

Liverpool City Region's Coastal Designated Sites Evidence Strategy Workshop

Workshop Session 2: Sharing evidence and accessibility

SUMMARY

The aim of this workshop session was to establish, through a series of key questions seen below, what were the key issues around both sharing and accessibility of evidence/data. Each key question was written on a separate poster and the workshop participants filled out post-it notes with their responses to the questions and placed them on the appropriate poster. Once the issues were identified, they were then the subject of round table discussion to identify routes for action. The overall aim of the session was to identify how organisations share data and come up with recommendations for a standardised sharing system/method.

The questions were as follows:

- 1) Do you know what is currently "out there" and where it is?
- 2) What storage systems are currently used and what is the data format? Are these fit for purpose based on identified need for evidence?
- 3) Do you have evidence standards – if so, do you share copies? Can the standards be improved by sharing and are partners included in the standard?
- 4) Is the evidence publicised and shared? If so how and who is it shared with?
- 5) What is restricting the sharing of data? Is sharing appropriate and how could it be made easier?
- 6) What would be the best way to collect/publicise data storage systems and format of evidence/data?

A common theme that came out of all three workshops in Session 2 was the issue of lack of awareness of available evidence or lack of awareness of how to access evidence. The consensus to resolve this issue was to have very effective signposting to evidence and data resources, with high quality metadata to maximise the efficiency of searches. Any signposting infrastructure would need to account for grey literature as many evidence sources are in report format. Discussion of the signposting infrastructure did not reach a consensus but MEDIN, BioBank and the Local Record Centres were mentioned most frequently as potential options.

Any discussion of signposting or of ways to supply the data/evidence always returned to a common thread about funding and resourcing of ways to share the evidence. Who would pay for the infrastructural developments and ensuring stakeholders followed standard procedures?

The point was made through the three workshops that any developments or recommendations need to have the end-user requirements as paramount. How would end-users want to access the data? The groups all agreed that end-users should be brought into these discussions more as there was danger in developing systems without taking their needs into account and that end-users should be the main focus of the next steps in terms of improving accessibility and sharing.

ANNEX 2

1. Do you know what evidence is currently “out there” and where it is?

- Yes and no answers given.
- Delegates were often aware that evidence data is available but not how to access it.
- A large proportion suggested more metadata was required, plus they don't have the time or skills to access data if not obvious or directed to by their colleagues.
- LRC's are a good channel for information but struggling due to financial funding assistance being withdrawn.
- Make more data open to all (Open Data).
- Signposting to data is vital, then making it easily accessible. Make it relevant to stakeholders.
- Grey literature – not used effectively – huge cost to produce and then sits on a shelf then binned when out of date. A wasted resource.
- Historic data – need to be selective about what is kept. It is easy to say gather all historic data and store it in a new system, but this is often a fall-back comment to deflect from storing and using current data effectively.
- Emphasis should be on evidence data storage and not on reports. Data can be manipulated and used in different ways.

Specific comments:

- BTO: No – I get Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society annual reports and I send my WeBS data to them for inclusion. I know a bit about RECORD and Biobank but I don't contribute to either of them or interrogate their data, mostly because I haven't got the time to find out how – poor excuse I know.
- EA: Open data via .gov website. Wide variety of functions. Yes – Big organisation big projects, published papers. No – Small projects, smaller departments, “grey literature”.
- I know what I know, but likely a large number of unknown.
- Learned about lots of data sources yesterday.
- No idea what's in the grey literature.
- To an extent, but our data is many and varied.
- All our public register information is on website data.gov.uk
- I thought I did before yesterday!
- LHU: No – impossible to know all and put it in one place. Unrealistic.
- LJMU: Did a three month review of data.
- Based on yesterday, surprised how much we missed. Why?
- MBioBank: Lots and No! Gov.uk → data from DEFRA family etc. MEDIN → Meta for marine/BGIS/Met. NBN → Species info. MAGIC → Portal to DEFRA spatial info. 'BioBank' → Species and habitats info. ENNE → other/unpublished. OS → Topographical information.
- MDHC: Only through working with other organisations, conferences/seminars.
- Hosted all over the place in different formats.

