

****Valuing the Benefits of Protecting and Improving Scotland's Water Environment****

The Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) intends to commission a **Science Policy Fellowship** aligned with CREW's Land and Water Resource Management Theme to develop a spreadsheet resource that collates the available evidence on the costs and benefits of protecting and improving Scotland's water environment. The fellowship will require expertise in environmental/ecological economics and/or natural capital to assess, interpret, and organise evidence to support national-scale policy and decision-making.

Background

Decisions to protect and improve Scotland's water environment are made at multiple scales, from local to community level, catchment, regional and national, and require balancing environmental outcomes with economic, social and policy considerations. Estimating the costs and benefits of different policies, plans and interventions to improve the water environment is challenging, as these are often location-specific, time-dependent, and subject to uncertainty. However, consistent, evidence-based estimates are essential to support transparent and proportionate decision-making.

At a national scale, there is an urgent need to estimate the benefits and costs of protecting and improving the water environment, particularly for ongoing work related to River Basin Management Planning (RBMP). This includes the development of RBMP4 (2027-2033), and consideration of recent changes made by the EU to the list of Priority Substances. Understanding the costs and benefits associated with these, and other, national-level plans and policies is essential to ensure they deliver value for money for Scotland.

Operational decisions require the most robust assessment of costs and benefits, and to enable this, detailed designs are often required as part of detailed, location- and time-specific optioneering. However, at larger scales (regional and national) there is a lack of collated information for national-scale decision making. Although natural capital approaches are broadly well developed for terrestrial environments, the evidence base for the water environment and for Scotland specifically, is less developed and remains dispersed across multiple studies and datasets.

Knowledge gap

There is currently no single, collated source of information on the socioeconomic costs and benefits of protecting and improving Scotland's water environment, particularly to support decision-making at a national level. This limits the ability to undertake consistent, evidence-based appraisal, quantify and appraise costs and benefits within monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and support statutory impact assessments, including Business and Regulatory Impact Assessments ([BRIAs](#)), to understand the impact of any proposed regulatory changes on certain groups e.g. businesses, local government, regulators, third sector organisations, and society as a whole.

Collating and assessing the available evidence to understand cost and benefit ranges and where generalisation can and cannot be made, will improve confidence in its application, and strengthen decision-making across policy and planning. In doing so, the project will also support delivery of recommendations from the recent CREW report [Natural Capital and River Basin Management Planning](#) by improving the evidence base needed to strategically align policy, investment, and funding decisions, and to target interventions where they deliver the greatest environmental and societal benefits.

The Ask/Scope

CREW invites proposals for a c. 5-month Science Policy Fellowship to develop a spreadsheet resource that collates the available evidence on the costs and benefits of protecting and improving Scotland's water environment, with a particular focus on supporting national-scale policy and decision-making.

The project should:

1. **Collate and analyse existing evidence on the costs and benefits of protecting and improving the water environment in Scotland, linking these, where possible, to actions and measures within relevant policies such as the development of the RBMP.**
 - *Focus should be on identifying cost and benefit ranges and determining where generalisations can and cannot be made.*
 - *There should be consideration of the relevance, applicability, and limitation of existing evidence for Scotland, including a range of cost and benefit evidence, e.g. the [ENCA databooks](#).*
 - *Focus should be on the most significant costs and benefits of tackling the significant pressures on the water environment¹. The assessment should prioritise costs and benefits that can be monetised, while also taking a socioeconomic perspective and capturing wider social and environmental benefits where appropriate.*
 - *Particular attention should be given to the sectors most likely to benefit from, or be affected by, actions to protect and improve the water environment. Where evidence relates to interventions, the emphasis should be on identifying indicative ranges of costs and benefits of the suite of measures required to address specific pressures on the water environment, rather than evaluating the effectiveness of individual measures.*
2. **Assess the quality of the available evidence and the level of confidence that can be placed in it.**
 - *This should include consideration of the transferability of economic values to the Scottish and RBMP context, considering factors such as population density, local characteristics, evidence age, valuation methodology used, and applicability.*
3. **Identify the distribution of costs and benefits across sectors, organisations, and society, by the main beneficiaries and those who bear the costs.**
4. **Identify evidence data gaps² relating to the costs and benefits of measures to protect and improve the water environment and provide specific recommendations on how these evidence gaps could be addressed, identifying the most pressing valuation gaps and the likely feasibility of addressing them through future research.**

¹ Please refer to this SEPA report: [Safeguarding Scotland's Water Environment](#)

² We recognise that evidence may not be available for all benefits and costs. The analysis should be proportionate to the availability and quality of evidence, with effort focused on identifying and prioritising evidence gaps where robust estimates cannot be produced.

Deliverables

Please note that the deliverables are intended to support discussions with Scottish Ministers. Main outputs should therefore be concise, accessible, and tailored to a policy audience.

