

Part I: Questionnaire for Country Participants

Name: Michael Vardon

Affiliation: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Country: Australia

1. What types of environmental and economic accounts have already been implemented in your country and for how long? (If none, go to question 6)

Environmental accounting first produced by ABS in 1994.

Past

- Mineral Account, 1998
- Environment Protection Expenditure Account (whole of economy), 1997, 1998
- Environment Protection Expenditure Account (mining and manufacturing), 2002
- Environment Protection Expenditure Account (local government), 2000, 2002, 2004
- Fish Account, 1999
- Energy Account, 1996
- Energy and Greenhouse Gas Account, 2001
- Water Account, 2000, 2004
- Annual balance sheet including land, subsoil and timber assets 1994-2004

Current

- Annual balance sheet including land, subsoil and timber assets, next due 2005
- Four yearly water account, next due 2007/08
- Biennial environment expenditure account for local government, next due 2006

2. Have you used or are you aware of any use made by others in your country of the handbook of National Accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting 2003*, commonly referred to as SEEA-2003 and/or of the handbook of National Accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting – An Operational Manual (2000)*? How useful were these documents in the implementation of the accounts?

ABS finds useful.

Very limited use of the manuals outside of the ABS.

3. Please, describe the major difficulties/constraints that have been encountered during the compilation of these accounts (e.g., financial support, lack of human resources, training, etc.).

Lack of financial resources, leading to

- ad hoc and inconsistent data collections

Human resources:

- small numbers of people with knowledge/skill needed to produce accounts makes it very sensitive to staff losses
- lack of career prospects leads to staff turnover (ABS has lost several staff with valued expertise as they search for careers elsewhere, both inside and outside the ABS)
- Small numbers mean training is largely ad hoc and often self directed as those with the skills do not have time (and sometimes the necessary skills/personal qualities) that enable them to train others.

Institutional support sometimes weak. Within the ABS environment statistics comes under the broad banner of economic statistics where it often gets lost amongst the 'core' economic data (eg national accounts). Environmental accounting still seen as an 'optional extra' in many parts of the ABS.

4. Was the implementation of the accounts driven from a policy demand or was it supply driven?

Supply driven to begin with, but now strong demand for the water accounts at least.

5. Have environmental-economic accounts been used for policy making in your country? If so, what were the policy issues?

Not explicitly, but used in economic analysis that has supported policy development and review.

Efficient use of water and determining the 'proper price' for water are key policy issues

6. Does your country have future plans for starting/continuing and/or expanding the implementation of environmental- economic accounting? Please describe.

Program has been reduced in recent years. Expansion very unlikely in short-term. Any expansion in the mid-term is dependant on funding, which is not assured.

7. What seems to be the major constraints in further implementing environmental-economic accounting in your country?

Within ABS there has been a significant reduction of resources/support for the environment accounting program. Staff levels in the area responsible for environmental account have fallen from 22 to 18 over 18 months.

Those with the knowledge and skill that remain are under increasing pressure, having to produce accounts as well as train new staff.

Outside of the ABS established data providers and policy advisors wary of ABS intrusion into “there” domain.

Policy makers are still unsure how to use accounts.

8. In your opinion, what should be the role of the Task Force on environmental-economic accounting?

To ensure environmental accounting is valued at senior levels internationally, and to the extent possible, help with this recognition within nations.

9. In your opinion, which activities of the Task Force would best facilitate in your country the implementation of environmental-economic accounting and the promotion of its uses at the policy level?

The last part of the activity (a), the preparation of training materials, would help greatly in Australia. Training materials for short (one week) seminars/workshops are one aspect of this but may the task force could consider developing a ‘text’ book, like those used in universities, with the theory intermixed with some practical exercises.

Additional comments:

Part II: Questionnaire for Representatives of International Organizations

Name: Michael Vardon

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Country: Australia

1. Please describe current activities of your organization in the area of environmental and economic accounts.

- Annual balance sheet including land, subsoil and timber assets.
- Four yearly water account.
- Biennial environment expenditure account for local government.

2. Please, describe future activities in the area of environmental and economic accounts.

No increase to current activity is possible in the short term. If additional resource are found they are likely to be modest and would probably be used to improve water accounts.

3. In your opinion, what should be the role of the Task Force on environmental-economic accounting?

Increased recognition of environmental accounting among statistical agencies. Environmental statistics and accounting are still seen as backwater in Australia.

Improved recognition of the usefulness of environmental accounts in supporting assessments of environmental and sustainability policies (within and outside of governments).

May be assist with the development of career paths for environment accountants (i.e. not just initial training, advanced training). At present it is a small field with very limited prospects.

4. In your opinion, which activities of the Task Force would best facilitate the implementation of environmental-economic accounting in the countries?

This would vary between countries.

Environmental accounts need to be seen as one part of information framework. For some nations environmental accounts may not be the most appropriate use of resources (e.g. other environmental statistics may be more beneficial to compile).

The last part of the activity (a), the preparation of training materials, would help greatly in Australia. Training materials for short (one week) seminars/workshops are one aspect of this but may the task force could consider developing a 'text' book, like those used in universities, with the theory intermixed with some practical exercises.

Handbooks and seminars are important but I think that more long lasting bonds would be needed to foster the development of environmental accounting in some nations. This could be in the form of more long-term assistance. Such assistance could be in commenting on proposed methodologies, reviewing draft documents, etc.

5. In your opinion, which activities of the Task Force would best facilitate the promotion of the uses of environmental-economic accounting at the policy level?

Holding seminars specifically for policy makers (and academics).

Involving academics and policy makers in meetings about the practical and theoretical aspects of environmental accounting.

UN and other expert involvement in such seminars and meetings may give them a profile they may not otherwise achieve in some countries.

Additional comments:

The development of training programs (as distinct from how to manuals) would be a useful addition to the roles of the task force.

Exchanges of staff between national government agencies may also be beneficial. E.g. Government officers from Thailand will be visiting the ABS for two weeks in October to learn more about ABS environment statistics. Similarly ABS staff have also visited Thailand to learn from them.

The discussion group, which was promoted last year, may have been a good idea but the mechanics of getting into the site was not easy and hence I (and others at the ABS) did not participate. Could this set-up be simplified?

Finally I am concerned that by taking in the task force meeting that I am raising expectations of significant ABS involvement. The ABS environmental accounting program is not as strong as it once was. The ABS is under great deal of budget pressure and the area of the ABS that produces the environmental accounts has gone from 22 to 12 staff over the past 18 months.