Internally all over the place.

MEAS: Depends on data required. Some yes, some no.

Very patchy – so many locations and data sets. No overall picture. Also, do not know what we don't know – grey literature.

Open data – opportunity but devil in detail.

Species records at Biobank. WeBS BTO website. MAGIC website. NBU website. LCR Framework website.

Some of it, but there is lots I don't know about. Data held by a range of organisations.

NE: Knowledge of data sources relating to SSSI/N2K features is patchy. Lots of data and research on some features and none (as far as I know) on others.

NE holds some published papers that we can use as evidence. I also resort to internet searches / asking nature conservation partners.

Some of it, mostly for specific areas/projects (e.g. offshore renewables).

Generally other than MEDIN or our own evidence. It is not obvious.

It is all over the place, but I phone people from other organisations and ask where stuff is. I know where we hold info!

More evidence needed! Apparent new sources/information as a result of this workshop.

Don't fully know what's out there or where it is.

NWIFCA: Partially! (I don't deal with the data – other members of science team)

Sefton: Yes but only really for my area of business – not for the other areas.

U of L: No not really. New MMO information system good source of material for local area/student projects. We have done work for ESPON data base on European seas gathering data for fields at an EU level.

WT: First port of call is Biobank – tends to know what is available.

2. What storage systems are currently used and what is the data format? Are these fit for purpose based on identified *need* for evidence?

- Many and varied. See below for more details.

Specific comments:

BTO: I don't know but I am sure it is very good. My own records are on Excel.

EA: WFD info – catchment planning system – internal system. Catchment data explorer – publically visible. Data format – database (can be exported into Excel spreadsheets).

Access/oracle database. GIS. Others?

EA data on Oracle database. Reports on PDF/word. GIS on ArcView. All on open data access. Other data – it is variable.

Again, varied storage systems due to variety of data. Paper and digital records exist.

Web space. Html – format?

Various. Open data for your department. Other systems for other orgs. Variable for private sector (?)

LHU: Many – too many to list.

LJMU: Medin. Conservation advice documents / packages.

Reports. Peer review paper. Conference. Presentations.

MBioBank: Allsorts/mixed. Species data ... standardised. NBN exchange format. Habitats info standard survey technique. Gemini – spatial info. Other Meta, INSPIRE (Gov.uk).

MEAS: Whatever it is, it's never enough.

Yes generally as data set, e.g. META data format/std. Data quality, data assurance, caveats for/from originators.

Our evidence base is largely electronic and either held on network drives or data is sent to Biobank.

NE: Unsure.

On-line library – OLIB TRIM (in-house records system). Paper copies at various offices (which keep closing!).

Online portal and local server. Most commonly useable format e.g. CSV, asci.

Mostly online. Reports on pdfs. Some GI data available in ESRI format.

TRIM, internal servers, electronic form, on .gov.uk / web.

NE evidence data base + register. GIS. CMSI. Bespoke internal systems. Some to NBN.

NWIFCA: Medin – meta data and excel.

U of L: We gather data on a project by project basis and use protocol required by funding agencies – not sure that the data we have produced is really useful in LRC context.

WT: Mix of Recorder. Mapmate, Excel, Paper.

?: Interval IT servers (current), tape back-ups, paper.

3. Do you have evidence standards – if so, share copies? Can they be improved by sharing? Inclusion of partners to same std.?

- Most don't have Evidence Standards, except NE, but majority have various forms of quality standards and standardised "ways of working".

Specific comments:

BTO: I am sure the BTO has very high standards.

EA: Yes – data QA, but depends on question.

Evidence standards – yes.

For WFD classification needs to be collected using standard criteria.

For anecdotal/additional information, not necessarily 'formed' standards. Photos might suffice sometimes – depends on purpose/need.

As far as I'm aware, yes. All our data is QA'd.

Yes – can be very stringent.

We have some area A&R officers who QA data and believe some in E.M.S. National do.

The EA has standards required for reporting directories and by government.

