Effective Provision of Environmental Information and Advice: A Scoping Study
EFFECTIVE PROVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION AND ADVICE: A SCOPING STUDY

Jean Welstead, Karen Aitchison and Bridget Savage
Enviros Consulting Ltd

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The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent those of the Department or Scottish Ministers.
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Forestry Commission
Friends of the Earth Scotland
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Scottish Coastal Forum
Scottish Consumer Council
Scottish Crop Research Institute
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Environment Link
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Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Water
Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research
Shetland Islands Council
Stirling Council
The Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland
Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARK</td>
<td>Access to Relevant Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAB</td>
<td>Citizens Advice Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Citizens Advice Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COWI</td>
<td>Consultancy within Engineering, Environmental Science and Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRM</td>
<td>Customer Relationship Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DALCAL</td>
<td>Do a Little Change a Lot</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEA</td>
<td>European Environment Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIR</td>
<td>Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>Frequently Asked Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>FoES</td>
<td>Friends of the Earth Scotland</td>
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<td>FOI</td>
<td>Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002</td>
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<td>GIS</td>
<td>Geographic Information System</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEN</td>
<td>Healthy Environment Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>National Consumer Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>Not in My Back Yard</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVZ</td>
<td>Nitrate Vulnerable Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEI</td>
<td>Office of Environmental Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSIC</td>
<td>Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIS</td>
<td>Public Health Institute of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>Pollution Prevention and Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAG</td>
<td>Research Advisory Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>Scottish Consumer Council</td>
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<td>SEPA</td>
<td>Scottish Environment Protection Agency</td>
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<td>SIC</td>
<td>Scottish Information Commissioner</td>
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<td>SNH</td>
<td>Scottish Natural Heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNIFFER</td>
<td>Scottish and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSSI</td>
<td>Site of Special Scientific Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNECE</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Europe</td>
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</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scotland’s Sustainable Development Strategy (Scottish Executive, 2005a) encapsulates the key principles of environmental justice, while reflecting the essence of the Brundtland definition of sustainable development. These principles are securing a fairer world and a fairer future, enabling all people to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life for future generations. Two central strands emerge from the many interpretations and dimensions of ‘environmental justice’ namely ‘environmental quality’ and ‘involving communities’. Effective provision of environmental information forms the main artery between these two strands and, without it, environmental justice is unlikely to be achieved.

This scoping study had the objective of identifying and characterising the key requirements for the effective provision of environmental information to the general public.

The information used in the study was acquired via a mixture of methods including: desk research, an information providers’ survey (67 organisations polled with 25 responding), an ‘Omnibus’ survey of the general public (1,001 Scottish adults), a selection of international case studies (Australia, Canada, Denmark and USA), focus groups (3 groups with a total of 17 participants) and interviews with key contacts (Scottish Information Commissioner, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage). The research was enhanced by the active involvement of the Research Advisory Group and the Enviros team’s collective experience of providing environmental information.

The information collected was used to support four distinct elements of the analysis:

- A review of the underlying principles and context of the study, which take into account the growing body of European and national legislative drivers that have been adopted in Scotland to facilitate access to environmental information.

- An evaluation of the current level of public awareness and demand for environmental information, including the available sources, public preferences for access, motivation for accessing information and the type of environmental information provided.

- An assessment of the present supply of environmental information and who is providing it, how it is promoted and disseminated, issues of cost, data management, staff structure and the interpretation of data.

- A review of models of provision, both environmental and non-environmental, including international models with possible parallels to requirements in Scotland.
The study explored the extent to which legislative and policy drivers have influenced the provision of environmental information in Scotland, and continue to do so. Despite a relatively low awareness of recent regulations and enhanced rights to access environmental information, the general public is nonetheless well represented within the current volume of requests received by the organisations that participated in this research. However, to meet the overall aims of effective provision of environmental information this demand requires further stimulus.

At the moment, the balance of information provision leans towards the reactive demand-led approach. This study acknowledges that there will always be a balance between the provision of demand-led and supply-led information. The study concludes that there should not necessarily be a wholesale shift towards supply-led provision, but argues for an increased emphasis on proactive supply as a stimulus for increasing demand.

Our research suggests that it may be possible to ignite interest in environmental information through consumer-led demand (e.g. purchasing an energy efficient fridge), and then build on this interest with more citizen level interests, such as the Scottish Climate Change Programme. In this way, it may be possible to stimulate and start generating increased citizen-led demand, similar to the aims of the Aarhus Convention.

There is evidence in this study that it is among the more elderly and less affluent of the population where current demand for environmental information is lowest. There is further evidence that it is among the less affluent where most work needs to be done to empower and equip people with the skills to carry an interest through to an actual request, thus attending to both strands of environmental justice.

The location and availability of environmental information is not well understood by the public. This has an impact upon the information providers and clearly, low awareness of the relevant authorities and a lack of effective signposting between them is a problem.

Data management has improved since the introduction of Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOI) and Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIR) but further resources are required in terms of dedicated teams, staff development and training. This could facilitate the provision of an agreed hierarchy of environmental information (such as currently offered by the Citizen’s Advice Scotland through their bureaux) which can then be clearly communicated to the public. The information should be organised in a user friendly way and not rely on the enquirer’s understanding of the organisation to be accessed effectively. Information providers also need to be able to respond to enquiries in a friendly and proactive way.

Our research has shown that it is most beneficial to use a number of techniques to develop and operate an effective service for providing environmental information that can reach the greatest number of people. These methods will vary regionally and demographically, depending on the needs of local users.

This study revealed a number of key characteristics of effective service including:

- **Effective access:** that a member of the public can easily identify whom to contact and find useful information at their first attempt or is reliably signposted to the correct source. Furthermore, that access is quick and convenient at no or minimal cost (e.g. downloading time for documents); and that a mix of media is used to promote and provide information
sensitive to the age, gender, local and cultural needs of the user. Effective access also needs to be flexible enough to change with time and the evolving issues of relevance to the public. Staff selection, awareness and training should be to an agreed standard and the methods of provision should facilitate effective access. In order to address the equity strand of environmental justice, the access to information should be designed to be inclusive of all social groupings and anticipate provision in a variety of formats, such as in Plain English, Braille, translations and via dedicated web versions for people with sensory deprivation.

- **Data management and interpretation**: that sufficient resources are available to enable management systems to function at an optimum level allowing faster information provision in a more consistent form; that interpretation and provision is intuitive and customer focused reflecting ‘right time and right information’ rather than the structure or purpose of the information provider’s organisation; that provision of information on a hierarchy of levels (such as, signposting, listening ear, information/advice, negotiation and representation work) is available to clarify the parameters of the provision and that there is increased provision of face-to-face support such as Accessing Relevant Knowledge (ARK)\(^1\) to improve the public’s ability to engage with information and participate in decision making.

