ESCom Scotland launch conference and science workshop report

Edinburgh Centre for Carbon and Innovation
30th April & 1st May 2014

ESCom Scotland (Ecosystem Service Community in Scotland) aims to become a community of practice for ecosystem services research, decision-making and natural resource management in Scotland. To achieve this ESCom will:

- Attempt to align Scottish ecosystem services research, to maximise value, identify synergies, and avoid duplication
- Work with Policy and Practice to gain better understanding of user needs, provide relevant research, and achieve impact
- Organise and promote events to support knowledge exchange, and promote these events through extensive networks

In order to progress this, the four founding organisations (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology; Forest Research; James Hutton Institute and University of Edinburgh) held a launch conference and science workshop. The launch conference was attended by around 90 policy makers, practitioners and researchers whilst the science workshop was also well attended with around 60 participants. There was a full agenda onboth days, comprising of presentations and facilitated discussions (see agenda in annex). This report provides a brief summary of the main discussion points arising from the facilitated sessions and plenary discussions.

The event was presented as a beginning of a journey whereby there was an opportunity to use the momentum from three major strategic research projects (FP7 OPERAS, OPENNESS and Scottish Government's Ecosystem Services Theme) to develop this community for Scotland. The need for effective research to support and protect ecosystem service delivery remains pressing, particularly as biodiversity continues to decline. Ecosystem services affect all sectors of society and the economy and provide a way to integrate multiple policy and practice domains. There is a need for an active community of practice given the concept has become quite contentious due to its alignment with monetary value, when there is a full suite of approaches involved.

The role that ESCom can play was recognised in the speech given by the Minister for the Environment at the launch: *'I very much welcome the establishment of the Ecosystem Services Community – or ESCom. There can be no doubt that Scotland's natural environment is one of our greatest assets. By gaining a deeper understanding of land use issues, we can achieve better management of this vital natural resource, to the benefit of everyone and our environment. Effective knowledge exchange and collaboration through*

initiatives like ESCom will help us harness opportunities to work together to attain the best possible outcomes for future generations.'

What do people want from ESCom?

Overall, people were broadly supportive of the reason to form a community of practice around the concept of ecosystem services and the ecosystem approach. However, exactly who could or should be involved in the community and its overall objectives need further clarification and should be collectively agreed.

The strong message was that the community should include policy and practice beyond academia and should be solution-focussed, such as helping align future rural development funding programmes.

The benefits of ESCom were to provide a forum by which we can discuss, agree, build on and promote existing understandings of both individual ecosystem services and ecosystems through time and in different places. These activities require joint working by researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders, including different publics.

ESCom could facilitate collaborative research planning and delivery between research, policy and practice. This should help avoid duplication of research and stakeholder 'saturation' by aligning common research questions. It should also help us realise synergies and add value by sharing case studies, co-designing methods or making better use of existing data sets. Another possibility is using research expertise to get existing data and experience held in agencies and NGOs published in scientific journals.

It is important to understand the different needs and motivations of different types of ESCom members. It might be useful to arrange capacity building training to ensure researchers better understand the policy and practice cycles; and for others to understand the conditions most researchers have to satisfy to retain their funding (e.g. publishing innovative findings). Explaining the 'jargon' and making ecosystem service frameworks relevant to actual decision making was also seen as essential to engage non-academics.

The ecosystem services agenda is fast-moving, so people are looking to ESCom to provide a synthesis and overview of the topics, promoting the high quality analysis and weeding out the spurious and mis-leading material. Potentially, the community also offers a gateway by which requests for advice, information or presentations could be disseminated more widely, making it more likely to find someone willing and able to respond. ESCom could be a forum for debate, to allow access to different ideas about ecosystem services, as well as a synthesis of existing knowledge.

ESCom needs to identify its niche(s) where it can do something in addition to existing networks (e.g. Ecological Knowledge Network; Ecosystem Service Partnership, Living with Environmental Change) or working groups (e.g. various Scottish Government committees to deliver the Biodiversity and Land Use Strategies) or web-portals (e.g. Scottish Environment Web) or other coordination mechanisms, such as CAMERAS (A Coordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment and Rural Affairs Science). Possible niches include: development and application of flexible 'cross-scale' tools; Scottish data-bases of ecosystem service data and research; futures and scenario studies; better understanding of cultural ecosystem services; sharing good practice on knowledge exchange, tools and other processes; and contributing

to further and higher education courses, particularly those taken by future policy makers and land managers.

Scotland is a small country that is well-networked and resourced so it should be possible to build a world-class community of practice. However, we should be outward looking and use Scottish expertise to learn from and inform, ecosystem service research, policy and practice in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond.

