

NERC Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Sustainability (BESS)

Engagement Strategy 2011-2016

Version date: 14th October 2013

Promoting understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services

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1. Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this Strategy is to ensure that the BESS programme has a significant influence on policy and practice, both nationally and internationally. The Strategy identifies the key messages and desired outcomes of communications with the BESS programme, and provides the guidelines through which these can be achieved.

The Strategy provides the background to enable participants in the NERC Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Sustainability (BESS) programme to engage with and promote BESS science to various audiences within and beyond the scientific research community, in such a way that is relevant and beneficial in terms of delivering value to society.

The communications activities within the BESS programme are designed to target five key audiences:

- policy and government (international, national and local)
- non-governmental organisations
- business (primary, secondary and tertiary sectors)
- culture and education, including research
- the general public

The goals of the Strategy are to:

1. Develop a thriving, interdisciplinary scientific community undertaking research related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the ecosystem approach to environmental management
2. Raise awareness of biodiversity and ecosystem services among policy-makers across a range of sectors, and deliver an enhanced evidence base to underpin policy development, both nationally and internationally
3. Engage with practitioners responsible for delivering ecosystem management initiatives, to enhance the application of BESS science to practical management
4. Enhance links between biodiversity-ecosystem research and the corporate sector, to build a greater awareness of the relevance of biodiversity for providing economic and societal value
5. Improve public understanding of the value and importance of conserving biodiversity for the services and benefits it provides

2. Strategic objectives for communication, engagement and knowledge exchange

The strategic objectives for the BESS Communication, Engagement and Knowledge Exchange Strategy are aligned to two existing NERC strategies: the NERC Knowledge Exchange Strategy and the Public Engagement Strategy (Science and Society). The BESS Communication, Engagement and Knowledge Exchange Strategy is designed to take forward the aspirations outlined in the NERC BESS Science and Implementation Plans, and to link BESS science with policy initiatives from the Natural Environment White Paper, specifically the development of Local Nature Partnerships and Nature Improvement Areas.

The **specific objectives** for the BESS Communication, Engagement and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, which underpin the five strategy goals, are as follows:

- 1.1 Promote collaboration between researchers within and beyond with BESS programme
- 1.2 Ensure that individual project leaders and participants are committed to the objectives of the programme, including participation in workshops and other programme-level activities
- 1.3 Provide added value by establishing co-funding for the programme

- 2.1 Engage with policy-makers to raise the policy profile of BESS research
- 2.2 Communicate with policy-makers concerning priorities for BESS-related research, to ensure that BESS research is policy-relevant
- 2.3 Create materials based on BESS science that are accessible to the policy community

- 3.1 Improve transfer of information on BESS science in accessible formats such as policy and practice notes
- 3.2 Develop links with local ecosystem-level projects, including via the Defra Ecosystems Knowledge Network
- 3.3 Promote exchange activities of BESS research staff with government agencies and NGOs responsible for developing and delivering ecosystem-level projects

- 4.1 Develop links with specific professional bodies, the private sector and the business community to promote awareness of BESS research
- 4.2 Promote exchange activities of BESS research staff with the corporate sector
- 4.3 Involve the corporate sector in BESS programme activities, including workshops, membership of the Programme Advisory Board, and in the development of BESS research and outreach activities.

- 5.1 Support activities that promote public understanding and engagement, for example via participation in Science in Society events
- 5.2 Ensure that there is frequent and timely use of press releases to promote BESS science to the media
- 5.3 Provide an informative and appealing website, including short films to promote BESS science and an active social media presence

The **key stakeholders** for the BESS programme include the following:

- The international community: Various including the European Commission and IPBES
- UK national government and agencies: Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government, Defra, BIS, DECC, DfT, Environment Agency, Natural England, JNCC
- Local government: Regional bodies, local councils, regional offices of NE, EA, LGA etc
- NGOs: Various including RSPB, National Trust and other local voluntary organisations and partnerships
- Corporate sector: Professional environmental management firms, private consultants, professional bodies such as IEEM
- General public: especially those involved in landscape-level management via local partnerships