- **Promotion/engagement**: that engages the user proactively rather than reactively; that there is careful consideration of ongoing communication plans, using a mix of media and retaining a continuous profile of the service(s); that promotion uses relevant evidence to identify target groups and is aware of linking with wider national campaigns to show how the messages link and prevent campaign ‘fatigue’.

- **Public participation**: that is ensured by making the information provided relevant to the needs of the user and tackles the issues of the main audience, who are ‘socially and economically excluded individuals who [feel it is] inevitable that they live in polluted areas’\(^2\); that builds trust through facilitation of public engagement and open consultation.

Based on the conclusions and findings from this project, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **A national exercise** should be undertaken to *clarify the roles and scope of different providers* so that these can be clearly understood by the organisations involved and promoted to the public.

- **A national signposting service** should be set up along the lines of a portal which provides links to all the environmental information providers.

- **Data management and interpretation** should continue to be improved with the development of *agreed guidelines and standards for a hierarchy of information provision*.

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\(^1\) See Case Study 13 in Chapter 5.

• In order to improve the consistency and the consumer focus of information provision a national training initiative for the main environmental information providers should be considered.

• To address the equity and public participation strand of environmental justice there should be more proactive community based projects such as ARK.

• To help share good practice and standardise provision it would be beneficial to establish a network of environmental information providers including professionals from industry, government, local authorities, academia, research organisations, environmental agencies and NGOs.

• The results of research show that monitoring of services is generally ad hoc and poor. It is vital to measure success and a monitoring and evaluation strategy should be established centrally, with guidelines provided to all environmental information organisations.

These recommendations are based on the findings of this research study, which show that there is a need for clear guidance and signposting towards sources of environmental information that is accessible to the general public. This will help to achieve the Scottish Executive goals of environmental and social justice, encouraging public participation in decision-making and developing sustainable communities.
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this study

1.1 This report was commissioned by Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department in February 2005 to inform the development of its environmental justice policy. The overall aims of this study were twofold. Firstly, it aimed to identify the key elements that would contribute to an effective service providing environmental information in Scotland. Secondly, it will feed into the growing body of knowledge concerned with improving the accessibility of environmental information in Scotland.

1.2 In order to present practical conclusions, existing public access to environmental information was reviewed, in terms of both the current demand for information and its supply. The study aimed to identify issues associated with providing access to environmental information and to assess a variety of models for information provision through our desk research and case studies. Based on the findings from our research, the report makes recommendations on the requirements for an effective service.

1.3 The timing of this study is significant given the current focus on freedom of information, aligned to recognition of the need to ensure environmental justice and public participation in communities across Scotland. Existing research suggests that members of the public encounter difficulties when accessing environmental information and this can discourage or prevent them from participating in environmental decision-making. This can often be compounded by concerns surrounding the lack of trust in public authorities in the United Kingdom (UK).

1.4 Overall, this study is intended to contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerned with improving the accessibility of environmental information in Scotland and to encourage public participation in environmental decision-making, with a broader aim of addressing the challenge of environmental injustice.

Methodology

1.5 The main research phase of this study began in February 2005 and continued until the end of July 2005. The research involved the following key methods:

- desk research
- an information providers’ survey
- an Omnibus survey of the general public
- international case studies
- focus group sessions
- interviews with key contacts

The research tools are presented in Appendix 1.

1.6 This study had a number of project objectives, and each was addressed using different methods, as outlined in Table 1.1.
Table 1.1 Project objectives and research methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Research activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess the level of public awareness of and demand for environmental information.</td>
<td>Omnibus survey (of the general public) and desk research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse public preferences regarding alternative ways of providing environmental information.</td>
<td>Omnibus survey (of the general public) and desk research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine the current supply of and public access to environmental information in Scotland, and assess its effectiveness.</td>
<td>Information providers’ survey / focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify best practice (in Scotland, UK and elsewhere).</td>
<td>Desk research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigate alternative models for the provision of accessible public information.</td>
<td>Desk research / case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate effectiveness of alternative models of single source outlets.</td>
<td>Desk research / case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the requirements of an effective service for providing environmental information and advice and make recommendations in relation to practical measures.</td>
<td>All activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Desk research

1.7 Desk research was undertaken by Enviros Consulting and COWI (Consultancy within Engineering, Environmental Science and Economics, Denmark) and included the review of key documents, web research and the identification of organisations and contacts relevant to the research. The findings of the desk research were used to identify key players, trends and drivers, in order to develop the providers’ survey and interview framework.

Information providers’ survey

1.8 Enviros worked with the Scottish Executive and the Research Advisory Group (RAG) to finalise the information providers’ survey contact list (referred to in this report as the provider’s survey). In total, we invited 67 organisations to complete this questionnaire survey and received responses from 25 of these. Following up this response rate, it emerged that some of the organisations approached had insufficient time to allocate to the survey because they were ‘snowed under’ responding to FOI requests, while others were too busy reorganising their information services. Where possible, we recruited providers unable to complete the survey to participate in the focus groups.

Omnibus survey

1.9 The Omnibus survey of the general public was undertaken by Scottish Opinion between the 4th and 10th May 2005. The sample group included 1,001 Scottish adults over the age of 18, from all Scottish Parliamentary constituencies. The results were weighted to be representative of the Scottish population by age, gender and social grade.

Focus groups

1.10 The focus groups involved representatives from local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), regulators, utility companies, statutory agencies, academic and
Research institutions, government, the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) and public health authorities. Three sessions were held in total, one on 20 June 2005 (7 participants) and on 22 June 2005 (4 participants in the morning session and 6 in the afternoon session).

Interviews

1.11 Personal interviews were held with key contacts within the environmental information field, in order to gain a more in-depth perspective on key issues in Scotland. These included an interview on 8 March, 2005 with Heidi Bartlett and Eurig Scandrett from the Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES), an interview on 21 April 2005 with Jennifer Davidson of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and an interview on 21 June 2005 with Kevin Dunion, the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC).

Structure of report

1.12 This report is organised into seven chapters as follows. Chapter 1, sets out the purpose for the study, the research methodology and the structure of the report.

1.13 Chapter 2 summarises the underlying principles and context of the study, taking into account the European and national legislative drivers which have been adopted in Scotland to facilitate access to environmental information. These drivers are underpinned by concepts such as environmental justice, and the public’s trust in information providers and their reputations. This chapter also defines the meaning of environmental information and the users of this type of information.

1.14 Chapter 3 discusses the findings of the study in terms of public demand for information and analyses current interest based on the findings from the Omnibus survey along with results from the focus groups, the providers’ survey and interviews. This chapter is broken down into sections which consider public awareness and demand, who is requesting information, the types of environmental information available and what motivates the public to make requests.

1.15 Chapter 4 looks at the current supply of environmental information in Scotland, with sections that focus on who is providing environmental information and how information is currently disseminated. This chapter discusses some of the issues associated with a service providing environmental information such as the cost of providing information and who should bear this cost. It looks at the staff and structure of organisations that provide environmental information and how they tackle data management.

