

The biodiversity chapter of the National Ecosystem Assessment

A response by Wildlife and Countryside Link

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together over 30 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic and marine environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK and manage over 690,000 hectares of land.

This response is supported by the following 9 organisations;

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Bat Conservation Trust
- The Grasslands Trust
- The Mammal Society
- Plantlife International
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- The Wildlife Trusts

General Comments

Link believes that there is considerable merit in including a chapter on biodiversity to illustrate the central role of biodiversity in the provision of ecosystems processes and ecosystem services (ES). However we are currently disappointed with this chapter and believe that it requires a shift in focus to achieve this valuable aim. Currently the biodiversity chapter seems simply to be a species chapter, despite reference to the CBD definition of biodiversity which speaks of ecosystems and ecological complexes.

We would also like to make the following specific points;

- The chapter is rather fixated on the lack of quantitative evidence linking individual species groups with ES, and more could be made of the known linkages to add balance.
- The concept of ES is inconsistent and often contradicts some of sections in the other chapters e.g. chapter 5 on grasslands. For example the biodiversity chapter incorrectly, completely undermines the value of long-term invertebrate monitoring (e.g. butterflies) where in the grasslands chapter it correctly comments on the value of these data sets.
- We have some concerns where the chapter states that wild species diversity is an ecosystem service and how different taxa relate to this. It is not fully clear how diversity itself is an ES and also how the different species groups contribute to this. We think that more diverse groups would contribute to this

further, but as stated in table 1, mammals and amphibians are given higher rankings. We would be interested to know the reasons for this.

- Furthermore regarding table 1, the expert assessments of the importance of species groups to underpinning the 'final' ES must be peer reviewed, or at least opened up to further discussion. Presently there are a number of inconsistencies in table 1, for example, only birds, mammals, and land plants are indicated as being highly important for 'meaningful places'. We would like to know the definition of 'meaningful places' as we think that lichens, reptiles and amphibians should also be included in table 1. A similar situation is shown for 'social valued land and waterscapes'.
- Figure 3 plays down the role of biodiversity in ES when it should usefully illustrate the central role of biodiversity. For example, adding fungi & invertebrates to the soil formation process, and plants to 'trees, standing vegetation & peat', 'climate regulation', 'valued landscapes' etc.
- Figure 4 linking the age of species groups to their roles within ES would need to be revised if changes are made to table 1.
- Additional input from further experts should be sought in discussion of the drivers of changes for species groups as outlined in table 3, especially in relation to the intensity of their impact¹. We are interested to know if references such as BAP reports or species atlases were used to assess the trend information.
- Link does not believe that 'cultural divide' is a useful way in which to describe the point raised in this section (the issue of data rich species groups and lack of data on species & ES). Furthermore, the lack of hard evidence to date on the impacts of species or species groups to ES should not simply be attributed to its cultural importance. It is only recently that the case for conserving biodiversity has needed to be couched within the terms of its value to delivering ES, hence data has not necessarily been collected in this way previously.
- On the final recommendations, it should be noted that we need better and more consistent understanding of ES before we can improve our understanding of how different species groups underpin or indicate ES and ES quality.
- Link believes that for Appendix 2, a single expert or institute's opinion is inadequate across the board and we suggest that additional opinions are sought. Equally, it would be of greater relevance in these sections to discuss known or inferred links between species groups and ES, such as the macro-algae section. We also believe that the paragraph on terrestrial invertebrates in Appendix 2 is misleading. It states that butterflies and moths are well

¹ The report states that there is compelling evidence for the influence of climate change on the flowering time of plants, however the link between climate change and land plants in table 3 is assessed as low. Whilst the table assessment may have been made in relation to climate change and status or range changes of plants, the seeming inconsistency could be confusing.

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monitored but it provides little information about pollinators when moths are a key pollinator group.

These are our initial comments on the biodiversity chapter of the National Ecosystem Assessment. We would be happy to discuss these in more detail if required. Please do not hesitate to contact Kirsten Knap at Wildlife and Countryside Link on 0207 8208600 or Kirsten@wcl.org.uk for further information.

Wildlife and Countryside Link
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Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP
W: www.wcl.org.uk

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