3. Approach to communication, engagement and knowledge exchange

The main activities, key messages and desired outcomes for engagement with specific stakeholder groups are provided in Table 1. A stakeholder map is also provided as Figure 1. Responsibilities for various activities are also identified in Table 1. These activities will be carried out at both the programme and project level. A stakeholder engagement plan will be developed for each stakeholder group, identifying their motives for engaging with the programme and the outputs that they are likely to want. In addition, the Directorate will work closely with the individual projects to ensure that engagement activities are complementary, and to identify potential partnerships, synergies and opportunities to maximise impact from BESS research.

As BESS is a long-term programme, and the content of individual future projects is not yet known, the stakeholder map and the specific activities should be taken as indicative rather than prescriptive. The Directorate will also be proactive in pursuing other opportunities for communication and engagement, especially beyond BESS itself, for example through collaborations with other NERC and LWEC programmes and initiatives.

4. Key messages for communications, engagement and knowledge exchange

Each project within the BESS programme will be required to identify clearly which stakeholders it will engage with, and the impacts that the project is expected to have on these stakeholders in terms of policy and/or practice. These stakeholders will receive regular updates on the progress made towards BESS programme goals and will have the opportunity to inform the further development of the programme. Over the course of the BESS programme, we will be able to demonstrate the importance of BESS research on biodiversity, ecosystem functions and ecosystem services in:

- Highlighting the significance of biodiversity for the social and economic wellbeing of society
- Informing the development of better strategies for managing our natural environment to sustain the benefits for society such as clean water, food, energy and wellbeing
- Providing guidance for how landscapes should be managed to maximise the range of benefits they provide to society

5. Desired outcomes from communications within the BESS programme

Success of communication from the BESS programme will depend on the following desired outcomes being achieved:

- BESS-related science and research widely applied beyond the programme itself, nationally and internationally
- International policy development (such as IPBES) influenced by BESS research
- Strategic national and local-level environmental decision-making influenced by BESS approaches and science
- Discussions of environmental issues in popular culture influenced by BESS
- Landscape management influenced by BESS science and approaches

6. Delivering the strategy

Overall responsibility for delivering the BESS communications strategy lies with the Directorate. However, the Directorate will work closely with NERC SO, the project PIs and the BESS Research Fellows to ensure that the desired outcomes are met. The Directorate will develop a more detailed Communications Implementation Plan to show how the strategy will be implemented.

The Directorate will also seek to maximise the impact of BESS through working closely with other NERC initiatives and programmes, especially with the Valuing Nature Network, the UK National Ecosystem Assessment, and with the LWEC/NERC Knowledge Exchange programme, including close liaison with UKRC KE specialists and with Dr Mark Reed.

7. Measuring and reporting impact

The success of BESS in meeting the above outcomes will be evaluated using a range of metrics matched to the specific outcomes. Evaluation will be done using primarily quantitative information (the metrics are outlined in Table 1), but qualitative information will also be used to evaluate impact, using project case studies and narratives.

8. Costs and resources

The delivery of the core communications activities has been budgeted for within the NERC Directorate's grant. The greater use of more innovative means of outreach, including expanding the use of social media, will be investigated in collaboration with Dr Mark Reed. In addition, joint outreach activities with the VNN programme are being considered, which would require the addition of a KE Research Fellow shared between the two programmes. This would be funded from outside the core Directorate grant.

9. Risks

The main risk in delivering this Strategy is a lack of sufficient time and resource being devoted to its implementation. The key risk here lies with PIs. This risk will be minimised by a requirement that all PIs register the details of the projects, including a list of partners and stakeholders, the planned interactions with them, and the desired impacts of the research, on a central project management system. The Directorate will provide support for PIs in entering and managing this information. This central database will allow the Directorate to monitor the progress of projects on communications targets as well as research targets, and to identify and exploit any opportunities for synergistic communications activities between projects. In addition, all PIs will be required to collaborate in programme-level activities, and to state their commitment to undertaking these activities as part of the conditions of BESS awards.