LHU: This is not applicable to us, except in an academic quality assurance sense.
If conducting commissioned research we comply with the funders conditions.

LJMU: As academics we need evidence that is fit for purpose.

MBioBank: LERC - ... NBN exchange ... Validation/... procedure. NE GIS data capture study. Biodiversity info. Other?

MDHC: QA procedures + OV Hydro surveys → UKHO Guide to best practice + metadata.
IHO S-44 complaint (Hydro). S-57.
No formal categorisation.

MEAS: Yes; source collection methods, age. Yes for biological and historic EAU! Also used National Guidelines and methods e.g. CIEEM.
Was (...?) suitably qualified and experienced? Was (...?) methodology suitable and in accordance with best practice?
In terms of how surveys are undertaken by who, formats of reports. CIEEM guidelines.

NE: Yes.
Yes, but most requests for evidence come from FOI requests, where the request is from someone who has a pre-formed opinion, so the standard doesn't really help.
Yes.

NWIFCA: We upload data to Medin on cockles, mussels, Sabellaria alveolata.

Sefton: Yes – stds part of national coastal monitoring programme.

U of L: Project specific, usually related to project funders.

WT: On our nature reserves, use CBC and WeBS, butterfly transects (AKA Butterfly Conservation std).

Tried to promote LRC standards via "Biodiverse Society" project – helped a lot.

4. How is your evidence publicised and shared? – Who do you share with? – is it publicised and shared?

- Bio Bank can 'clear datasets'.
- Several questioned how we ensure data is used.
- Recognition that historically there was a prejudice to sharing evidence – Peel Holdings at Liverpool Docks encouraged public bodies to "come and ask for data, we have terabytes of stuff".

Specific comments:

- BTO:** WeBS data is available on internet – I think there is a surprisingly large amount available. However, for detailed data you have to pay to get it.
I publish a monthly summary of what has been seen on WeBS counts on Facebook – search ‘Mersey estuary webs’ on FB.
- EA:** Yes. Open Access.
Data openly shared on internet via .gov website.
Catchment data explorer website.
National package of data has been shared with Rivers Trust for use by all Catchment partnerships (handbook of latest version on national BABA website).
Lots of data published in reports and on web. We provide species records to LRCs.
Publicised if you get onto .gov.uk site.
Yes, EA data available as open data and through .gov.uk, WIYBY map and other related websites. Catchment data explorer.
- LHU:** Yes – Usual academic outlets of books, journals. Also – activities through the Sand Dune & Shingle Network → occasional publications, proceedings, events, etc.
- LJMU:** Documents/reports aimed at industry. Training docs/guidelines.
- MBioBank:** Data shared via NBN (web portal). GIS. Reports. Public sector info gov.uk.
- MDHC:** Not currently but we would like to.
Some historical data only kept if useful.
Seminars/conferences.
- MEAS:** Data search through MBB.
Open data via website – MEAS.org; MBB; nature connected; Heritage gateway.
MEAS website i.e. non-breeding bird survey of docks.
Data shared with Biobank. Some available through website.
- NE:** Don’t know.
Most of it is if commissioned through evidence team. Smaller, local projects may not be.
On .gov.uk / MAGIC. Pop-ups to other sources.
Yes on our evidence portal/website.
Yes. On .gov and regular publication with summary of reports. Public for designated sites system.
- NWIFCA:** Only some aspects are publicised via Medin. Most fisheries data is recorded for internal use – currently updating data collection methods.
- Sefton:** Shared via web portal, www.coastalmonitoring.org, downloadable and viewable (some datasets) online.
- U of L:** Project reports/data usually made available through project websites and or finding agency websites with links from U of L website.

WT Our data tends to go to LRCs. Use our magazine Lapwing to promote some surveys/results, etc.

5. What is restricting the sharing of data? Is it appropriate to share data? How could this be made easier?

- Difficult for Local Councils to proactively share **all** their data, but they have a duty to ensure data is available on request.
- Organisations in the LCR should have better signposting to data and concentrate on producing robust metadata.
- How can we make sure we don't overlook organisations that collect significant and relevant evidence data? Better promotion/ awareness-raising for and from those organisations?
- Too many organisations doing similar "things" with little connectivity/ sharing.
- Not having the right skills to search for data or time to learn how. A generational difference? Experience of new systems?

