

Undertaking Corporate Natural Capital Accounting (CNCA)

Mark Gough – Head of Sustainability at The Crown Estate, tells us about his experience of trialling the innovative CNCA framework.



The Crown Estate chose to pilot CNCA on its Windsor Estate which covers around 6,400 hectares of parkland, woodland, and gardens.

The Crown Estate's role is to make sure that the land and property it invests in and manages are sustainably worked, developed and enjoyed to deliver the best value over the long term.

How has your organisation benefitted from participating in the Natural Capital Committee's CNCA pilot and what lessons have you learned?

Undertaking corporate natural capital accounting has enabled us to show the wider societal value generated by the Windsor Estate from its natural capital assets so that we can better understand its total contribution alongside the financial costs and benefits in our accounting framework.

We've also learned that we need more data in order to show the full extent of the benefits provided by the Estate, such as its important flood attenuation service and its internationally significant biodiversity value.

If we developed a full set of accounts, it could be useful in budgetary discussions and the allocation of resources across the organisation. The framework could also be a useful tool for performance management and could engage staff in different parts of the organisation, from site manager to centralised staff responsible for budgets and priority setting.

Lastly, the exercise was a cross business initiative and the finance team played a key role in this, helping to develop robust systems for measurement and stimulating discussion of natural capital at a senior management level.

What was your approach to undertaking the pilot?

We decided a top down approach to implementing CNCA would be the most use to us in the first instance. We used an ecosystem services model which has the advantage that it requires less onsite data and monitoring and resources to deliver. However, this also limits the ecosystem service benefits that can be included, is less sensitive to changes over time, and is subject to modelling error.

Notwithstanding this, it's excellent at showing us a helicopter view of the benefits of our site to show us where we need to look a bit closer.



The Long Walk in Windsor Great Park, part of the Windsor Estate

Would you recommend others to undertake their own CNCA, and if so, what advice would you give them?

We'd certainly advocate other organisations to undertake CNCA. We would suggest that they first consider what they want to get out of it to help to set the initial scope (do they have a lot of sites, what level of decision making are they trying to affect, what resources are available, what data are available?), this will help to determine whether their organisation wants to take a top down approach like us, or to look at the detailed site level in the first instance.

The framework is flexible to enable an organisation to get out of it the information it needs.

What are your organisation's next steps regarding corporate natural capital accounting?

At Windsor, we're hoping that as an additional year's data becomes available, the account could then be augmented to reflect the maintenance of natural capital value over time.

We're also undertaking the further application of CNCA across our entire portfolio.

For more information on Corporate Natural Capital Accounting or other aspects of the NCC's work, please visit our [website](#), follow us on Twitter: @Nat_Cap_Com, or email the [Secretariat](#).