

Marine Natural Capital Navigators: Meeting Minutes

17th October 2024, 10:00-11:30

Chairing Organisation: NatureScot, Chair: Chris Leakey

Agenda:

Item	Lead
1. Introductions	CL
2. The 'universal' Asset System Matrix - how it works, what's new for this year + questions	Louise Anderson, Marine Natural Capital Evidence Specialist, JNCC
3. Group updates	CL
4. Source-to-sea collaboration across SFNC hubs – Are there any elements of the NatureScot 2023 source to sea report that can be used as a focus?	CL
5. Steering Group Update	CL
6. AOB	CL

Actions from previous meeting:

Action	Lead	Status
1. Organising blue carbon webinar with Scottish Blue Carbon Forum	JJ, SS, CL	In progress

Attendees:

Jessica Jones - JJ (SWT)
James Rigby - JR (CES)
Chris Leakey - CL (NatureScot)
Louise Anderson - LA (JNCC)
Marion Harrald - MH (SEPA)

Sam Collin - SC (HMC)
Mike Spain - MS (CES)
Sarah Marley - SM (SRUC)
James Merchant - JM (MCS)

Apologies:

Calum Duncan (MCS)
Philip Boulcott (MD)
Tavis Potts (UoA)

Rebecca Crawford (SWT)
Kate Bellew (CES)
Hannah Rudman (HR)

Item 2: Presentation from JNCC on “The Universal Asset System Matrix” (UASM)

Louise Anderson (LA) attended the meeting to provide an overview of this the UASM - <https://www.marlin.ac.uk/asm>.

- Falls under the natural capital and Ecosystem Assessment programme, set up to support government ambitions to better incorporate nature into terrestrial and marine decision-making processes.
- Three years to March 2025, DEFRA led programme in partnership with other government bodies and external partners.
- For marine: CEFAS, Environment Agency, JNCC, MMO and Natural England.
- Holistic approach looking at interactions, dependencies and trade-offs between different policy areas and management options with the goal of making better decisions for people and environment.
- UASM sits under the ‘natural capital approach to achieving good environmental status’ project.
- An asset system matrix is a tool to describe and catalogue links between natural assets and the ecosystem services they provide – usually literature review.
- Categorised by estimated level of service delivery + confidence we have in the information.
- Through the GES project, wanted to understand ecosystem service delivery across a wide range of assets at a broad, UK wide scale, within a standardised and flexible framework.
- ‘Universal’ reflects the standardisation. Tools store data and provide conversions.
- Good for comparative analysis and also initial rapid review of existing research and evidence for other projects.
- Currently >4,000 linkages in UASM.
- Assets = habitats and species, with several classification systems.
- Ecosystem services – use Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES) as the base classification. Entries that use other systems get assigned the equivalent CICES code for comparability.
- Each link between an asset and an ecosystem service is given a link, which is the ecosystem service supply (high, medium, low) + the confidence in the evidence (high, medium, low) – i.e. peer reviewed and published literature gets high confidence assigned.
- Still want users to interrogate those linkages to make their own value judgements, so this is intended as an early indication.

Challenges:

1. Categorical service supply estimates are very broad – our understanding of how asset condition effects service delivery is limited in many areas.
2. Skew towards asset service linkages where service provision is high, as research tends to focus on more high value ecosystem services.
3. Understanding the difference between true gaps (where a service is not provided by the given asset) and evidence gaps (no data in the UASM to construct a linkage).
4. Users don’t really add their own data to it – this is possible but this influences how we consider UASM beyond the life of the project.

Ongoing work:

- Maintaining an updating evidence base – Marine Biological Association.
- Exploring how to visualize data in UASM in a more spatial way.
- Improving user experience using feedback.
- What happens to UASM after the project?

Following the presentation there was some discussion on the following points:

- JM asked if this tool was applicable for understanding the economic and socio-economic impacts of management decisions. LA said UASM is best applied as a high-level starting point to get a shortlist of the evidence for ecosystem services associated with those habitats. When considering decision making it has useful applications in participatory stakeholder approaches, demonstrating ecosystem services to stakeholders that may not be immediately obvious.
- Query on whether the National Marine Plan 2 team are using this tool or incorporating this into their own natural capital work happening in parallel with the risk register work, as they seem to be doing something similar. UASM could be used as a starting point and then refined as needed.
 - **ACTION – CL to check is NMP2 is considering UASM in natural capital methodology.**
- Clarification was asked on how different classification systems were converted to CICES, LA states that conversion tables are available for this, and they have recently updated to newest CICES v.5.2.
- SC asked who the target user was and a wider query around accessibility for using this as a communication tool. LA responded that to adhere to classification systems, the matrix became less user friendly for people without a background in ecosystem services or habitat classification, so you would need some level of background in marine natural capital to navigate this tool. However, it has been used in the context of someone with a background helping to navigate and explain what the codes and classification systems mean.
- Discussing the skew towards habitats and species high service index, there was discussion around the value of spatially mapping provision and where that coincides with them having low sensitivity to different pressures, from a spatial planning perspective. LA hopes that the literature reviews this year will fill in some of the less obvious or not low provision relationships.

