

# Ecosystem accounting in New Zealand

Prepared by Adam Tipper, Senior Analyst, Statistics New Zealand

13 October 2015

There is scope for ecosystem accounting to be developed within the next few years in New Zealand. This opportunity arises from the recent passing of the Environmental Reporting Act, demand from key stakeholders for this information, and the upcoming development of SEEA at Statistics New Zealand.

The publication of [Ecosystem services in New Zealand](#) (ed. Dymond, 2014) provided “the first comprehensive overview of the state of ecosystem services - the benefits people obtain from nature - in this country.” Covering the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting ecosystem services, this edited collection provides a platform of knowledge for ecosystem accounting to build upon.

## The Environmental Reporting Act

In September 2015, the Environmental Reporting Act was passed by parliament and is expected to be in force in mid-2016. The Act requires the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand to produce regular reports on the state of the environment, and the pressures upon it and the impacts that environmental change has on our society, culture, economy, ecological integrity, and Te Ao Maori. The Act requires a ‘synthesis report’ covering the domains of air, atmosphere and climate, freshwater, land, and marine, as well as the cross-cutting biodiversity domain, to be produced every three years with a domain report produced every six months also in a three yearly cycle.

Environment Aotearoa 2015, to be released on 21 October 2015, is the first ‘synthesis’ report to be produced under the spirit of the Act. Given the availability of existing data, this report will focus mainly on the state of the environment and measures of economic impacts will be minimal.

The ecosystem account has the potential to powerfully inform on environmental reporting, given its holistic nature (ie not domain specific) and ability to relate changes in environmental state to impact (economic and well-being in a broader sense).

## Natural capital in decision making

The Natural Resources Sector (NRS) comprises eight central government agencies that are responsible for the management and stewardship of New Zealand’s natural resources. The Sector has an interest in understanding the utility of estimating stocks and flows of natural capital for improved decision-making. The Sector will consider what, if any, further work it may wish to undertake in this area, including the potential to support the development of the SEEA.

## SEEA development at Statistics New Zealand

During the early to mid-2000’s, Statistics New Zealand embarked on a comprehensive environmental accounting programme publishing accounts for energy, timber, minerals, fish,

water, environmental protection expenditure, and air emissions, as well as a marine economy satellite account. Since then, the environmental statistics team has been focusing on the [environmental domain plan](#) (which identified the value of ecosystem services as an information gap to be filled) and environmental reporting with the Ministry for the Environment.

A resource of one FTE has recently been allocated to the environmental statistics team to begin work on re-developing the SEEA accounts. Our approach is to prioritise accounts with maximum demand and value, which, at this point in time, is likely to be ecosystem accounting. Scoping of this work may begin with the next year, with development following soon after if it is considered to be a priority account.