



# Implementing the SEEA



# The Australian Experience





# Outline



History of environmental accounting in Australia

- Timeline of environmental accounting in Australia

Key lessons

- Need sustained high level institutional support
- Importance of international engagement
- Producing accounts requires strong partnerships
- Experimental accounts are very useful
- Accounts get better over time and usefulness increases when repeated
- Communication is essential





# Timeline of environmental accounting in Australia

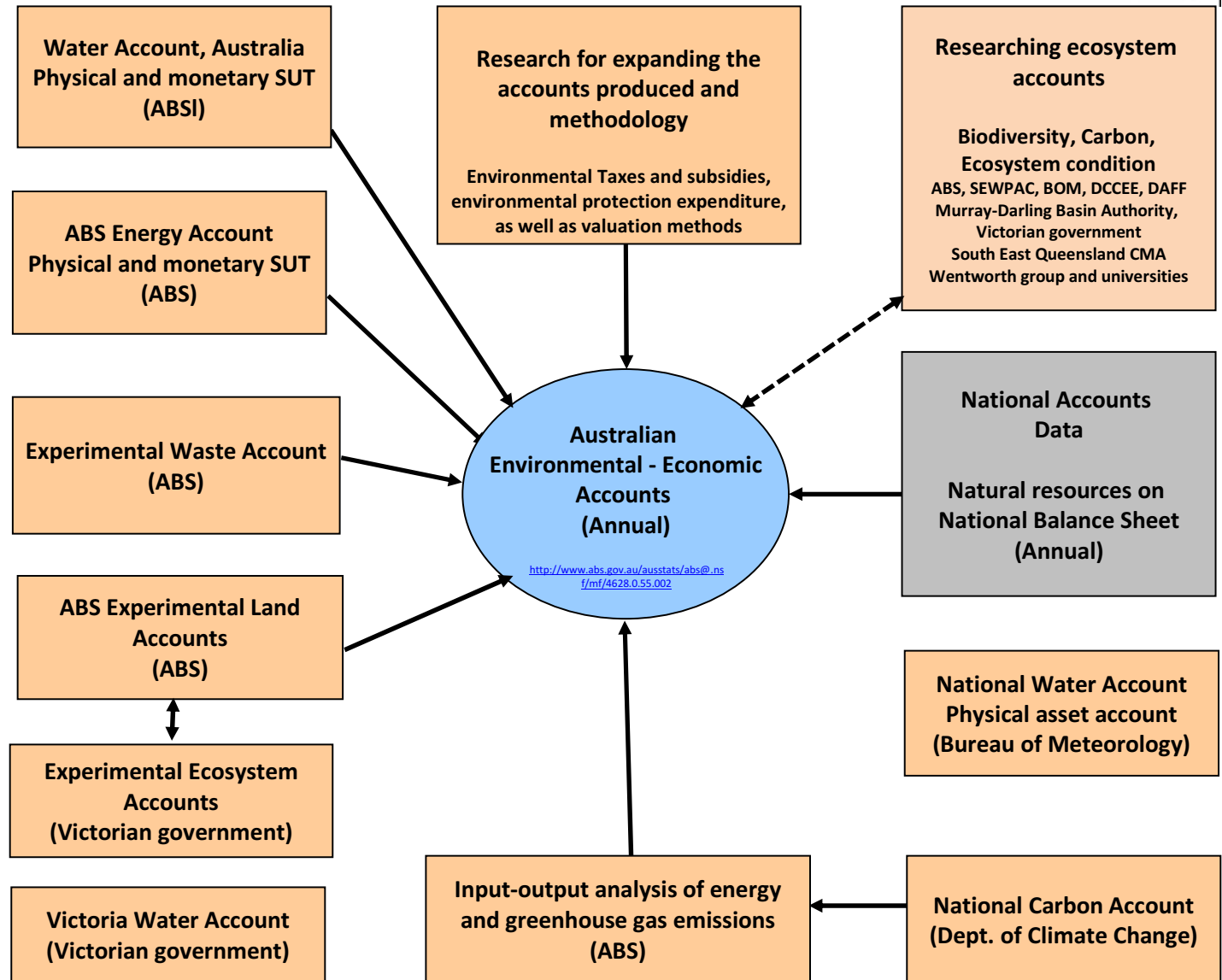
(Brief and only showing first time of account production)



