

UK Ecosystem Accounting

Emily Connors, October 2015

In 2011 the UK Government committed to working with ONS to incorporate natural capital into the UK Environmental Accounts by 2020 so that the benefits of nature would be better recognised.¹ Following consultation, and in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), ONS published a Natural Capital Accounting Roadmap in December 2012 setting out early priorities for scoping and developing various types of accounts.

Earlier this year the first phase of the project was complete and the second phase initiated, with full details set out in the [2020 Roadmap](#). The aim of this phase of the project is to develop and improve the aggregate estimates of UK Natural Capital by incorporating a wider range of services and refining existing components, in order to provide an improved overview of the value of natural capital in the UK.

This phase will be completed in 2017, and the final phase will run from July 2017 to December 2020. By 2020 we envisage the accounts moving beyond experimental status, to be part of the UK Environmental Accounts, and integrated as far as possible.

A dedicated web-page on the ONS website on Natural Capital Accounting can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/natural-capital/index.html>

The initial publications and methodology can be found on this site.

Achievements

- General principles for natural capital accounting (UN SEEA) have been made into a focused set of [principles](#) (published in July 2014) around what accounts should be about and look like. *A second version of the principles paper will be published later this year.*
- Published **initial [aggregate natural capital estimates](#)** in May 2014 which have helped to raise the profile of natural capital accounting. As of December 2014, the web-page for this work received over 2000 hits. *Revised initial aggregate estimates will be published in May 2016.*
- Produced initial **woodlands and freshwater ecosystem asset and services accounts** in both physical and monetary terms (latest estimates published in the [environmental accounts](#)), together with scoping studies for accounts for peatlands, marine ecosystems and spatially disaggregated accounts for woodlands;
- Published initial [UK land cover](#) and [UK land use](#) accounts
- Fostered strong **partnership working** between ONS, Defra and the Natural Capital Committee, through a high-level Steering Group and Project Board. This has

¹ HMG White Paper, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* (2011)

and policy relevance. Other organisations such as Forestry Commission and the Scottish Government have been closely engaged on particular workstreams.

- Created strong interest in ecosystem accounting amongst many **National Parks and other protected area authorities** through research to pilot spatially detailed multi-habitat accounts at this sub-national level (to be published shortly).

Next steps in 2015-16

- Revised principles paper
- Revised and updated initial aggregate monetary estimates of the value of natural capital in the UK, including revised recreation estimates, further freshwater services and estimates for air quality and amenity value.
- Publication of ecosystem accounts for 6 pilot protected areas
- Farmland initial accounts
- Coastal Margins scoping study
- Cross-cutting carbon initial account