1.16 Chapter 5 summarises a number of international case studies, which help to identify good practice associated with services that provide different types of information to the public. Each case study provides an example of how certain elements of information provision can be implemented in a real-life situation.

1.17 Chapter 6 compares existing practice as identified through the Enviros research discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 with the international case studies listed in Chapter 5. This chapter then uses these findings to develop options for providing environmental information in Scotland, taking into account the need to provide a national service.
The options developed in Chapter 6 are then drawn together in the final chapter, Chapter 7, to identify the key elements that are recommended for improving and providing effective provision of environmental information in Scotland.
CHAPTER TWO CONTEXT

This Chapter, starts by looking at the current policy drivers in both Europe and Scotland, which aim to encourage public access to information and participation in environmental decision-making. This is followed by examining the way in which concepts of both environmental and social justice have played a part in shaping these and considering the ways in which the general public access information and examining the challenges facing those charged with delivering environmental information. The objectivity of the information is discussed, with perceptions surrounding the provider of the information and a particular emphasis on trust and reputation. The term ‘environmental information’ is explored and finally, the way in which requests for information can arise is examined, and the value of categorising them as demand-led and supply-led explained.

Legislative drivers - background

2.1 This review identified a number of international, European and national legislative drivers that are encouraging public access to environmental information. In order to develop the context of the research the drivers were considered at two levels which the authors of this report refer to as (i) high level principles and (ii) principles specifically applicable to Scotland. To examine the relevance of national legislation, it is important to trace its origins. For example, Agenda 21 (United Nations, (UN) 1992) is a plan of action which was adopted at a conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (UN, 1992a) [the Rio Summit]. The aim of the conference was to promote sustainable development and the following quote demonstrates the underlying aim of those attending:

“In sustainable development, everyone is a user and provider of information considered in the broad sense. That includes data, information, appropriately packaged experience and knowledge. The need for information arises at all levels, from that of senior decision makers at the national and international levels to the grass-roots and individual levels.”

2.2 From this conference, a working definition of sustainable development has been widely adopted which states that sustainability is about conducting economic, social and environmental progress in a way that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). It is clear that public access to environmental information will shape and inform not only the decisions we make in relation to our consumer choices but also our ability to share in the shaping of the sustainable development of our local and national communities.

2.3 To address this at a national level, the Scottish Executive has developed a new Sustainable Development Strategy (Scottish Executive, 2005a), which examines the education, learning, structures and processes needed to support the delivery of policy. The strategy is structured around four topics:

- The wellbeing of Scotland’s people

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Scotland’s thriving communities
• Scotland’s natural heritage and resources
• Scotland’s global contribution

2.4 The concept of environmental justice has also been firmly embedded on a European and national level following the United Nations Economic Commission (UNECE)

2.5 The concept of environmental justice has also been firmly embedded on a European and national level following the United Nations Economic Commission (UNECE) Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters for Access to Justice in Environmental matters at Aarhus in Denmark in 1998 and which this came into force in October 2001 [the Aarhus Convention]. The aim of the Convention is to impose obligations on public authorities regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice, and each contracting party to the Convention must guarantee this. The main principle of the Convention embraces the concept of environmental justice, namely that “every person has the right to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being”. Further, the Convention states that:

“improved access to information and public participation in decision-making enhance the quality and the implementation of decisions, contribute to public awareness of environmental issues, give the public opportunity to express its concerns and enable public authorities to take account of such concerns”.

2.6 The Convention comprises three main ‘pillars’:
• Effective access to environmental information
• Public participation in environmental decision making
• Access to justice

2.7 The first ‘pillar’ of the Convention is implemented in the European Union (EU) through Directive 2003/4/EC which obligates public authorities, inter alia, to respond to requests from the public for environmental information. In Scotland, this Directive was transposed into law via the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EISREIR), which took effect on 1 January 2005, the same date as the commencement of the comparable access provisions for other information under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

2.8 In autumn stages during 2005 - 2006, new Regulations came into force in Scotland to deal with the second pillar of the Convention on public participation in environmental decision-making. This pillar is implemented in the EU via Directive 2003/35/EC which is intended to strengthen the requirement for public consultation in respect of permits under the Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) regime,

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5 Ibid. p. 2.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and plans and programmes on air quality, nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ) and waste management.

2.9 The third pillar requires the public to have access to review the public authority application of the first two pillars. This is being achieved within the implementing Regulations for the first and second pillars. Under the changes on public participation, environmental NGOs are to be included with those who can participate in the processes under PPC and EIA. Proposed transposition arrangements on PPC, air quality and NVZ went out to public consultation until 12 in February-May 2005 and consultation on EIA ran until May 4-4 August 2005.

Legislative drivers – high level principles

2.10 The ripple effect of the Rio Summit and the Aarhus Convention can now be seen in a number of areas of law and policy within Europe and the UK. The recent Planning White Paper (Scottish Executive, 2005b), for example, sets out proposals for a wide-reaching reform of the planning system in Scotland. One of the most contentious aspects of the Paper is that of ‘stakeholder consultation’. The current proposals provide for consultation with owners, occupiers and neighbours where key developments are planned and stipulate that any development scheme must include a ‘consultation statement’ which sets out the method by which the planning authority proposes to consult with relevant stakeholders. Predictably, these proposals have raised concerns on both ends of the spectrum. For the development community, concerns lie with the potential delays that may arise to a development project, whereas organisations such as Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) are concerned about the absence of Third Party Rights of Appeal, which in their opinion is a significant omission in the proposed reform. In addition, it is possible that organisations such as FoES may hold the view that the proposed consultation element of the reform is insufficient and has the potential to become a mere formality.

2.11 Directive 2001/42/EC “on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment” (commonly referred to as the SEA Directive) is an example of the way in which access to decision-making and environmental justice is becoming embedded in the Scottish legal framework. This Directive aims to ensure that environmental consequences of certain plans and programmes are identified and assessed during their preparation and before their adoption. The underpinning principle of the Directive is sustainability and the aim of the Directive is to ensure that the public is fully consulted before plans and programmes are implemented, and is included in the dissemination of information after a plan or programme is completed. As these ‘high level principles’ continue to drill down into Scottish law and policy, it is likely that supply of environmental information can drive demand in fields like this, where the public have a vested interest in the long-term future of their community.