Item 2: Group Updates

Marine Conservation Society – Workstream that proposes ways that governments can raise finance in the blue economy and harness the benefits. One proposal around blue bonds to be pitched to UK and devolved governments, where anyone could invest (individuals or private sector). The funds pot would go towards investing in the blue economy, so the government would get a return in socioeconomic benefits (job creation, economic growth) and it would pay a return to the investors as well. Not much on this topic in developed countries.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Blue carbon mapping project reports launched. The wildlife trusts, RSPB and WWF commissioned SAMS to create reports for four different regions around the UK, including Scotland. The technical summary is here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Scotland%20-%20technical%20summary%20%283%29.pdf>

NatureScot – Expecting more information on NMP2 methods soon. UKRI had a funding call for 3-4 year research projects that would work under the “Resilient Coastal Communities and Seas Programme”: <https://www.ukcoastalresilience.org/project/resilient-coastal-communities-and-seas-programme> - CL has light involvement in two which have a natural capital angle. One is TRACC ([Transformative Research Actions for Resilient Coastal Communities \(TRACC\) - Coast R Network](#)) where one of the case study regions is the Firth of Clyde. The other is TRANSECTS ([TRANSitions In Energy For Coastal Communities Over Time And Space \(TRANSECTS\) - Coast R Network](#)), led by Heriot-watt taking a historical approach on previous energy transitions with a natural capital assessment. Plus, one small NatureScot commission before the end of the financial year to review

whether there's opportunities to add more coastal habitats to the [Natural Capital Asset Index – UPDATE \(11/11/24\) – no tenders were received so this is not progressing \(yet\)](#).

Howell Marine Consulting – New video “ECOWind Policy Masterclass: Five Capitals Marine Management” which can be found here [New ECOWind Policy Masterclass: Five Capitals Marine Management - ECOWind](#)

Item 3: Source-to-Sea

In spring, we had a conversation around how we can use source to sea thinking, and what we know about connectivity between land and marine environments, to stimulate discussion and collaboration with the other hubs.

- **ACTION** – CL would be happy to invite himself to other hub meetings and have a discussion about collaboration, and potentially start threads on different basecamp groups to open this conversation up.



Q1. Are there current or upcoming projects linked to the **Land Management Connectors** hub that could extend their scope to consider benefits across the S2S spectrum, to serve as proof of concept for S2S issues and solutions?

Regarding the **Community Benefits Network**, are there projects that can stimulate dialogue between upstream-downstream communities that are connected by hitherto overlooked S2S effects (e.g. Black Devon catchment + Restoration Forth)?



Q2. Geospatial data management is a challenge for S2S approaches – can the **Digital Enablers** help? What are the barriers and opportunities to combining terrestrial-riverine-estuarine-marine data sets or models that relate to water flows and the transport/movement of nutrients, carbon, species and pollution?



Q3. What ideas do the **Nature Finance Pioneers** have that could leverage the S2S concept to ensure that the effects, dependencies and benefits of sometimes geographically distant nature-based solutions are recognised, and then used to attract investment? e.g.:

- might the Woodland Water Code evolve to attract buyers from transitional and coastal waters, for whom the benefits may be less easy to link to specific woodland restoration projects?
- are there projects, ideas or ambitions about Scottish/UK water or nutrient markets that marine colleagues should be involved in?

SC – In terms of asset indexes, how much crossover is there in terms of assets on land and the recognition of services they provide to supporting marine environment and knock on services? When talking about MPAs/marine restoration etc. pollution from land etc is captured, but its far more nuanced than that.

CL – agrees, example is concerns around seagrass restoration in the Firth of Forth – is there an issue with nutrient input from land that needs to be addressed for all that effort to be worthwhile. Could we be doing things on land that could be beneficial, like riparian planting in the Forth valley? LA noted that the marine-uASM project is being mirrored by similar Defra-funded efforts for terrestrial

and freshwater. Hopefully the broad approach will be similar and the tools can ultimately merge and reveal source-to-sea connectivity of ecosystem service effects and dependencies.

SC – question around strategic compensation, which in England has focused around MPAs, kittiwake towers and predator eradication, but in Scotland is looking at a wider catalogue of measures. Could use strategic compensation to support activities on land that could be equally as impactful as planting seagrass, for example?

CL – Three tiers of opportunities. Tier 1 = strategic compensation work, tightly controlled with legislative process and regulation. Tier 2 = what happens with net gain and nature positive development because its policy driven rather than legislation driven. Tier 3 = voluntary restoration projects driven by community groups and NGOs etc. There might be a lot more scope for trying different things at the third tier.

Item 5: Steering Group Update

CL as steering group member updated on impending change in chairs: [👉 New Co-Chairs appointed for the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital](#) and direction of the forum.

SC suggestion that perhaps the hub representatives that join steering group meetings have separate meetings to discuss opportunities for hubs to coordinate outside of the high-level steering group meetings.

Item 6: AOB

Next meeting January after Christmas, potentially with update on Sea the value project.

Summary of Actions:

Ongoing from Previous meeting	
1. Organising blue carbon webinar/s	JJ, SS, CL
New Actions	
1. Check if NMP2 team is considering UASM in natural capital methodology	CL
2. CL to invite himself to other hub meetings and discuss collaboration, and potentially start threads on different basecamp groups to open this conversation up	CL