

**Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)**

Thematic Report

**Millennium Ecosystem Assessment  
workshop  
Executive Summary**

February 2006

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## **Executive Summary of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Workshop held 3 February 2006, London**

### ***Evaluating the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: messages, knowledge gaps and policy implications***

The overarching aim of the workshop was to develop an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), including those elements that can be used to support policy development; those elements that should be approached more cautiously; and to identifying priority gaps in the science to be addressed.

The workshop consisted of 6 expert presentations on the findings and implications of the MA, followed by breakout groups where participants discussed the MA's assessments, scenarios, responses, using the MA for decision making, lessons learnt and future needs. Some key themes emerged which are summarised below, and expressed in more detail in the full report of the workshop. More specific recommendations suggesting options to take forward the work of the MA are also explored in the workshop recommendations, although these were not consensus based. For other documents relating to the MA workshop see <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4629#me>.

#### **Strengths and weaknesses**

The scale and the scope of the MA was applauded, and the participatory approach of the assessment was particularly valuable. Despite such an approach, a lack of key policy-maker buy-in to the MA was also seen as a key weakness.

The MA has developed key methodologies which can be further developed and applied to research, including its conceptual framework; a classification system for ecosystem goods and services and its approach to the modelling of possible/plausible futures/scenarios as an analytical tool.

However, the development of scenarios could benefit from more dynamic approaches, in particular developing biodiversity-centric scenarios. There is a pressing need to draw upon wider data sources (i.e. data on fauna and marine) for future work.

#### **Science: Research gaps, focus and access**

Data gaps limited the scope of the work that the MA was able to do. The MA made progress in understanding the links between ecosystem changes and human well-being and the importance of biodiversity for the provision of ecosystem services and functions; however more work was needed in both these areas. There continues to be a need for robust, yet flexible policy-relevant indicators.

Other important gaps include Species-Area relationships, improved measures of biodiversity decline, increased study of non-linear systems, including the effects of step changes, thresholds and positive feedback.

Better opportunities for joint working between the natural and social sciences would also be valuable, as would further taxonomic research and the promotion of whole-organism biology. In the future, existing datasets could be made better use of, but this will be reliant on improved access to collections and information. Modelling approaches should be developed to inform future options and inform decision makers of possible futures.

A country level study using MA methodologies could provide a useful insight into the efficiency of methodologies and scaling up/down considerations.

### **Communications**

The MA findings should be disseminated beyond the biodiversity sector and to sectors which hold the policy and behavioural leverage to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity; including the public, decision makers across the private sector and within government. The educational potential of the MA could also be exploited through various organisations and the media (e.g. books, TV, the internet). The role of the National Curriculum, the development assistance agencies and the British Council were examples. MA ‘champions’ could also promote the good messages. It is important to involve local stakeholders in this work.

### **Economics**

The MA identified that the key drivers of change to ecosystem services were indirect, for example economic drivers of change. The need for a cross government response to perverse incentives and trade considerations was raised. Better economic valuation of ecosystem services could facilitate this dialogue with government and the private sector - and the development of tools for this is essential. Consideration of unsustainable consumption is also vital in addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss.

### **International governance**

Uptake of the MA’s findings should be promoted within Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Better integration of biodiversity expertise into other international negotiations and multilateral agreements would provide a platform for promoting the MA’s messages. The importance of capacity building in developing countries was also stressed.

The MA messages could also be integrated into a number of UK and EU policy statements (including the Sustainable Development Strategy and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan) and the work of various governmental and non-governmental research groups and bodies. The MA is useful for horizon scanning exercises.