

MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2010

[A National Ecosystem Services Network](#)

For the past twelve months, the Australia 21 ecosystems team has put its efforts into promoting the development of a National Ecosystem Service Strategy (NESS) and a National Ecosystem Services Network (NESN).

This work is led by Geoff Gorrie, Chair of the A21 Ecosystems team that includes Australia 21 Fellow Mike Archer, Australia 21 Scholars Peter Ampt, Phillipa Rowland and Simone Maynard, Dr Jeremy Thompson, Dr Allan Dale and A21 Chairman Professor Bob Douglas.

Evidence of the diminishing health of Australian ecosystems is unfortunately not hard to find, with evident decline in soil fertility, fisheries stocks, water quality and quantity and loss of carbon sinks that help local/regional climate regulation. There is both a national and a global sense of urgency about the need for a coherent strategy to preserve ecosystems and the services they provide to humans. This is highlighted in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment conducted by the United Nations (access the Assessment home page [here](#)) and recognised by the Obama Administration which on 6 January 2009 announced a new section of its Department of Agriculture, entitled the Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets, to be headed by a new appointee Dr Sally Collins (see [here](#)).

The concept of ecosystem services is becoming more widely recognised in research and policy and has the potential to provide the framework for better planning and management, leading to ecologically sustainable development. An ecosystem services approach is being applied to Southeast Queensland catchments and is becoming recognised as leading the world. Research networks are already focused on ecosystem service provision. Some groundbreaking work with indigenous communities has highlighted the possibilities for payments to groups who, by their actions, are enhancing ecosystem service provision on the vast and important indigenous estate.

Great potential can be generated by fostering enthusiasm and passion from innovators and bringing them together in a flexible network that brings together the interests, skills and capacities of Federal and State Governments, the private sector, research communities, local regional bodies and civil society. An approach that encourages collaboration and ownership and builds on existing activity, while creating opportunities for a broad consistent approach to the national valuation of the

essential suite of services could, Australia 21 believes, contribute very substantially to the solution of many natural resource issues including biodiversity conservation, bio-sequestration of carbon and indigenous employment.

Cross-sectoral learning from each other appears to have the greatest likelihood of success in rapidly building ecosystem services into the future Australian economy.

In its preliminary proposal for a NESN, the Australia 21 Ecosystems team is suggesting that NESN members would have the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of a world leading strategy to be at the heart of the activities of regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies around Australia. The NESN would have responsibility for overseeing the data needs, the research activity, and the development of a framework for a coordinated regional approach to the assessment and management of ecosystem services across the nation.

To further develop these ideas for an NESN, Australia 21 is currently seeking support from funding agents, to undertake discussions and a roundtable with the many stakeholders who would be needed to make the national strategy operational.

website: <http://shapingaustraliasfuture.blogspot.com/2010/03/national-ecosystem-services-network.html>