- 1991 Greenhouse Gas emissions (Department of Environment)
- 1993 SNA revision and 1<sup>st</sup> edition of SEEA (EC, IMF, OECD, UN, WB)
- 1995 Natural resources on balance sheet (ABS)
- 1996 Energy account (ABS)
- 1998 Mineral account (ABS)
- 1999 Fish account (ABS)
  - Environmental expenditure, local government (ABS)
- 2000 Water account – PSUT (ABS)
  - Greenhouse gas emission accounts (ABS)
- 2003 SEEA revision (UN)
- 2008 SNA revision (EC, IMF, OECD, UN, WB)
- 2011 Land account (ABS)
  - Water account – Asset (BOM)
- 2012 SEEA Central Framework (EC, FAO, IMF, OECD, UN, WB)
  - Completing the Picture (ABS)
  - Environmental Taxes (ABS)
- 2013 SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and Application and Extensions (UN, et al)
- 2013 Waste accounts (ABS)
  - Ecosystem accounts (DSE)
  - Environmental Accounting Landscape (BOM)



# Environmental accounting in Australia







## Need sustained high level institution support



- Support within the ABS for environmental accounting has been strong for nearly two decades
  - Building knowledge and capacity to build accounts takes time
  - Building understanding of accounts and how to use them also takes time
  - To persevere with accounts, especially with limited funding and sometimes opposition, requires strong commitment and leadership
- Support outside the ABS has been variable but increasing
- Support for water accounting in Australia driven substantially by a prolonged drought



# Importance of international engagement



- A key feature of the Australia experience has been the engagement with international processes.
- This has allowed:
  - Us to learn from the activities of other agencies around the world
  - The identification of common theoretical and practical problems and for these to be worked through cooperatively with a highly skilled, knowledgeable and intelligent colleagues
  - The establishment of international standards and recommendations which can be applied at a national level (and we would have been unable to develop these with our resources)



# Need strong partnerships



- Government partnerships
  - ABS and Bureau of Meteorology (BOM)
  - ABS and Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC)
  - ABS and Dept. of Climate Change (DIICCSRTE)
  - ABS and State Governments
  - BOM and CSIRO
- Academic institutions and non-government organisations
  - ABS and Australian National University, University of Sydney, Queensland University, Wentworth Group
- Professions
  - Geographic information professionals working hand-in-hand with accountants, economists, scientists and statisticians



# Experimental accounts are useful



Virtually every environmental account has been published first as either a research paper or experimental estimates. This approach:

- Provides a practical focus for work and learning by doing
- Allows the development of the accounts to be a collaborative process
- Comments on the results and methodology used to be critiqued ahead of official release
- Potential users to see what an account actually looks like and determine how it could meet particular needs
- Refinement of accounts over time to improve quality, especially the relevance to policy development and evaluation





## Accounts get better overtime and usefulness increases when repeated



The repeated production of accounts leads to increased quality and allows efficiencies in compilation process gained through:

- Increased knowledge and skills of staff
- On-going development and use of information technology to support production
- The compilation process to feedback comments to primary data sources and hence improve the quality of the primary data
- Data gaps and deficiencies to be addressed through the identification or creation of new data sources
- The construction of useful indicators from the accounts (e.g. Gross Value of Irrigated Production per ML of water)
- For accounts to be built into the policy process



# Communication is essential



- Accounts are generally poorly understood by both potential producers and users of accounts.
- Communication needs to recognise and target different audiences:
  - Producers and users of accounts
  - General versus specific users of accounts
  - Scientists, economists, accountants, statisticians (especially understanding their world views and motivations for either wanting to produce or use accounts)
- Communication needs to go beyond traditional tabular data presentations and to also extend into some of the analysis of the accounts at least in the early phases of implementation



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