Legislative drivers - principles specific to Scotland

2.12 To further understand the context of this research it is appropriate to consider recent principles specific to Scotland and, in particular, legislation that came into force on 1 January 2005. The FOISA and the EISRsEIR both significantly ‘bed in’ the principles of access to information and set out the legal framework within which the Scottish public authorities must comply with their obligations. The definition of a Scottish public authority is found within the 2004 Regulations. The appointment of an
independent Scottish Information Commissioner (the Commissioner) in 2003, whose
remit is to oversee the enforcement of the both the Act and the Regulations, further
endorses, amongst its other objectives, the commitment to environmental justice.
Thus, if it appears to an applicant that an authority has not complied with the
Regulations in response to a request for information, the applicant has the right of
review by the relevant authority and, if still dissatisfied, to appeal against the decision
to the Commissioner, who will then investigate, *inter alia*, whether the information
should or should not be released. The Commissioner has powers to force an authority
to release information where it judges it has acted wrongly in refusing a request. In
addition to his enforcement role, the Commissioner is responsible for raising
awareness of the public right to access information and, as such, has been organising
and leading events around Scotland to do so.

Environmental justice

2.13 Underpinning any successful policy on access to environmental information is the
concept of environmental justice. A report by FoES⁶ indicates that environmental
justice rests on three fundamental premises:

- That all people have the right to live in a healthy environment and have access
to adequate environmental resources
- That it is predominantly the poorest and least powerful people who live in
degraded environments
- That it encompasses an “element of democratic decision-making or
community self-determination”

2.14 The Human Rights Act 1998 strengthens the UK commitment to ensuring that the
rights of individuals are protected. This is illustrated by a number of European cases
which reinforce the principle that individuals are entitled to live free from the impacts
of environmental pollution.⁷ The two key strands to environmental justice are implicit
in much of the literature and legislation surrounding the concept. These two strands
are explored in the Scottish context below.

2.15 Firstly, communities must be empowered in terms of decision-making and must be
able to access accurate information to make informed assessments. The FOISA and
the EISREIR clearly facilitate greater dissemination of information to individuals and
communities, which in turn equips them to challenge and participate in a democracy.
The key to achieving this strand is the delivery of the information, introducing
accountability on the part of relevant authorities and the building of trust between
community and authority.

2.16 The second strand that emerges is often referred to as the ‘equity’ strand. A recent
Scottish and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) report
states that, “People in the most deprived areas are far more likely to be living near to
sources of potential negative environmental impact than people in less deprived

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⁶ Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) (2004) *Love Thy Neighbour? The Potential for Good Neighbour
⁷ Lopez Ostra v Spain (1994) 20 EHRR 277
areas”. Thus, injustice may occur where certain individuals, groups or communities are more likely to encounter difficulties in accessing information, either through financial or cultural constraints, or lack of local community resources. This belief is supported by a recent study (Adebowale, 2004), which found that it was usually the people most affected by negative environmental impacts that were unaware of where help could be sought and were apprehensive of using the law to resolve environmental problems. Furthermore, many of these socially or economically excluded individuals felt that it was inevitable that they would live in polluted areas. Similarly, such people may also be likely to live in what would be termed the most deprived areas, where poor environmental conditions will exist. A recently published report conducted by Curtice et al (2005), concludes that “an attempt to reduce environmental incivilities in deprived areas would help reduce inequality and could be expected to improve the health status and community cohesion of those living in such areas”.

Trust and reputation

2.17 It is clear that access to environmental information is high on the political and social agenda. The question, however, arises not only how best to disseminate this information but also how to ensure that the information is perceived to be valid and reliable. The question of trust has often been cited as a central problem in politics and much research has been conducted in order to identify what type of action will instil trust in citizens and consumers. The National Consumer Council (NCC) found that, in general, consumers welcome information as long as they can trust both the information and the source to help in making decisions. In terms of building trust in decision-making processes and bodies, the NCC has developed a list of key principles, which should be:

- Open and transparent
- Inclusive of stakeholders from an early stage
- Clear and accountable

2.18 Further exploration of the issue of trust can be found in a recent report by the Cabinet Office (Phillis, 2004).

2.19 For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to be explicit about what is meant by trust, how trust can be built up and how a strong reputation can be used to build trust, which can in turn reinforce a good reputation. In undertaking this research a variety of aspects that contribute to securing public trust have been considered. These include:

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9 For instance, a lack of computer access or non-English speakers.
11 An example of this is the series of Reith lectures delivered by Onora O’Neill, for the BBC in 2002 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lectures.shtml).
• Efficient, consistent and transparent delivery
• Confidence that the information is valid and interpretation is unbiased
• Application of best practice from the point of first contact to the delivery stage
• Place for competing suppliers of information
• The service provider must have sufficient resources
• Independent evaluation may assist with highlighting concerns and building reputation
• ‘signposting’ may form part of successful service

**Environmental information**

2.20 Whilst recent legislation (i.e. the EIR) sets out a definition of ‘environmental information’\(^{13}\) and the parameters under which relevant Scottish public authorities\(^ {14}\) will have a statutory obligation to provide such information, a broader working definition for the purposes of this research has been developed. This takes into account the view that the public’s interest in environmental information can be motivated and stimulated by a variety of factors, and to capture a wider definition more likely to reflect the public’s understanding of the term ‘environmental information’.

2.21 Firstly, there is the situation where the delivery of information is proactive and, to an extent, supply-led. An example of this would be data which relates to air quality. As a result of European legislation, such data must be collated and held by local authorities and can be accessed by a number of user groups, including the general public. On the other hand, there is information that can be classified as demand-led, where members of the public may request information for a specific individual purpose, for example, in order to raise an objection to a proposed planning application. In such cases, the member of the public needs to know what to ask for, in itself a barrier to accessing information.

2.22 The working definition of environmental information for this report is reflected in the providers’ survey and the survey of the public. In order to capture the various types of environmental information understood by both providers and the public, the legal definition was reworked to include a wider range of topics that covers both the natural and built environment. The final list included: climate change, air quality, drinking water, river and coastal quality, flood risk, soil and contaminated land, land use and planning, forestry, farming, local authority service, natural sites (e.g. SSSIs), biological diversity, human health and safety, food and environmental consumer issues, built structures (including transport infrastructure), derelict or unused sites, energy efficiency, energy generation, noise, hazardous waste, waste management (e.g. recycling), litter and fly tipping, emissions, discharges and releases to the environment, and environmental policies and legislation.

\(^{13}\) See end of Chapter 1.
\(^{14}\) See end of Chapter 1.
Therefore, for the purposes of this study, an understanding of environmental information has been adopted which is ideally, ‘the effective provision of information and data which are accessible and comprehensible by the general public, drawing on both supply and demand-led sources, meeting current legislative requirements and contributing to the objectives of environmental justice for Scotland’.

Related initiatives taking place in Scotland

The Scottish Executive is already undertaking a number of related policy and information initiatives which it will be able to draw upon for evidence of good practice, once evaluated.

In the area of culture, the Executive has provided an effective ‘gateway’ for access to information and resources related to culture in Scotland, by funding the development and piloting of an electronic one stop shop, Scotland’s Culture, where users can search a selection of resources covering music, literature, sport, funding and event information. Partners in the project include Visit Scotland, a number of local authorities and national cultural and educational bodies and institutions. The portal results from the Executive’s response to the vision expressed in ‘Creating our Future….minding our past’ (2003), of access for all to information and resources (evaluation due 2007).

