

# science summary



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SCHO0805BJMI-E-P

## Developing social appraisal criteria for the Environment Agency

Science Summary SC010044/SR3

During 2001-04, a research consortium headed by the consultancy Shared Practice undertook a major research study, 'Joining Up', to clarify the nature and extent of the social dimension of the Environment Agency's work.

This report describes one of the components of the Joining Up study, namely, the research undertaken during 2003 to develop a set of criteria for social appraisal for the Environment Agency.

The two main drivers for this work were:

- the requirement under Defra's Section 4 Guidance to the Environment Agency to take social and economic considerations into account in the Agency's work on environmental protection and enhancement; and in line with this:
- the opportunity to strengthen the social criteria within the Environment Agency's newly developed integrated appraisal process.

To develop the social criteria, a comprehensive review of existing criteria and indicators relevant to the Environment Agency was undertaken. From this, an initial set of 14 indicators was then developed and tested in detailed interviews with Environment Agency heads of function. As a result of feedback from the interviews, a final set of 14 social criteria was agreed. These were subsequently incorporated into the Environment Agency's Policy Appraisal Guidance.

These criteria were also used to help shape the Environment Agency's social policy, published in 2003, and to identify the social issues of most importance across the Environment Agency's functions, and the priorities for future work on social issues.

Different functions identified different priority social issues, as follows:

- **Environmental quality.** *Public participation and stakeholder involvement* was their top concern, particularly in relation to the Water Framework Directive, working with farmers and rural

communities, and effective waste strategy development;

- **Process Industries Regulation** identified two priorities:
  - *effective engagement with local communities*, especially early investment in good engagement to avoid excessive costs through later conflict;
  - a clear *corporate social responsibility framework* covering the Agency's responsibilities to poorer communities and on health, liveability and regeneration;
- **Flood risk management (policy)** identified *health, safety and wellbeing* as their top priority, given their responsibilities for saving lives by reducing flooding, and the health benefits of reducing public fear and anxiety of flood risk;
- **Flood risk management (National Capital Programme Management Service)** identified *working with local communities and other stakeholders* as their main priority, given their need to negotiate with local authorities etc (for example on planning permission for flood defence projects) and with other agencies (for example on heritage and wildlife impacts), as well as taking public views into account;
- **Water resources** stressed the need to balance the environmental impacts of water abstraction with the needs of society, and thus identified *social justice* issues as a priority, alongside the need to promote greater awareness of social issues among Environment Agency staff;
- **Recreation and Navigation** identified *wellbeing* as their top priority as their work offered the potential for high-grade leisure opportunities that could provide even greater educational and enjoyable experiences. Reducing the exclusion of disadvantaged groups was also a priority.

In summary, the research concluded that the key areas for future work were:

- Frameworks to enable Environment Agency staff to better understand social issues;

- Resources to build awareness, understanding and skills so staff could deal with social issues in more structured and consistent ways;
- Guidance for staff on working on social processes, especially community and stakeholder involvement;
- Greater promotion within and outside the Environment Agency of the importance of social issues to the Agency's environmental responsibilities, not least to allow staff to have the confidence to invest time in this work, and to share experience;
- Mechanisms were needed to measure the full *social* costs and benefits of the Environment Agency's activities, which were currently under-represented in Agency thinking.

This summary relates to information from Science Project SC010044, reported in detail in the following output(s):-

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