10. Further information

Further information on the BESS programme, including the programme Science Plan and the Implementation Plan, is available at:

<http://www.nerc-bess.net>

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/programmes/bess/>

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October 2013

Table 1. Communication activities within the BESS programme

Desired outcomes	Target stakeholders	Key messages	Type of activity	Delivery mechanisms	Responsibility	Indicators of achievement	Possible evaluation metrics
Develop a thriving, interdisciplinary scientific community undertaking research related to biodiversity and ecosystem services	Education (including research community) and culture	Interdisciplinary research based on an understanding of ecosystem processes and functions is essential for understanding the major biodiversity-related environmental challenges we face	Promotion of BESS science within the research community	Conferences, networks, workshops, fellowships	Directorate, PIs and Research Fellows, NERC SO	BESS-related science and research widely applied beyond the programme itself	Peer-reviewed publications, collaboratively authored presentations and papers
Raise awareness of biodiversity and ecosystem services among policy-makers across a range of sectors, and deliver an enhanced evidence base to underpin policy development, both nationally and internationally	International policy-makers, national and local government; media; public	BESS research demonstrates the significance of natural capital for the social and economic wellbeing of society BESS research is essential for developing better strategies for managing our natural environment to sustain the provision of benefits for society such as clean water, food, energy and healthy environments	Promotion of BESS science into policy	Policy briefing notes, dialogue, engagement with other initiatives, e.g. Defra Ecosystems Knowledge Exchange Network, expert advice, work placements, BESS 'champions' in policy organisations	Directorate, PIs, Research Fellows, NERC SO	International policy development (IPBES) influenced by BESS research Strategic national and local-level environmental decision-making influenced by BESS approaches and science Discussions of environmental issues in popular culture influenced	References to BESS in IPBES documents Government department and agency website references to BESS Mentions of BESS in Hansard References to BESS in research requirements documents from e.g. Defra

by BESS

Traffic to policy areas of the BESS website

Engage with practitioners responsible for delivering ecosystem management initiatives, to enhance the application of BESS science to practical management	Local government, NGOs, business, partnerships	BESS research can provide guidance for how landscapes should be managed, to maximise the range of benefits that landscapes provide to society	Promotion of BESS science into practice	BESS partnerships with local landscape initiatives, e.g. in relation to NEWP initiatives Collaboration with existing science-into-practice initiatives, e.g. conservationevidence.com Collaboration with professional bodies e.g. IEEM	Directorate, PIs	Landscape management influenced by BESS science and approaches	Reference to BESS in landscape initiatives Reference to BESS in material originating from professional bodies Qualitative information such as statements from stakeholders and practitioners
Enhance links between biodiversity-ecosystem research and the corporate sector, to build a greater awareness of the relevance of biodiversity for providing economic and societal value	Corporate sector bodies, including large, medium and small businesses	BESS research can help to highlight the importance of biodiversity for supporting the economy	Promotion of BESS research to business leaders	BESS partnerships with corporate sector Links with emerging initiatives, e.g. Environment Bank	Directorate, PIs, NERC SO	Corporate sector influenced by BESS science and approaches	Invitations to meetings with corporate bodies Invitations to speak at professional conferences Co-funding from business and collaborations with business

Improve public understanding of the value and importance of conserving biodiversity for the services and benefits it provides	General public including school children	Biodiversity is essential for the health and wellbeing of humans and the planet	Educational and outreach activities to promote understanding of BESS science	Royal Society/UKRC Festival of Science events Science in Schools activities	Directorate, PIs	Greater public awareness of the importance of biodiversity for underpinning health and wellbeing	References to BESS in traditional and social media Qualitative information based on media and other reports
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Figure 1. Stakeholder map for BESS programme