Specific comments:

BTO: Having the time to look for it. Knowing where to look. Wondering whether it will be a good dataset with info I need.
I did try to get some LIDAR data for the estuary but don't have the software at home to see it, so it needs to be in a format available.

EA: 3rd party data ownership. Accessibility (.gov.uk) is clunky.
3rd party ownership of datasets. Ease of navigating.
Several systems where information sits.
Other than confidential or sensitive info, all EA data is available. Volume is probably a big restriction.
Historic evidence, I'm not sure if all is now on the internet. Suspect public record information request needed.
Some issues with sensitive data but anything that can be shared will be shared.

LHU: £££ plus people..

LJMU: Time. Resources. Funding.

MBioBank: Funding. Ownership. Lack of collaboration (at times). Not knowing what exists. Not knowing who to contact.

MEAS: Format of data.
Resources and capacity to: manage; store; QA and ensure META data consistency.
Activity needs sustainable funding strategy. Commercial sensitivity. Purpose of original collection.
Time and cash implications – not with MEAS, but could be issue with commercial organisations.

NE: Data – Formatting and storage (size). Evidence – (e.g. reports) needs one point to go to, even if just to link to another location (e.g. online library).
Ownership of data.
Format – GIS, etc.

Purpose of intended use.

Timing of requests/ease of finding data when managing very reactive workload.

Some information is deemed sensitive and therefore not published.

We are required to share. Open data.

NWIFCA: Time/resources. Format/collection method.

Sefton: Freely available under Open Gov license. Awareness of its availability. Type of data – e.g. wider specialists to use the data

WT: We have a list of undergraduate studies done – rarely get results! Students have short memories?

Time – staff don't see data collection and sharing as day job. Erroneously.

?: Usually fulfils one purpose.

No obligation.

Focussed study → perceived commercial sensitivity.

?: A location for sharing evidence.

Time and resources plus obvious central point to connect to.

6. What would be the best way to collect data or publicise the data storage systems of each organisation? What would be the best way to publicise the format of the evidence data? (considered best practice)

- Majority seem to prefer organisations individually having a platform to access data but with excellent signposting, possibly using MEDIN or Biobank (or similar other) as conduits. Have common protocol in NW region agreeing a set format for search criteria, maybe?
- Some appetite for a common/ shared platform, but more difficult to set up and maintain.
- MEDIN has a quality standard and professional experience so trust built, and continuity/ consistency of approach more likely. Also easier to query and improve if process not quite right or parameters change.
- Question: What does the group want? What's the process you go through/ needs to set objectives for evidence data gathering? – E.g. the development planning process (MMO). A tick list on how to access evidence? Early consultation. – If planning an infrastructure project then suggest at the outset what key data/ evidence sets would be required at completion (MMO?). Should MMO take a lead in this? Likewise, should other organisations in the LCR/ NW evidence strategy take the lead/ initiative on their own subject areas to make others aware of what is and might be available? Better forward planning?

Detailed comments:

- Get the contract specification correct to start with so consultants give the end product you wanted; make specific to what evidence data is being sought from consultants/ contractors. Have you analysed the outcome you need, which should inform the specification. Say what you want to happen with the data (format, ownership, standards, etc.)
- Encourage all agencies to be open with data that is not commercially sensitive.
- Better search engines and accurate metadata to allow detailed searches. Capture and publicise the status of the data, it is not all equal.

