

EAWG3: Decision-making frameworks and the Ecosystem Approach: application to policy and practice

EAWG 3 is an opportunity to discuss the selection and use of frameworks to guide research, decision-making and management for ecosystem services. Researchers in the RESAS Ecosystem Services Theme (EST) are currently developing an “integrated framework” which is useful for several purposes, from decision-making in Ecosystem Service assessment, research, management, and monitoring. The EAWG 3 meeting will use this work as a basis for discussing if and how such a framework can be relevant and useful to EAWG members.

Context

The RESAS Ecosystem Services Theme (EST)¹ is currently developing an integrated framework to aid decision making in Ecosystem Service assessment, research, management and monitoring.

Frameworks can have many meanings and many purposes. Within our planned research we intend to use the framework:

- To improve understanding of the effects of environmental asset degradation on ecosystem service provision.
- To improve understanding of the adaptive capacity of environmental assets to deliver final ecosystem services under a range of pressures and drivers of change (including changes to land use and farming systems).
- To assess the utility of the Ecosystem Approach as applied in practice to specific case studies, and the potential for wider application at a range of spatial scales with the benefits, difficulties and uncertainties this might entail.

This “integrated framework” intends to incorporate and help application of an Ecosystem Approach (CBD, 2012). The current version of this proposed framework is shown in Figure 1 on the next page. This framework can be of relevance to EAWG members as, within Scotland, the EA is being viewed as a broad objective across a range of policies including Climate Change, National Planning Framework, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Land Use Strategy. For example, [Proposal 8](#) of the Land Use Strategy sets out the need to “*Demonstrate how the ecosystem approach could be taken into account in relevant decisions made by public bodies to deliver wider benefits, and provide practical guidance*”.

Rationale for EAWG3’s focus on frameworks

The Ecosystem Approach, and associated Ecosystem Services assessments, are being incorporated into a wide range of Scotland’s policy objectives and are now even being tested on-the-ground for practical management. This means that there is currently a great deal of interest in developing, testing and applying a framework that can assist with integrated decision-making.

In addition, the EST team wants to ensure that the research it conducts (to underpin and build capacity in Ecosystem Services and the Ecosystem Approach) in next four years is interconnected, relevant and accessible to end-user expectations and needs. An integrated framework will assist with this.

EAWG3 provides an opportunity for EAWG members:

- To consider the pros and cons of frameworks in use, and discuss the EST’s proposed integrated decision-making framework. For example, might it be applicable for your sector? Might it be applicable at the scale you work at?
- Exchange knowledge, expertise, lessons learnt on decision-making frameworks and the EA, their application and incorporation from policy to on-the ground practice.
- Develop collaborative research in areas of mutual interest.

¹ One of eight themes in the [Scottish Government’s two strategic research programmes](#) Environmental Change and Food and Rural Industries (2011-2016).

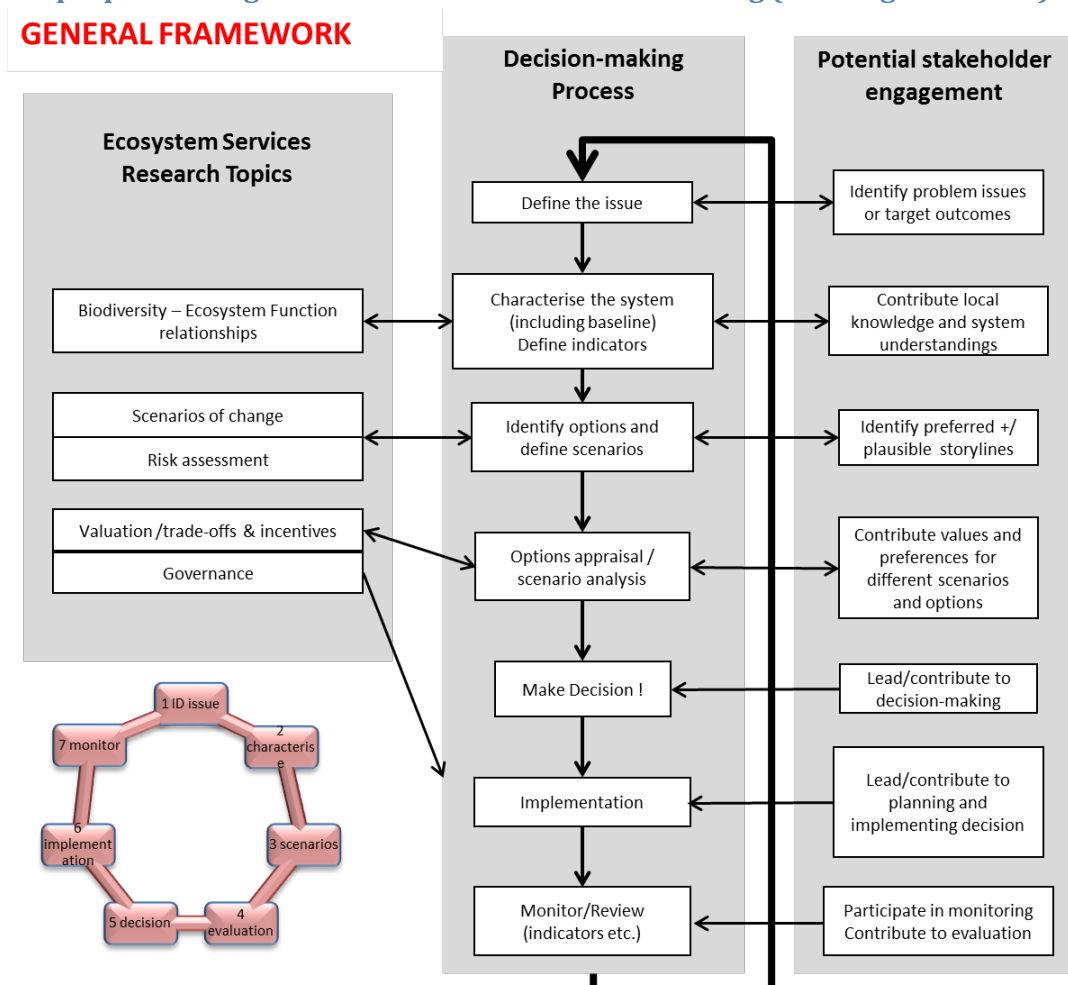
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Our “integrated framework” aims to have several uses:

- To show the steps in an ecosystem approach applicable over multiple scales,
- To link the research activities within EST with those in the other seven SG programme themes, and with the relevant activities carried out by other organisations,
- To provide a mechanism for identifying methodologies appropriate at each stage of the cycle, and different scales,
- To provide a mechanism to identify the data and knowledge available or required at each stage of the cycle and,
- To provide a mechanism to identify, for a particular case study, what stages are being addressed and what needs to be done.

The framework should be relevant to decision making consistent with the Ecosystem Approach at a range of scales, from national-scale policy decisions to local (catchment or sub-catchment) scale land management decisions. In this way it will help us to systematically work through the issues of applying an ecosystem approach at a range of scales, and work together where necessary to identify and address gaps in knowledge.

Figure 1: Our proposed integrated framework for decision making (working document)



This framework is necessarily a work in progress and suggestions and comments on the framework are always appreciated, not just at EAWG 3!