- A spreadsheet evidence resource. The structure of the spreadsheet should be designed and pre-agreed with the steering group at the start of the project. It should include a *'Guidance/Navigation'* tab.
- A short report of 15-20 pages, excluding references and appendices
- A plain English summary (up to 2 pages)
- Website summary (including image or photograph) (200 words)
- Communications and impact plan, developed with support from CREW at the start of the project and refined throughout delivery of the project.

Meetings

- (3) Project Steering Group meetings online (throughout the project lifecycle)

Further information for applicants

Overview

CREW **Science Policy Fellowships** intend to support evidence-based decisions by providing the opportunity for Scotland's research community to advocate for critical science that addresses upcoming water-related policy, regulatory and/or industry needs. This 'research-push' workstream compliments CREW's 'policy-pull' Capacity Building and Call Down workstreams in facilitating exchanges of expert knowledge between Scottish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and Research Institutes, and policymakers, regulators, and industry representatives.

Eligibility

CREW Science Policy Fellowship funding is open to applications from **all relevant Scottish HEIs and Research Institutes (approved subcontractors)**. Approved subcontractors have received a copy of CREW's Terms and Conditions. CREW encourages applications from experienced to early career researchers (ECRs) under the supervision and mentorship of experienced researchers. **A fellowship may be led by a single lead researcher, with support and input from a small research team.**

Expectations and award criteria

A copy of expectations and the award criteria are provided overpage.

Project management

Day-to-day communication will be between the research/project steering group and a CREW Project Manager and is likely to involve short catchups as agreed.

Pre-contract meeting

A CREW representative, and representatives of Scottish Government and its delivery partners, will meet with the preferred bidder(s) for a pre-contract meeting. A pre-contract meeting between will likely take place approximately **15th or 16th of September 2026**.

Anticipated timescale (c. 5 months)

The project will commence approximately **21st September 2026**, depending on contract processing and signature. All project outputs must be finalised and signed off by the CREW Director by the **12th February 2027**.

Funding

The maximum amount of funding available **exclusive of VAT** (where applicable) is **£77,500**.

Submitting a proposal

Please complete a **CREW Science Policy Fellowship application form 2026** outlining your proposal.

Proposals need to be submitted to Procurement@crew.ac.uk for evaluation **by 15:00 Monday 24th August 2026**. We aim to notify the successful bidder during the **w/b 7th September 2026**.

Please contact Procurement@crew.ac.uk by **the 17th August 2026** if you would like any clarification on any of the above. You should highlight any potential conflicts of interest in your proposal. For queries about what may constitute a potential conflict of interest please contact the CREW Manager (Nikki.Dodd@hutton.ac.uk).

Expectations

No.	Criteria	Descriptor
1	Duration	The proposed duration will align closely to the details provided in the anticipated timescales section of the specification.
2	Staff time and effort	The proposed allocation of staff time and effort is appropriate and includes all deliverables. The proposal must also provide a commitment that named staff members will be available to work on the contract if the bid is successful. CREW encourages applications from experienced to early career researchers (ECRs) under the supervision and mentorship of experienced researchers. A fellowship may be led by a single lead researcher, with support and input from a small research team.
3	Project costs	The estimated breakdown of project costs is realistic and inclusive of all milestones/deliverables/activities.

Award criteria

No.	Criteria	Descriptor
1	Understanding the project ask and the Scottish policy background	The proposal should include an introduction which demonstrates a clear understanding of the requirements of a CREW Science Policy Fellowship, a short introduction to the research area and its policy, regulatory and/or industry context and the knowledge gap.
2	Proposed methodology	The proposal should demonstrate a high quality and workable methodology, including how the evidence will be identified, reviewed, and assessed. It should explain the suitability, robustness, and limitations of the proposed methodology.
3	Milestones	The project milestones are logical, practical and show a clear pathway to achieving all deliverables.
4	Project Management	The staff, resources and expertise are appropriate for conducting the proposed project. The proposal should name the project lead and outline their project management experience.
5	General and specific topic expertise and experience	The proposal should provide details of individual staff members who will work on this Science Policy Fellowship and demonstrate how they will meet the project requirements, specifically: - general research experience and expertise; - specific experience and expertise on the topic of chosen topic. The fellowship will require expertise in environmental/ecological economics and/or natural capital to assess, interpret, and organise evidence to support national-scale policy and decision-making.
6	General communication and deliverables	The proposal should describe the approach to producing the deliverables, which will be published on the CREW website. It should detail who will take lead responsibility for report-writing and overall report quality. It should provide examples of previously published reports in which they have been involved.
7	Quality assurance	The proposal should provide details of quality assurance procedures to demonstrate how the contract will be continuously delivered to a high standard. It should specifically address issues of quality control at different stages of the project, including evidence gathering, analysis and report writing. It should include a timetable for delivery of tasks, project milestones and allocation of staff and staff time against each task, covering the duration of the contract.
8	Risk	The proposal should provide a risk assessment matrix detailing any risks identified in relation to the delivery of this contract, and proposed mitigation measures to minimise their probability and impact, focused particularly on risk to completion on time.