Government Departments. It includes the use of the ecosystem services framework so that the full range of environmental impacts from a



proposed policy or project can be included in policy appraisal and decision making processes.

- This has also been incorporated in the Defra policy cycle guidance in the list of assurance prompts as one of the issues to be routinely considered throughout the policy cycle. Assurance is the independent assessment of an activity to assess whether it is on track to deliver, is being managed in accordance with good practice, and is providing best value for money. Assurance Prompts have been developed to ensure that relevant points/areas are considered in implementing the right policy in the right way and to the right standard. The following assurance prompts for Ecosystem Services and the natural environment have been developed:
  - Have you looked for opportunities to work with natural systems to deliver policy objectives as well as identified risks the natural environment might pose?
  - Does your impact assessment consider the positive and negative impacts of the policy options on different parts of the natural system (e.g. clean air and water)?
  - Have you considered the contribution of the natural environment to the delivery of outcomes?
  - Have you taken the value of changes to ecosystem services into account in your impact assessment?
- The Impact Assessment toolkit (BIS Better Regulation Framework Manual, July 2013) is consistent with Treasury Green Book guidance and provides links to more detailed Defra guidance on accounting for environmental impacts at: <https://www.gov.uk/assessing-environmental-impact-guidance>. Steps in the analysis of environmental impact are proposed, including the use of the ecosystem services framework.

### **iii) Have recommendations been made in regard to suggestions for governance structures/mechanisms to be used by other departments to integrate the ESA?**

- The Supplementary Guidance to the Green Book on: “Accounting for environmental impacts in policy appraisal” at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-book-supplementary-guidance-environment> was developed for use by all Government Departments in valuing the natural environment in appraisals.

### **iv) Have any SSSI designations been made to date on grounds of the need to protect ecosystem services?' If so, how many designations have been made to date?**

- The current England and Wales law on SSSIs is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which replaced an earlier Act dating from 1949. So it predates by some years the recent work on ecosystems services.
- The statutory wording used to determine whether a site should become a SSSI therefore does not use the term ecosystem services. It refers to “any area of land [which] is of special interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features”. Currently, the legislation therefore does not extend to notifying sites explicitly by reason of the ecosystem services that they and their features provide.
- For biological SSSIs, which are the majority, there is JNCC guidance on how they should be selected. Part 1 of that guidance was revised in 2013 and Part 2 is now being looked at. This guidance includes references to the context of ecosystems, for example, paragraphs 2.9 and 2.12. See <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2303>

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs, and in keeping with the government’s Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you.

I also attach Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

## Annex A

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## Annex B

### Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: [requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk)) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
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