

## **Baseline Evidence Reviews: Frequently asked questions**

The following questions and answers explain the status of these reviews, how they were prepared, and how they will be used by Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS).

### **Why have we undertaken these reviews?**

We wanted to be clear in our Strategic Plan about where we would focus our analytical work. In order to do so, we needed to ensure that we understood the current position, recent trends and whether Scotland is on track to achieve its environmental targets and objectives.

Combined with our prioritisation criteria and feedback from our consultation, this work has helped us to identify 14 issues of most concern for our analytical programme.

### **What do the reviews cover?**

The reviews have a deliberately narrow scope. They are a snapshot of high-level key trends in each environmental category, focusing on publicly available data from official sources accessed up to August 2022. They are intended to provide a snapshot of the evidence rather than a fully comprehensive picture and, as such, do not include all interdependencies. Where our initial assessment of the evidence has identified potential concerns or issues that warrant further scrutiny, more detailed monitoring and analysis will be considered.

### **What methodology was used?**

The reviews scanned across each topic area, identifying key publicly available data sources and summarising what they tell us about how the environment is changing in

Scotland. The scope of the work was narrow and our focus was on National or Official Statistics and Annual Reports and their related data, mainly from Government and other national organisations, to obtain a high-level summary of current environmental conditions and to ensure confidence in the quality of the information.

### **What was out of scope?**

Only publicly available information was considered. We were not looking for individual research reports or grey literature. Future analysis will consider whether performance trends relate to issues of compliance with or effectiveness of environmental legislation and scrutinise the detail underpinning the trends identified.

### **Who was consulted on the reviews?**

Initial drafts of the evidence reviews were shared with key analytical contacts in relevant organisations (such as SEPA and NatureScot) to check that no key sources had been missed and that we had not misinterpreted any of the information. As we move into more detailed analysis we expect to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

### **I can't find information on a topic I'm interested in. Why is it missing?**

As set out in our Strategic Plan, we are structuring our work around eight environmental categories and this is why we have produced eight baseline reviews. There will be overlaps amongst these categories and, to minimise duplication, topics have been covered under the most relevant category. For example, while there are a wide range of issues considered in the waste review, we have considered the health impacts of the application of sewage sludge to land in the 'population, human health and cultural heritage' review while plastic waste on beaches is covered in the 'water' review.

If a topic is not included, it may be because it is covered in another review, or we did not find any relevant published data at this point. However, the topic will still form part of ongoing horizon scanning activity and could be explored in the future with relevant organisations.

### **What will you do with these reviews?**

The reviews have helped us to identify 14 priority areas for further analysis as set out in our Strategic Plan.

Our monitoring and analysis work for these priority areas will develop our understanding of how things are changing, the causes of this, and how policy and regulatory decisions affect this. All of our monitoring and analysis work will be focused on identifying areas where further investigation may be necessary, then supporting active investigations, and assessing whether the changes that have been made in response to our recommendations are having the desired impact.

Our list of analytical priorities is expected to be dynamic and will be reviewed and updated regularly.

### **What about issues that aren't specific to Scotland?**

These reviews are the first step in identifying issues for ESS to consider. Before moving to any stage of further analysis or investigation we will consider issues as relevant to Scotland and to our remit, and will liaise with others to take appropriate action when concerns are identified.

### **Will the reviews be updated in the future?**

The evidence reviews are a snapshot in time as of August 2022 and were produced for a specific purpose relating to the development of our Strategic Plan. As such, there is no plan to update them on a regular basis. However, we may choose to update them in the future if the evidence and our analytical programme of work suggests this would be useful.

### **Can others make use of these reviews?**

We have published these reviews as part of our supporting material for the ESS strategic plan. If others wish to use or reference these then it is important to recognise their purpose, narrow scope and the limitations that are described above.