

KNOWLEDGE ACCOUNTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT: BACKGROUND NOTE

Origins

The knowledge accounts present a high level summary of the key evidence on a range of environmental themes. The themes were identified during previous work undertaken with a number of public sector organisations as areas we need to focus on in order to achieve our goals for Scotland's environment.

The knowledge accounts format was developed to show: what we know about current trends, factors influencing these trends, where we want to be and what factors will influence how we get there, and the effectiveness of our policy interventions. It also identifies the key evidence gaps which we believe need to be addressed.

Evidence

The knowledge accounts were prepared by the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services at the Scottish Government. They were drafted using a range of previously published sources of evidence including statistical publications and the range of reports available on Scotland's Environment Web, such as the series of State of the Environment reports.

The views of public bodies, such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, along with a range of research institutes, were also fed in to the development of the knowledge accounts. Feedback on the knowledge accounts was also sought as part of the online discussion on the Environment Strategy¹. The final knowledge accounts thus incorporate the views of a diverse range of stakeholders and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

Scope

The themes represent policy areas covered by the Scottish Government's Directorate for Environment and Forestry. Separate work has been undertaken to assess the evidence base on climate change and the marine environment. For example, as part of the latest Climate Change Plan evidence reviews were published of the potential wider impact of climate change mitigation options^{2,3}. In addition, the UK Committee on Climate Change produced a risk assessment evidence report for Scotland⁴. For the marine environment, Scotland's Marine Atlas⁵ and the Marine Scotland Information⁶ web portal provide evidence on the state of the marine environment and an assessment of the quality of the evidence. However, key information on the marine environment has been incorporated in the knowledge account on Ecosystems and Biodiversity.

The variation in length of the accounts reflects not only the breadth of some of the themes covered, but also that in some areas the evidence base is much more comprehensive compared to other areas.

1 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysis-report-responses-online-discussion-developing-environment-strategy-scotland/>

2 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-review-potential-wider-impacts-climate-change-mitigation-options-built/>

3 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-review-potential-wider-impacts-climate-change-mitigation-options-transport/>

4 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/tackling-climate-change/preparing-for-climate-change/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017/national-summaries/scotland/>

5 <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/science/atlas>

6 <http://marine.gov.scot/>

Strategic vision and outcomes

The knowledge accounts were prepared prior to the development of the Environment Strategy vision and outcomes, to help inform evidence gaps and direct future research needs. The themes chosen were determined to be appropriate for organising the evidence base. The knowledge accounts have been used to ensure that an evidence-led approach is taken for the development of the strategy. Noting that there is some overlap, and some knowledge accounts will be relevant across more than one outcome, the following table shows the key knowledge accounts that relate to each strategy outcome:

Strategy outcome	Key relevant knowledge accounts
Scotland's nature is protected and restored with flourishing biodiversity and clean and healthy air, water, seas and soils	Ecosystems and biodiversity Air quality
We play our full role in tackling the global climate emergency and limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C	Evidence on climate change is held separately, as explained above.
We use and re-use resources wisely and have ended the throw-away culture	Households conserve resources Businesses conserve resources
Our thriving, sustainable economy conserves and grows our natural assets	Natural capital
Our healthy environment supports a fairer, healthier, more inclusive society	Access and enjoy nature Greenspace Attitudes towards the environment
We are responsible global citizens with a sustainable international footprint	We will review evidence for this outcome when developing the delivery pathway.

The knowledge accounts have been prepared by the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services, Environment and Forestry Directorate at the Scottish Government. Contact: environmentknowledgeaccounts@gov.scot