



British Ecological Society

## **The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Inquiry Environmental Audit Committee**

### **Memorandum by the British Ecological Society**

2 October 2006

#### **Introduction**

1. The British Ecological Society is the learned society for ecology in the UK. It was founded in 1913 and currently has over 4,000 members. The Society's mission is to promote the science of ecology worldwide. The BES's core activities are organizing scientific meetings, publishing scientific journals, giving small grants, supporting ecology in schools and providing policymakers with ecological advice.
2. The BES strongly supports the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA). The MA developed a strong conceptual model to understand the value of ecosystem services to human wellbeing. The MA also raised awareness that many of the ecosystem services that society benefits from are being degraded. The UK should build upon the MA framework so that it can be better utilized by decision makers nationally.

#### **Influence on Decision Makers**

3. The MA provides decision makers with information about the current state of ecosystem services and those policy options that can ensure their continued delivery. It is important that the MA findings are considered throughout government. The MA is a useful tool for realizing the UK Sustainable Development strategies guiding principles of using sound science and living within environmental limits.
4. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has taken the MA seriously. The BES took part in a Defra sponsored workshop to look at how the MA should be followed-up. Furthermore, Defra is funding research projects on ecosystem services. Defra and its Non-Departmental Public Bodies (Natural England, Environment Agency, etc.) have an important role in engaging other stakeholders with the MA's findings, as well as integrating it into their work.
5. The Department for International Development (DfID) is aware of the MA. However, it could have given the MA and the link between ecosystem services and poverty reduction greater emphasis in its White Paper. The BES hopes that a number of projects between DfID and the scientific community will help to embed the importance of the MA in its work.
6. The BES is pleased that the HM Treasury has identified "increasing pressures on our natural resources and global climate from rapid economic and population growth in the developing world and sustained demand for fossil fuels in the advanced economies" as a long-term trend and challenge to be considered during the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. HM Treasury needs to play a strong role in

integrating the findings of the MA, especially the value of non-market ecosystem services, into government thinking.

### **An Ecosystem Assessment for the UK**

7. The MA did sub-global scale assessments at the local, national and regional scales. It found that the scale at which an assessment is taken influences the problem definition and assessment results. This is an important insight since decisions affecting ecosystem services are taken at multiple scales in the UK.
8. The BES recommends that interested parties consider conducting ecosystem assessments at multiple scales in the UK. There would be value in conducting local assessments of key ecosystems. A national assessment of the state of ecosystem services in the UK would be extremely valuable in communicating the state and importance of the UK's ecosystem services. However, since the UK imports goods from abroad which can degrade other countries ecosystem services it is important that the international dimension of a number of key ecosystem services are also examined.
9. The UK is in a good position to conduct multi-scale ecosystem assessments and make the MA more relevant to decision-makers' nationally, because of its relatively strong evidence-base with regards to the state of its ecosystems, scientific expertise in environmental issues and engaged stakeholder communities (government, NGOs, business).
10. The BES is helping to bring together expert and user communities to examine how scientists could assess the contribution of ecosystem services to human wellbeing in the UK. However, it would take significant government and research council support for the UK to conduct multi-scale assessments.

### **MA Gaps and Follow-up**

11. The MA highlighted a number of scientific gaps that limited its ability to fully answer the policy questions it was given. One crucial gap was the lack of monitoring systems needed to assess the condition and trends of ecosystem services. Another weakness in the scientific community was the ability of social and natural scientists to integrate their knowledge. Scientists involved in the MA had to look at environmental issues in novel way. The partnerships and understanding forged during the MA process could be lost unless action is taken to build upon the work of the MA.
12. The UK government should take a strong lead at European and international policy forums to move the MA forward. If there was international commitment to conduct future assessments, there would be a greater urgency in filling the research gaps and building the institutional capacity to undertake ecosystem assessments and act on the findings.

### **Further Information**

13. Nick Dusic, Science Policy Manager, British Ecological Society  
Address: 26 Blades Court, Deodar Road, London SW15 2NU, UK  
Telephone: 02088719797; E-mail: [nick@britishecologicalsociety.org](mailto:nick@britishecologicalsociety.org)