ESCom will work if trusted relationships are formed, which takes time and needs to be facilitated through regular meetings and identifying 'quick wins' whereby membership of ESCom delivers something that would not have been possible alone. It is unclear what the balance of ESCom activities should be between generating new research and collating or evaluating existing research and translating it into practical applications. It will depend who ESCom is 'for' as different members will have different priorities, available time and resources and work to different timescales. Work placements might help understand one another better.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach for ESCOM to follow in terms of facilitating these discussions. Suggestions included using a range of interactive and passive mediums, some face-to-face and some virtual such as: targeted workshops on specific issues (e.g. how to align research with policy and practice; or on methods such as agent based modelling or decision support tools); 'walk and talk' events at demonstration sites; research briefings that synthesise existing material in plain English; a 'pin-board' to post requests for data, research case studies etc as part of an interactive website; a resource repository; a mailing list; e-bulletins; and judicious use of social media such as twitter.

During the science workshop there was a debate about whether or not ESCom should seek to standardise methods and frameworks to facilitate more comparative research and help with re-use of data in the future. There were also multiple references to citizen science approaches; and whether ESCom could coordinate or facilitate these types of approaches to data collection and analysis. Finally, issues related to data access and ability to share data-sets were raised.

What can individuals do for ESCom?

Many individuals were enthusiastic about ESCom's potential and willing to:

- Organise and host events from an annual science conference through to summer schools and training/demonstration workshops on specific tools
- Chair working groups
- Write joint papers or presentations badged as 'ESCom'
- Run sessions at academic and practitioner conferences as 'ESCom'
- Provide access to potential fieldwork sites
- Use existing demonstration sites to promote the concept to practitioners
- Provide access to honours, masters and PhD students seeking research topics
- Share data and experiences (often unpublished)
- Share methods, data, concepts and mutual research interests e.g. health; cultural ecosystem services; multiple benefits; policy assessment; evaluation as well as concepts of valuation.

- Disseminate information about other meetings, events, publications and guidance using website

ESCom structure and governance

Currently ESCom has seven working groups: WG1 – Frameworks, indicators and data; WG2 – Stakeholder engagement and communication; WG3 – Information tools; WG4 Valuation (including economic and social valuation, off-setting and PES); WG5 – Modelling; WG6 – Futures and Scenarios; and WG7 – Decision Support.

Whilst all participants during the science day could find a home in at least one working group, there were some suggestions to streamline or cluster some of the groups. For example, could WGs 3, 5 and 7 be combined, at least some of the time? And many questioned why WG2 existed when stakeholder engagement and communication should inform all ESCom activities as an ongoing process – but is there a need for a WG to look at methods and evaluation of such processes? Participants were keen that WG7 covered decision making more generally, rather than only decision support tools. Possible missing topics included implementation and delivery including behaviour change; conflict resolution or win-win delivery; dealing with extreme events, shocks and uncertainty; evaluation as well as valuation; and cultural ecosystem services.

More generally, it wasn't always clear how the seven working groups supported the overall aim and objectives of ESCom, particularly as the topics were very academically focussed. If the groups are to support policy and practice, not just coordinate academic research, the topics need to be aligned with policy and practice needs. One solution might be to have co-chairs drawn from academia and policy-practice respectively. Furthermore, many were keen that the linkages between the working groups were maintained, as integration was seen as one of the strengths of ESCom. A formal mechanism might be required to do this. The parallel sessions actually prohibited cross-fertilisation of ideas whereas ESCom should encourage stepping out of our comfort zones to learn about each other's work. It was unclear whether ESCom was focussed solely ecosystem services or also in the use of the Ecosystem Approach (a holistic participatory approach to management) as a complementary topic area.

There were many questions about the structure and governance arrangements for ESCom, such as how does one become a member? Will a board and chair be elected and what will be their roles and responsibilities? What are the roles and responsibilities of members? There were a number of 'missing' participants who could be approached to become part of ESCom. These included:

- Marine and coastal interests – particularly through MASTS and Marine Scotland
- Geology through British Geological Survey
- Practitioners – whatever this term means – including land managers, consultants and land agents
- Educationalists from primary through to further education colleges
- Wider policy makers whose domains draw on ecosystem service provision
- Funding councils and other funding bodies
- Business interests – building on links with the Scottish Natural Capital Forum
- Environmental philosophers and ethicists

- Social scientists
- Conflict resolution experts
- Politicians
- Unengaged publics
- Urban researchers and stakeholders
- Spatial planners

There are questions about how the suggestions can be delivered if there are no dedicated resources to make them happen. Most attendees are already too busy and will struggle to take on additional responsibilities.

Whilst participants were supportive of the ethos of collaborating were possible, rather than competing for funding, there were questions about how best to enable collaborative funding bids in a time when research funding is more scarce and ESCom may become a network of +150 individuals.

During the event, the question of how to capture the 'impact' of ESCom was raised and over what time period, as part of the way in which to engage the interest of the business sector and members of the public. The 'lifetime' of ESCom was raised – it is a 'task and finish' group or a network with an indeterminate lifespan? Either way, it will need to adapt to needs over time.