This portal is linked to another portal, the Rural Community Gateway. The Gateway although being funded by the Scottish Executive, is editorially independent of it. It has been developed jointly by Sift Ltd, a leading provider of community websites, and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), who develop and manage the site content. The website acts as a one-stop shop for people living in, or with an interest in rural Scotland to access a very wide range of information, advice and news, at national, regional and very local levels. Apart from providing information, active participation in the form of opinion polls, regular columns and events information are also actively encouraged from the user and membership base. The potential of creating a ‘super-user’ community is currently being explored. An independent evaluation has been commissioned by the Executive to examine the extent to which objectives of the Gateway have been met, and outline future options in terms of developments/improvements to the Gateway. The evaluation is due for completion by mid-June 06. There is also a research project on the delivery of rural services, exploring the viability of the ‘one stop shop’ model, due for publication by end 2006. Additionally, the SEERAD ‘On the ground’ project is also looking at how the ‘ERAD family’ of Departments and Agencies can collate their resources and efforts, and work in a more effective, integrated way. The aims of the "On the Ground" project are to identify common areas of work where there is already or potential for duplication, and agree how these can be brought together and implemented to produce savings and reduce the number of farm visits. It will also consider possibilities for collocation of organisations and identify the associated benefits through front and back office amalgamations. The project will look at the ERAD family of organisations, with an initial focus on Agricultural Staff, SNH, SEPA and FCS.

The provision of effective environmental information is also of concern within the recreation and heritage management field where organisations such as SNH and the Forestry Commission are examining how they promote and provide information to the
public to increase recreational use. Examples include, Active Woods, a Forestry Commission campaign about the range of health and fitness opportunities offered by Britain’s woodlands and Paths for All.

2.28 The Marketing Unit within the Executive have developed a website, 'infoscotland', to promote and service its current marketing campaigns. The site, based around the five main marketing brands, includes support information on individual campaigns such as drugs, anti racism and NHS recruitment. The site also offers access to key partners and services. The web address is used widely on Executive advertising with most individual campaign web addresses are an adjunct to the main address.

2.29 Finally, in terms of providing better information, more effectively and efficiently to more people in Scotland, the Executive is currently undergoing a review of its Digital Inclusion policy, “Connecting Scotland’s People”17, originally published in September 2001. The revised Digital Inclusion Strategy and action plan will be published around late Summer 2006 taking into consideration the EU i2010 eGovernment Action plan which focuses on 5 key areas as follows:

- No citizens left behind
- Making efficiency and effectiveness a reality
- Implementing high impact services for citizens and businesses
- Putting key enablers in place
- Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making

2.30 However, the Digital Inclusion Strategy is just one area that supports EUi2010. The Customer First programme, which is a three year programme (2005-2008), aims to deliver first point of contact services for customers who come into contact with Local Authorities. This includes the creation of the customer’s own Citizen Account to enable a proactive approach to service delivery.

Users of environmental information

2.31 During the early stages of the study, it became clear to the research team that the general public is made up of numerous ‘user groups’, including consumers, single-issue interest groups and individuals with a particular interest. However, the study suggests that there are two distinct categories of user groups who may request information for different reasons. Firstly, information may be requested by an individual (or group) exercising their right as a citizen(s). This could relate to a proposed development in the local community, which may have an impact on the

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15 Forestry Commission Scotland, Active Woods campaign website: www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-69LDJK.
16 Scottish Natural Heritage, Paths for All Initiative website: www.pathsforall.org.uk.
18 Further information on Customer First is available at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Open-scotland/ModernisingGovernmentFund/CustomerFirst
community’s local environs. However, it is difficult to separate the consumer from the citizen as this might also be driven by a NIMBY-like (Not in My Back Yard) self-interest. Likewise, information may be requested by an individual acting in their capacity as a consumer. Their request may relate to the purchase of a new car and they may be seeking information on fuel efficiency, emissions and tax benefits, which may in turn influence their purchase. This might also be driven by a citizen concern, wanting to be greener and take action to reduce their carbon footprint. Again this request will be a balance of self-interest specific to the individual and greater or lesser citizen concern. Although distinctions within a citizen/consumer framework are not always clear cut, this framework still provides a useful context when considering the supply and demand of information, whatever the motivation of the user.

2.32 Dissemination of environmental information can be proactive or reactive and is often a balance of both, with the emphasis being influenced by the type of organisation and purpose of providing that information. For example, the Access to Relevant Knowledge (ARK) project run by FoES is proactive and to some extent supply-led, as discussed in Case Study 13 in Chapter 5. ARK identifies areas where there may be environmental justice issues and provides appropriate information to communities in that area. ARK engages further with the community to help them identify and find the information they require, engendering a shift from supply-led proactive provision to demand-led reactive provision. Significantly, ARK also aims to achieve a transfer of ‘power’ to the community within the ensuing debate, hoping to level the playing field in terms of the engagement.

Conclusions

2.33 In this chapter we can draw a number of conclusions:

- The need for, and approach to, the dissemination of environmental information in Scotland is a relatively recent concept, with its origins firmly located in international law and policy

- Definitions of sustainable development and environmental justice have only recently been integrated into national law and policy

- At a national level, the principles of environmental justice are becoming more firmly embedded. This is evident in the EIR, SEA and recent planning legislation

- There are specific challenges in terms of how environmental information can be disseminated and in particular, how those charged with the responsibility of providing information, can instil trust in consumers

- There are two distinct groups of users: those who may act out of self-interest and those who may seek information in their capacity as a consumer or a citizen
**Environmental information**

**Environmental Information**, as defined in Article 2(1) of Directive 2003/4/EC and in A Service Providing Environmental Information, is information in written, visual, aural, electronic or any other material form relating to

(a) the state of the elements of the environment, such as air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites including wetlands, coastal and marine areas, biological diversity and its components, including genetically modified organisms, and the interaction among these elements;

(b) factors, such as substances, energy, noise, radiation or waste, including radioactive waste, emissions, discharges and other releases into the environment, affecting or likely to affect the elements of the environment referred to in paragraph (a);

(c) measures (including administrative measures), such as policies, legislation, plans, programmes, environmental agreements, and activities affecting or likely to affect the elements and factors referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) as well as measures or activities designed to protect those elements;

(d) reports on the implementation of environmental legislation;

(e) costs benefit and other economic analyses and assumptions used within the framework of the measures and activities referred to in paragraph (c); and

(f) the state of human health and safety, including the contamination of the food chain, where relevant, conditions of human life, cultural sites and built structures inasmuch as they are or may be affected by the state of the elements of the environment referred to in paragraph (a) or, through those elements, by any of the matters referred to in paragraphs (b) and (c).

