

The SEQ Ecosystem Services Project



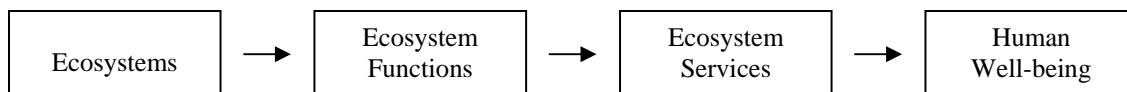
Ecosystem Services are the goods and services provided by natural (and semi-natural) ecosystems that benefit, sustain and support the well-being of people. They include the production of food and medicines, the regulation of climate and disease, provision of productive soils and clean water, and landscape opportunities for recreation and spiritual benefits.

Ecosystem services are fundamental to the maintenance of a healthy economy. Geographic areas that provide ecosystem services comprise vital 'green infrastructure' for any region. For too long in industrial economies, ecosystem services have been inadequately recognised and hence undervalued. When ecosystem services are lost they can be extremely - or even prohibitively - costly to reproduce.

In response to a growing interest in ecosystem services and their role in supporting the economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability of South-East Queensland, SEQ Catchments has been working with expert panels and technical working groups to develop a framework for ecosystem services. The SEQ Ecosystem Services Framework is based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment established by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The SEQC approach has been to:

- assess available data describing the environmental and ecological resources of SEQ;
- identify and map the ecosystem functions of SEQ;
- establish relationships between ecosystem functions and services;
- map ecosystem services in SEQ;
- identify the benefits (constituents of well-being) and beneficiaries of ecosystem services in SEQ; and
- explore processes and techniques for evaluating benefits in various planning, management and policy-making contexts.



Mapping ecosystem services will a) help decision makers identify losses and benefits of further development and areas where offsets might apply b) help in assessing the sustainability of current and future regional plans and c) assist natural resource and land managers to maintain ecosystem service provision over time. The Regional Landscape and Open Space Advisory Committee (who provide specialised advice to the Regional Planning Minister) have recently endorsed the interim approach taken by the project and its list of ecosystem functions.

More generally, applications of the SEQC Ecosystem Services Framework can include:

- informing the review of the SEQ Regional Plan;
- identifying strategic locations for offsets, rehabilitation and restoration, and climate change mitigation sites;
- identifying potential alternative land uses with multiple values in non-urban areas; and
- guiding the regional application of federally funded ecosystem services and natural resource management schemes.

In 2008, work will include finalising the ecosystem services maps; identifying where and by whom ecosystem service benefits are received; using historical data to identify changes in ecosystem service provision; identifying relationships between ecosystem services and constituents of human well-being; and applying the framework to specific case studies in SEQ.

Over 140 individuals from government and non-government organisations have participated in the Project to date. The SEQ Ecosystem Services Project has received financial support from the Federal Government (through NHT funding), Queensland Government agencies (Department of Infrastructure and Planning & Environmental Protection Agency) and Brisbane City Council. Technical support has also been received from Brisbane Regional Environment Council and the University Sunshine Coast.

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