

The SEQ Ecosystem Services Project

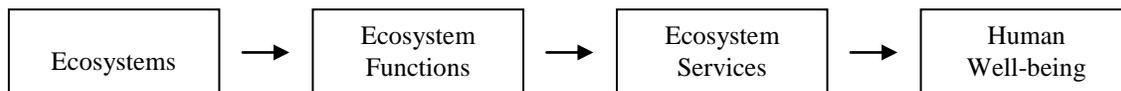


Ecosystem Services are the goods and services provided by natural (and semi-natural) ecosystems that benefit, sustain and support the well-being of people. They include the production of food and medicines, maintaining a habitable climate, the regulation of pests and disease, the provision of productive soils and water for consumption, providing a sense of place and opportunities for recreational, spiritual and therapeutic benefits.

Ecosystem services are fundamental to the maintenance of a healthy economy. Geographic areas in any region providing ecosystem services can be considered vital natural capital providing 'green infrastructure'. For too long in industrial economies, ecosystem services have been inadequately recognised and hence undervalued. When ecosystem services are lost they can be extremely - or even prohibitively - costly to reproduce.

In response to a growing interest in ecosystem services and their role in supporting the economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability of South-East Queensland (SEQ), SEQ Catchments (SEQC) has been working with expert panels and technical working groups to develop a framework for ecosystem services. The SEQ Ecosystem Services Framework (the Framework) is based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) established by the United Nations Environment Programme. The SEQ approach has been to:

- (a) Classify and identify the ecosystems of SEQ;
- (b) Map the ecosystems in SEQ;
- (c) Identify and describe the ecosystem functions occurring in these ecosystems;
- (d) Determine the link between ecosystems and ecosystem functions;
- (e) Relate ecosystem functions to data and then map ecosystem functions;
- (f) Identify and describe the ecosystem services provided by these functions;
- (g) Determine the link between ecosystem functions and the services they provide; and
- (h) Explore the linkages between ecosystem services and the well-being of the SEQ community.



There are a wide range of potential applications of the Framework, for example (but not limited to);

- assisting decision makers to identify losses and benefits of further development;
- assisting in assessing the sustainability of current and future natural resource management and regional plans;
- assisting natural resource (e.g. water, fisheries, forestry, agriculture, ...) managers to maintain ecosystem service provision over time;
- identifying strategic locations for offsets, rehabilitation and restoration, and climate change mitigation sites;
- identifying potential alternative land uses with multiple values in non-urban areas;
- guiding the regional application of state and federally funded ecosystem services and natural resource management schemes;
- inputting into State of Region and State of Environment reporting;
- value adding to Local Govt Planning Schemes, Community Plans, Water Resource, Biodiversity Strategies; and
- as a communication tool for bridging gaps across multiple stakeholders.

The Project received a Planning Institute of Australia Award in 2008. The Framework has been incorporated into the statutory SEQ Regional Plan 2009 – 2031 and the SEQ Natural Resource Management Plan 2009 – 2031. In 2013, work will include developing ecosystem services maps; continue identifying where and by whom ecosystem service benefits are received; use historical data to identify changes in ecosystem service provision; and applying the Framework to specific case studies in SEQ.

Over 190 individuals from government and non-government organisations have participated in the Project to date. The Project has received financial support from the Federal, Queensland and Local Governments. Technical support has also been received from Brisbane Regional Environment Council, the University Sunshine Coast and the Australian National University.

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