Suggested next steps:
- "Do a few things and do them well"
    - Map existing networks and initiatives to identify where ESCom can add most value – what is its USP – and explain where it complements and coordinates with others
    - Attend existing forums and events – video or blog material to share on website
- Draft governance structures but also principles informing how ESCom should operate
    - Revisit the working group structure and have joint policy/practice & research co-chairs
- Create and maintain a 'brand' presence through website and social media and leaflet – disseminate leaflet at Royal Highland Show on multiple stands
    - Consider whether, and how, to quality-assure the use of the brand on joint papers and presentations
- Tackle the 'jargon' perhaps through a shared glossary; and be consistent in use of terms
- Act as 'match-maker' to connect demand and supply of research, advice or Knowledge Exchange via interactive pin-board
    - Identify knowledge gaps as perceived by members (across all types of organisations including NGOs and business sectors)
    - Annual event where policy/practice derived questions are responded to with best available science
- Provide good practice guidance on frameworks, methods and scenario protocols, including possible standardisation for comparative research (but keeping flexibility to respond to local context and stakeholder needs)
    - Consider how to align various research programmes

- Timetable some 'quick-wins' including a session at the Natural Capital Forum; a special issue; method or topic based workshops (SCRR may be able to help fund workshops)

These and many more ideas will be discussed at the next ESCom meeting on 23rd June 2012, to be held at the ECCI from 11-3pm. Please disseminate widely – it is open to anyone interested in the network. Please register for this via our eventbrite if you plan to attend for catering purposes. If you have any queries about the event please contact Darren Moseley or Chloe Bellamy.

Annex: Event agenda

ESCom Launch Event Agenda

Tuesday 29 April – Thursday 1 May 2014

Tuesday 29 April - Evening Reception

Time	
18.30 - 19.15	Arrival and drinks reception
19.15 - 19.45	Welcome and launch
	• ESCom - Marc Metzger
	• Scottish Environment Link - Deborah Long
	• MEP Struan Stevenson
19.45 - 20.15	Drinks reception and discussion
20.15	Open invitation for dinner at Spoon Café

Wednesday 30 April - Launch Conference

Chair: am Allan Watt - pm Alison Hester

09.00 - 09.30	Registration (coffees and teas available)
09.30 - 09.45	Welcome and launch
09.45 - 10.40	ESCom Introduction - Allan Watt
	• Jan Dick (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology)
	• Mike Smith (Forest Research)
	• Alison Hester (James Hutton Institute)
	• Marc Metzger (The University of Edinburgh)
10.40 - 11.00	Key note speech - Patrick ten Brink
11.00 - 12.00	Coffee break and Facilitated Breakout 1
	What do you want from ESCom?
12.00 - 12.30	Address from Paul Wheelhouse MSP
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch
13.30 - 13.40	Breakout 1 Summary - Kirsty Blackstock
13.40 - 15.10	Scottish Organisations and Ecosystem Services - What do you do / What could we do?
	• Sally Thomas - Scottish Govt.
	• Rebecca Badger - SEPA
	• Jason Hubert - Forestry Commission
	• Mary Christie - SNH
	• Andrew Midgley - Scottish Land & Estates
	• Phoebe Cochrane - SELink
15.10 - 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 - 16.30	Facilitated Break Out 2
	What can you do for ESCom?

16.30 - 16.45	Reflective keynote speech Wolfgang Cramer
16.45 - 16.55	Breakout 2 summary - Kirsty Blackstock
16.55 - 17.30	Wrap up plenary and way forward
18.00 - 19.45	Please join us for drinks at Greyfriar's Bobby bar
20.00	Dinner at Howies (pre-booking and £15 deposit required)

ESCom Launch Event Agenda

Tuesday 29 April – Thursday 1 May 2014

Thursday 1 May - Science Workshop

Chair: Mark Rounsevell

08.45 - 09.10	Registration (coffees and teas available)
	Please remember to register for working group presentations
09.10 - 09.30	Welcome and launch conference summary
09.30 - 10.30	Communication of current research (group activity)
10.30 - 11.00	Coffee Break
11.00 - 12.30	Science Advances Presentations (Working Groups 1-4)
	• WG1 - Frameworks, Indicators and Data
	• WG2 - Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
	• WG3 - Information Tools
	• WG4 - Valuation
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch
13.30 - 15.00	Science Advances Presentations (Working Groups 5-7)
	• WG5 - Modelling
	• WG6 - Futures and Scenarios
	• WG7 - Decision Support
15.00 - 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 - 15.40	Reflection (Chris Spray)
15.40 - 16.30	ESCom Panel Discussion

Next Event…

ESCom Future Governance (Open Event) - 23rd June

The University of Edinburgh

11.00 - 15.00