**In more detail (Guidance):**

*Air* includes the air contained by any building and any other natural or man-made structures either above or below the ground level. It also includes systems such as air-conditioning.

*Water* includes underground as well as surface waters irrespective of whether they are natural or man-made in design. It also includes sewage and foul water, inland waters, rivers, canals, lakes, estuaries and seas.

*Soil* should also take in the upper layer of rock in which plants grow.

*Land and Landscape* includes all land surfaces, buildings, and underground layers or land covered by water.

*Natural Site* includes areas identified by reason of their flora, fauna, geographical or physiographical features for example sites of special scientific interest or areas of natural outstanding beauty.

*Biological diversity* includes both flora and fauna, living or dead.

*Human health and safety and conditions of human life* include human responses to physical, chemical and biological agents delivered through environmental media of water, air, land, and biodiversity etc.

*Built structures* should include roads and other infrastructures.

*State* includes physical, chemical and biological conditions.

*Emissions* includes discharges and other releases into the environment whenever they occur including the direct or indirect release of substances, vibrations, or noise from individual or diffuse sources into or onto air, water or land.

*Measures* include administrative measures and environmental management programmes such as permit schemes, management contracts; and environmental information may be utilised in other measures such as land-use planning regimes and permits, regeneration and transport development plans and proposals.

*Effects* include direct and indirect effects.
Scottish public authority

**In the Guidance, a ‘Scottish public authority’ means:**

a) all Scottish Public Authorities as listed in Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 or designated by order as a ‘public authority’ under section 5 of the same Act.

b) a wholly government-owned company as defined by section 6 of the Act.

c) any other public authority within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998.

d) any other person/body under the control of a public authority (a), (b) or (c) and having public responsibilities, functions or providing services in relation to the environment.

The definition of function above should be taken to include the provision of any services. Control should be taken to mean a relationship, which is constituted by statute, regulations, rights, licence, contracts or other means that either separately or jointly confer the possibility of directly or indirectly exercising a decisive influence on bodies/authorities or organisations. In line with this definition, any private company, which is sufficiently associated with activities of government, will have responsibilities under a Service Providing Environmental Information. “Control” may relate to the body/authority itself and control of the services provided by it. It also includes financial control as well as regulatory or administrative control. Examples of such bodies would be private contractors or public private partnerships with environmental functions such as waste disposal, water, energy, transport and environmental consultancy. Following privatisation and liberalisation of marketing and competition such arrangements can be complex. For a Service Providing Environmental Information to apply there needs to be a link to a body at (a), (b) or (c) above.

Public utilities carrying out functions involved with the supply of essential public services such as water, sewerage, gas and electricity may fall within the scope of the new Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulation 2004, depending upon the nature of the constitution of the company and the extent of their environmental responsibility. Some companies may be linked to UK public authorities and hence caught by the UK EIRs. A single contract between a Scottish public authority and a private organisation will not necessarily bring the private company within the scope of the environmental information regime although it may do so. Each case will need to be considered on its merits. No comprehensive list can be compiled of the companies and organisations under the control of a Scottish public authority. Such relationships are dynamic and subject to change.
CHAPTER THREE FINDINGS: ASPECTS OF DEMAND

Scotland has implemented legislation and established the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) to arbitrate, rule and lead on matters relating to the provision of information, and the Scottish Executive is now giving detailed consideration to the mechanisms that may be required to meet their outline commitments to environmental justice. Having established that it is in the public interest to make environmental information available and accessible, it is nonetheless important to take account of current levels of awareness and demand for this. This may represent varying levels of demand, but it will also indicate to what degree the public interest should be stimulated.

Chapter 3 examines current demand for environmental information in Scotland and identifies public preferences in terms of access. The analysis is based on the results from the providers’ survey, focus groups, survey of the public and interviews, along with existing information from other independent studies. This chapter then assesses public awareness regarding environmental information, and how the public determines their first point of contact. It investigates who is asking for information and what motivates their interest, which leads to a discussion on what type of information people are requesting. Finally, the importance of how to promote information services is discussed.

Evidence on awareness and demand for environmental information

3.1 Against a context mapped out by a survey on sustainable consumption, the National Consumer Council (Steedman 2005) found that 57% of people not actively seeking environmental information claimed that they either did not require more information or that they already knew enough. In Scotland, a comprehensive study by Professor Mark Poustie for Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) (Poustie, 2004) illustrated that the reasons underlying the low uptake of rights of access to environmental information included lack of awareness, accessibility, inadequate publicity and comprehensibility of the information. Further, a study completed by the OSIC in April 2005 (OSIC, 2005) showed that only 4% of people had ever made a written request for information that a public authority holds.

3.2 From existing evidence in this field a variety of reasons for these findings emerge including no knowledge of how to obtain environmental information, a misunderstanding of the meaning of environmental information, a lack of interest in environmental issues or already feeling well informed on the subject.

3.3 Research findings from the public survey for this study also appear to support these findings. The results show that one in four of the general population have wanted environmental information, although the majority of respondents have not, to date, wanted such information (see Figure 3.1).
Figure 3.1 ‘Have you ever wanted information about environmental issues, e.g. information about recycling, local pollution, flood risk, planning applications, climate change or global warming?’
(Omnibus results, n = 1,001)

3.4 When these results are broken down by age, gender and social grade, it becomes apparent that the demand for environmental information reduces with an increase in age. The gender split is fairly even, however, there is a marked decrease in expressed demand for environmental information as social grouping moves from AB to DE. These results demonstrate that it is principally among the more elderly and the less affluent that interest remains to be stimulated.

3.5 More than half (51%) of the respondents claimed to be aware of their legal right to access environmental information to some degree. When Question 3 and Question 5 of the survey of the general public are plotted against each other (see Table 3.1), it becomes evident that the behaviour of the respondents is not significantly affected by their awareness of the legal right to access environmental information. For example, of respondents that were not aware of their legal right to access information, 59% still requested the information they wanted, while 41% did not. Of people that were definitely aware of their legal right, the majority (60%) requested information; of respondents that only thought they were aware, there was little difference in whether they requested information (48%) or not (49%).
Table 3.2 Q3 ‘Did you request the information that you wanted?’ by Q5 ‘Awareness of the legal right to access environmental information.’

(Omnibus results, n = 1,001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q5: Awareness of the legal right to access environmental information</th>
<th>Yes, definitely aware</th>
<th>Yes, I think I’m aware</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3: Did you request the information that you wanted?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 When the results of Question 3 are analysed by age, gender and social grade, it appears that the 61% of the most affluent group followed through with an actual request, while this decreased steadily across the social grades to only 39% in the least affluent social grade. This suggests that it is among the less affluent that most work needs to be done to empower and equip them to carry an interest through to an actual request.

3.7 When the results of Question 5 are broken down by age, gender and social grade it becomes apparent that only slightly more men were aware of their rights than women. Half of the most affluent social grade was definitely aware of their legal right, while only 33% of the lowest social grade was definitely aware.