- Types of data sets are in different formats between organisations – with better “sign-posting” data would be more accessible
- Historic data – scan it; send it to deposit libraries for posterity, and National Records Centres. Decide how far back it’s appropriate to go for each record – big task, resources heavy so must ensure future usefulness.
- Be specific about the data you are asking for when approaching the EA, they have loads available! They are willing to share and have a public duty to do so, but they need to conserve resources as well.
- Have a Government (Defra) lead and resource a regional/ national initiative to centrally capture data for public use. A central repository concept.
- With a new project (geographic or subject driven) could other organisations in a consultation group be asked whether they wish to contribute/ help set parameters for evidence gathering – better product and ownership with more “heads together”? More people benefit giving improved standards.
- Do organisations have to provide data on a regular basis (weekly, monthly?)? If so, can this be used in long-term monitoring? EA – Have a central repository for evidence data.
- MEAS employ a proper Data Manager to oversee a central portal for evidence gathering and management. Danger of too bureaucratic and keeping records current. How would this be resourced?
- Use Cowrie to record off-shore renewables, possibly linked to a central evidence portal. - have excellent front-end labelling so end-user can access easily (good metadata?)
- Be realistic – have good metadata standards.
- Have a central point of contact for similar bodies/ institutes to share data – have similar principals and approach between these organisations.
- Where are the resources for above? - Possibly charge for services? Proactively share knowledge of where data is? Are there volunteer organisations or those within businesses to collect data – partnerships to spread risk and increase access? More advertising to let professionals know what MEDIN can do – portal for information.
- Possibly set-up a Field Centre for study as a commercial concern to include data storage of environmental data.
- In principle LERC’s (Local Environmental Records Centre) work well but struggling for funding.
- Merseyside Biobank has a standard for evidence data collection through the Local Planning Authority process.
- CIEM to promote good standards.
- Build strong evidence partnerships on Protected Sites – foster a consistent message about how we use data. Have logical published standards and share with others.
- The EA already makes data available but not necessarily analysed, unless already available via a report.

Specific comments:

- BTO: BTO is a charity and so needs to make money to be able to employ people to turn data in to evidence so they have to charge. This may put people off getting the data. However, there is loads of data available free and I think Conservation orgs can get detailed stuff for free.
- EA: Consistent formatting of data provided across organisation (i.e. ‘Tidy data’). Therefore even if users are having to ask individual organisations for data, at least the data provided will be able to be integrated.

Is data provided (e.g. by NE) 'usable with EA data'?

Open Access. Easy navigation. Hierarchical. 'Pre-digested' sign posts. User friendly.

Broad usability. Make it usable to develop, researchers, students, regulation, i.e. different levels of resolution of data.

I think current initiative to have open data is moving us towards best practice.

More publicity, magazines, newspapers, radio, TV, other websites.

Standards partnership set via open data, however the data is available but not always the analysis.

LHU: In academic terms this is publishing in peer reviewed high quality journals, or production of a monograph. → applies more to evidence rather than data.

In terms of the knowledge exchange activities of the Sand Dune & Shingle Network, evidence is best shared through free open access areas so it is accessible.

LJMU: Publically available reports with linked workshops for stakeholders.

Open Access peer reviewed publication.

MDHC: Company policy to provide evidence/data in agreed format. Metadata standard. Central/hosted storage service (most relevant for type of evidence).

MBioBank: Single Metadata portal for environmental information. Signposted through local contacts and documentation (guidance?). ... through to sources/data holder where storage at central ... appropriate.

MEAS: All data MEAS obtain through develop management work is passed on to LRC.

Open data.

Single point of contact. Proper data management.

Open data – Combining public, private and industry. DH centres and some form of postal/network supported by Framework Agreement.

NE: Catalogue displayed on public website with central (national?) teams responding to requests?

Improve online access, i.e. make it more obvious where things are located. Data – I don't know.

Publish more than the final report. Don't just stick to pdf format.

Need agreed and shared standards, common formats. Exchange between existing repositories. Shared programmes.

NWIFCA: User friendly online portal. Easily accessible/downloadable.

I am potentially not best placed to answer these questions as I don't deal with the evidence/data as much as other members of the science team – sorry.

Sefton: Currently good, but web portal could be improved. More publicity is needed.

WT: Use LRCs!! All support their activities. Act as gateway.

?: Ideally open source e.g. Open DEFRA.

?: Obvious local central point to connect with. Light touch enabling many types of evidence to be included with minimum effort.