

IEMA Core Principles for Environmental Policymaking

November 2022



The purpose of this document

This document sets out a range of strategic considerations that policymaking should adhere to in the context of environmental protection and enhancement, environmental principles and the UK's governance architecture for developing, implementing and assessing progress on long-term environmental outcomes.

It also acts as a high-level guide for all policy development activities that IEMA itself engages in; a set of aims and principles that act as a touchstone for the Institute's policy staff and members.

In addition, the document looks at the role of industry and businesses in contributing to more effective outcomes for the natural environment by recommending that the private sector also aligns itself with key environmental principles.

The document is primarily focused on policymaking in the UK policy context. However, the principles and concepts discussed within it are considered as being largely transferable internationally.

Background

Following the outcome of the Brexit referendum in the UK, IEMA developed a set of core principles¹ outlining the Institute's insights on how environment legislation and policy should be developed in the UK both during and following our exit from the European Union.

The updated principles and approach set out in this document give the direction of travel needed for policymaking on the natural environment in the UK in the transition to a sustainable economic model.

Overarching focus on environmental protection

Working together, government, businesses and the third sector should:

- aim for **high levels of environmental protection** and improvement and, in particular:
 - ensure the development and use of high-quality environmental standards
 - secure long-term enhancement of natural capital
 - ensure that the value of natural capital is integrated into all relevant decision-making;
- ensure **full implementation of international environmental agreements** that the UK is signatory to:
 - continue to show leadership in the development and implementation of future global environmental treaties and conventions
 - actively consider the impact of the UK on the environment in other countries, particularly through cross-border trade and investment;
- ensure that **sound science underpins the evidence base** upon which decisions affecting the environment are made.



1. IEMA (2017) Brexit and Beyond

A measured approach to environmental improvement

Working together, government, businesses and the third sector should:

- ensure a **systematic process of improvement** with the aim of achieving better environmental outcomes in a way that minimises bureaucracy and administration;
- develop an **integrated approach to policy delivery** that utilises a range of tools including regulation, permits, taxes, subsidies and market instruments to effect positive change;
- regulate to clearly identify the **environmental outcomes to be achieved** and the measures of success, with fully resourced enforcement to ensure a level playing field;
- **pursue long-term policy consistency and certainty** to unlock business investment and support the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy.

Environmental principles for government and business

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) developed a policy statement² in 2021 for use across Whitehall to ensure that environmental matters are robustly considered in all policymaking. In effect the statement, which relates specifically to England and UK reserved matters, contains five core principles that all government departments must have 'due regard to' when formulating policy.

Those five principles are:

- The **integration principle** is the principle that policy-makers should look for opportunities to embed environmental protection in other fields of policy that have impacts on the environment.
- The **prevention principle** means that government policy should aim to prevent, reduce or mitigate harm.
- The **rectification at source principle** means that if damage to the environment cannot be prevented it should be tackled at its origin.
- The **polluter pays principle** is the principle that those who cause pollution or damage to the environment should be responsible for mitigation or compensation.
- The **precautionary principle** states that where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, a lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

IEMA fully supports the use of these principles across policymaking. As the principles are integrated into policy formulation it will be important that their relationship with other government appraisal guidance, e.g. Green Book is fully appraised. Ongoing iteration of how best to implement the principles and measurement of their use and impact across government is also key.

More widely, the principles provide a useful framework for industry and businesses to align against.

Whilst the application of the principles through the Defra policy statement relate only to England, the devolved administrations are developing and implementing their own delivery arrangements for the principles.

2. Defra (2022) Environmental principles policy statement

Governance

The Environment Act has set down a completely new governance architecture for environmental policymaking and implementation.

In England, the Act requires that long-term environmental targets (covering air quality, biodiversity, water and resource efficiency) are delivered through Environmental Improvement Plans. It is also the primary legislative vehicle for the environmental principles, establishing environmental review and constituting the Office of Environmental Protection.

Each of these components is central to protecting and enhancing the natural environment, but at present a coherent strategy for how they will work together in tandem has yet to be developed. Policy development that addresses this is critical, as is a mechanism that keeps this under review. The review of the current Environmental Improvement Plan, which is due in January 2023, provides a suitable opportunity for clarifying the governance regime.

Furthermore, the governance regime should be carefully reflected in any future legislation that pertains to putting the environmental impact assessment system in England onto an outcomes-based footing.

The applicability of provisions set down in the Environment Act vary within the context of the devolved administrations, but environmental governance within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is ultimately changing as a consequence of the legislation having been passed. In most cases, these changes will be delivered by the relevant government departments and public bodies within each devolved administration. It is of course important that this is also done in a strategically effective way too.

IEMA's engagement with the policymaking process stemming from the Environment Act

IEMA has responded to each of the key policy consultations that have been conducted in the lead into the Environment Act having been passed in November 2021 and those that have been issued thereafter. Details of the Institute's insights and recommendations can be found below.

- [Environmental policy statement \(2021\)](#)
- [Environmental review \(2021\)](#)
- [Office for Environmental Protection's strategy and enforcement policy \(2022\)](#)
- [Long-term environmental targets framework \(2022\)](#)

International and global policymaking

Although the principles, concepts and considerations put forward in this short document have been done so through a UK policy lens, they are relevant both internationally and globally.

Internationally, they provide a framework for policymakers and other stakeholders involved in the policy development process that can be mapped onto different political and policymaking systems. Globally, they are a basic yardstick for measuring the robustness and ambition of the agreements reached at key summits and negotiations whereby nations come together to deliver better outcomes for the natural environment, e.g. the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Biodiversity Conference.

About IEMA

IEMA is the professional body for everyone working in environment and sustainability. We're committed to supporting, encouraging and improving the confidence and performance, profile and recognition of all these professionals. We do this by providing resources and tools, research and knowledge sharing along with high-quality formal training and qualifications to meet the real-world needs of members from their first steps on the career ladder, right to the very top. We believe that together we can change perceptions and attitudes about the relevance and vital importance of sustainability as a progressive force for good. Together we're transforming the world to sustainability.

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Further information

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