3.8 This Scottish evidence depicts a situation not dissimilar to that described in other western nations that have already implemented procedures and mechanisms for allowing public access to environmental information. A Canadian study looked into the constraints on accessing environmental information and found that although many citizens are interested in obtaining more information, they do not know where to find it or believe the information does not exist. One third of respondents said they were interested in more information and knew where to look, but found it too inconvenient (Environics International Ltd, 2001).

3.9 The survey findings were tested further in the focus groups. In general, the focus group members agreed that people are not aware that the information they require exists and is accessible to them. One participant echoed the Canadian study finding and indicated that often people just do not know that there is an issue or that the information is available. The majority of focus group members felt that many people are not aware of the environmental information that is available, even when it has been available for some time. For example, one participant pointed out that regulatory bodies have been publishing information about wildlife crime on a public registry for years, but that not many people were aware of this.

3.10 In addition, another focus group member discussed a survey completed during the update of the EIR in 2004, which found that only nine of the thirty respondents had come across EIR before. The Commissioner, Kevin Dunion, indicated in an interview
for this project, that the EIR has had a lower uptake than expected. This contrasts with
the higher than anticipated FOI requests since January 2005.

3.11 One NGO representative indicated that the public can be apathetic until an issue
ignites their personal interest. A few of the focus group participants pointed out that it
can be difficult to generate interest on such things as personal health care or finances,
let alone global, intangible issues such as climate change. This Scottish observation
correlates with the evidence generated for the UK as a whole by the NCC which also
found that only a relatively small number of consumers had actively sought out
information on sustainable lifestyles (19% on at least one topic and only 8% for five
or more). This was in contrast with levels for other long-term issues: 75% of
consumers said they had sought at least some information on how to live more
healthily; and 63% on pensions and savings. At least 18% of consumers were simply
not interested in finding out more on sustainable consumption at all (Steedman, 2005).

Meeting the public interest

3.12 Discussion at the focus groups concentrated on what motivates interest, both from the
perspective of the public and individuals. The majority of participants were of the
view that often people are only interested in issues that affect them personally. One
participant in the focus groups suggested that people are often motivated for ‘selfish
reasons’ and will only request information when there is an issue that may affect them
personally and their quality of life. One participant felt that members of the public are
primarily driven by consumer concerns and choice (e.g. what’s in my fridge? What
products should I buy?), while another participant from an NGO noted that in the
midst of general public apathy, it takes only one person with a strong interest to
motivate others.

3.13 From this evidence the distinction between demand-led and supply-led information
provision has been developed as discussed in Chapter 2. The research findings
indicate that the presentation of stimulating environmental information and provision
of services should take account of quality of life and personal interest issues, as
dimensions of the public interest being served.

3.14 One civil servant at the focus groups felt that the Aarhus Convention emphasises the
importance of environmental democracy and the need to be informed. Access to
information helps to provide the public with the means to participate in decision-
making and to challenge those decisions made by others. He felt that participation can
only work when people are informed. The majority of the other participants agreed
with this, and felt that it was important to stimulate public interest in environmental
information. This opinion supports the principle that whether interest or demand for
environmental information is low or high, it is important, in the spirit of the Aarhus
Convention, to encourage public participation and access to information.

Sources of environmental information

3.15 The logical step once interest and awareness have been stimulated and ignited among
the public is to begin to seek the desired environmental information. Therefore there
is a need to assess whether people know whom to approach in their quest for this.
Existing evidence from England suggests that those who lack knowledge of scientific
issues and those who are most affected by environmental problems are usually the
most likely to be discouraged from seeking help (Adebowale, 2004). When looking
for a first point of contact for environmental advice, this study showed that most people can list a number of places which they may try to approach, but often do not know the most appropriate point of contact.

3.16 A key question in the public survey aimed to ascertain the respondents’ awareness of organisations providing environmental information in Scotland. The results suggest that most people in Scotland are not aware that statutory bodies have specific roles in terms of providing information (see Figure 3.2). It was found that a quarter of respondents (25%) would approach their local authority for information, whilst another 15% of respondents would approach an NGO or environmental charity. In addition, the majority of respondents were unsure of which organisations offer help, advice or information on the environment. Of the 52% of people who were unsure of which organisation to approach, it was the most elderly (65+ years) and the least affluent (66%) who were most commonly unsure. The 25-34 age group and the most affluent are the most likely to approach an NGO or charity. Within the sector identified as ‘other’, it was Greenpeace and Citizens Advice Bureaux who had the most popularity as a source of environmental information.

![Figure 3.2](image)

**Figure 3.2** ‘Can you please tell me the name of any organisations that offer help, advice or information on the environment?’

(Omnibus results, n = 1,001)

3.17 The findings illustrated in Figure 3.2, prompted discussion in the focus groups which centred on the identity of those organisations that people associate with providing environmental information. Certain participants felt that most people would approach the incorrect point of contact in favour of an organisation with whom they were more familiar. The focus group discussions suggested that the public may be more inclined to approach a local or familiar organisation rather than a more specialist one.

3.18 Whilst there was widespread agreement among the focus group participants that there is general confusion amongst the public regarding the roles of the various environmental organisations (and who holds what information), there was no apparent consensus in terms of who should be responsible for guiding the public to the correct sources of environmental information.

3.19 In his book, *Troublemakers*, Dunion pointed out that “it may be that the individual requires a mass of information from a variety of different sources to be fully
The literature and evidence indicate that this can be very discouraging for those people who are disinclined from the outset to ask for environmental information. Other studies have identified complaints about first points of contact including a lack of sign posting, length of response time, travel distances, lack of technical assistance and cost. It was found that most people had to go through, on average, three points of contact before receiving the required information or assistance (Adebowale, 2004).

3.20 The focus groups agreed that trust is an important factor when the public is determining whom to approach for information, as participants felt that often, individuals will base their information-seeking decision on which organisations they trust in a wider regard. A 2002 report by the Scottish Executive on “Managing Radioactive Waste Safely – Engaging Scotland” found that the ‘unaffected public’ places most trust in community groups, and in the information provided by regulators and NGOs rather than by the nuclear industry and government (Elrick et al, 2002). This research also mapped out widespread misunderstanding about both the organisations and the waste issues involved. However, ‘trust’ was established as the pivotal aspect upon which engagement on waste issues needed to proceed.

Requesters of environmental information

3.21 The majority of information providers include the general public amongst the users of their service. However, most of these providers also provide information to between four and eight groups in addition to the general public. The findings from this study suggests that it tends to be the local councils that report the highest level of requests generated by the public, whilst researchers, regulators and government agencies tend to deal with requests from a wider range of ‘user groups’ of which a proportion are the public.

3.22 The information providers’ survey found that users of environmental information in Scotland originate from a wide range of sectors including the general public, commercial organisations and consultants, academics, NGOs and government researchers (see Figure 3.3). These findings are supported by existing research evidence which suggests that environmental information is used by a number of different groups including the media, professionals and researchers, decision-makers, interest groups and the general public.

3.23 The focus groups also discussed the survey’s categorisation of environmental information request groups. Some participants felt that it might be useful to further distinguish ‘requester’ from ‘user’. There was also some agreement that the general public can be divided into two main groups: one that is generally interested in environmental information and another that is interested in a particular issue that affects them personally, which supports the concept of citizen and consumer discussed in Chapter 2.

3.24 In discussing community groups, the focus groups noted that they may have different information requirements. Some community groups, who request information, may include specialists, such as toxicologists or chemists, while others may have no experience with environmental matters at all. It was generally felt that environmental information must be targeted to particular groups and individuals, to ensure that the information is useful and to take account of the audience’s level of experience.

3.25 The focus groups also discussed various aspects of access to environmental information and the boundaries that many requesters or users face. In terms of the public interest, already discussed in Chapter 2, this is a critical consideration.
From this study, it was clear that many users have to overcome barriers in terms of being able to access information. For example, some may encounter difficulty in interpreting the data, particularly if it is presented in an overly technical format. Similarly those who are already marginalised may be more disenfranchised and may require more encouragement to participate. They may struggle to access IT systems due to a disability, a lack of resources or a shortage of funding within their local community. This is an important consideration when discussing the cost and ease of accessing information, particularly within the wider context of environmental justice. The specific findings of this research indicate that the most common barrier to accessing environmental information is the technical nature of it, followed by the capacity of the service and lack of access to IT services.

In order to explore whether those who wish to ask for environmental information are prompted by an interest or a particular concern, and to help identify what issues these requests had sprung from, one of the questions in the survey of the public was ‘why did you want environmental information?’ (Figure 3.4). The most common answers included ‘general concern for the environment’ and ‘interest in environmental issues’. Thereafter the most common responses related to ‘local concerns about the environment, pollution and planning applications.’ This suggests that people who are requesting environmental information are doing so due to an interest and awareness of environmental issues in general and also out of concern for their local environment. This might suggest that while larger scale issues may be of interest to the public, it is the smaller scale, more localised issues that generate a concern. Again, this reflects the different approach between citizen and consumer.

It is important to note that within the ‘other reasons’ category, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were concerned with ‘gaining information about recycling facilities or how to recycle waste more effectively.’ This aligns appropriately with the promotion of waste reduction and recycling by the Scottish Executive and other environmental bodies. The Key Scottish Environment Statistics finding between 2003 and 2004, reported a 6% increase in recycling activity (from 55% to 61%) among Scottish households (Scottish Executive, 2005c). It is likely that the relationship between the demand for, regulation of, and promotion and supply of recycling facilities is complex, but these new findings indicate that recycling is one of the primary reasons that people requested information in Scotland in 2005.
Of those that requested environmental information the majority of the respondents used the information for lifestyle or recycling changes. This is consistent with the above finding that there was a strong interest in gaining information about recycling facilities or how to recycle waste more effectively.

In general, it was found that women were more concerned with environmental issues (32%) than men (20%), and were more concerned with local issues than men. In addition, the least affluent social classes were four times more likely (27%) to be concerned by local issues than the most affluent (7%).

It was the age group of 25-34 year olds and women rather than men who were the most motivated by an interest in lifestyle changes. In terms of using the environmental information for help with a planning application, it was men (24%) rather than women (10%) that were motivated by this, which is consistent with the results above.

When the results from the survey of the public are broken down by age, gender and social grade some findings are of note. The age category of 55-64 had the highest level of worry about health. In terms of planning applications, men were more concerned by this (15%) than women (6%), and the most affluent social grade were more concerned than those with less affluence.

The focus groups, which included several people employed at the ‘receiving end’ of environmental information requests, agreed that most requests are reactive, and currently do not embody the true spirit of the Aarhus Convention and the encouragement of environmental awareness amongst the public.

In this context, several of the focus group participants agreed that communities need to become involved and empowered, and some felt that the best way to achieve this would be through information networks and by using existing resources. It was suggested by a number of participants that networks could be formed from existing infrastructure such as the Community Council Network and Area Committees, and there was a commonly held view that there may not be a need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ in order to provide an effective service providing environmental information. This links with the findings on the supply side where it was suggested that an entirely new service is not required, but one built on services that already exist.

Types of environmental information

Both the topic and the format of the available information determine its utility to the user. Canadian research described the range of types of environmental information including general, regulatory, administrative, policy, specific and personal (Lura Consulting, 2001). That study then concluded that a service providing environmental information need not provide ‘all the answers to all the questions’, but it should be able to direct a customer to the most appropriate information source. Therefore, existing evidence asserts that it is the principle of aligning requests to available information (while informing the shape of future information collection and provision) that is paramount.

In order to establish which topics for environmental information are currently generating most demand in Scotland, the organisations participating in the providers’ survey were asked which ‘interest areas’ they currently respond to. These areas of interest are set out in Figure 3.5. In more detail, requests about policy and legislation
are most numerous, with human health and food/environmental consumer issues being less frequently represented in the survey. Water quality and climate change were also identified as areas of concern. These results are perhaps linked to changes in law and policy but undoubtedly demonstrate the importance of demand-led requests. This is something that could change with time and with variations of supply. Within the particular topics, requests relating to waste, land, pollution and water are predominant.

![Figure 3.5](image)

**Figure 3.5** ‘What are the most common types of request which you provide information about?’ (information providers’ survey results, n = 25)

3.37 The findings in Figure 3.5 echo those of the European Commission’s Eurobarometer 2005, which found that Europeans are worried about ‘water pollution’ (47%), ‘man made disasters’ (46%), ‘climate change’ and ‘air pollution’ (both 45%) and impact on our health of chemicals used in everyday products (35%) (European Commission, 2005). The same study found that more than half of the respondents would like to know more about solutions to environmental problems (55%), while only a minority wants to know more about the environmental problems themselves (14%). Another
23% indicated that they would like to know both about the problems and the solutions.

**Promotion of environmental information services**

3.38 In terms of generating public awareness, many of the organisations that were interviewed for the providers’ survey indicated that they were involved in promoting their services to the public using a variety of techniques (see Figure 3.6).

![Figure 3.6](image)

**Figure 3.6 ‘How do you promote your organisation’s provision of environmental information?’ (information providers’ survey results, n = 25)**

3.39 The providers’ survey results revealed that there are a number of methods currently employed by organisations to promote an environmental information service. These include:

- Information networks – which rely on the web, media, seminars, bulletin boards, dissemination through other networks, published papers, newsletters and conferences
- Local authorities – which rely mainly on the web, followed by local libraries, TV/radio, shop fronts, roadshows, community events, publication schemes, Community Councils and Area Committees
- Researchers – who rely mainly on the web, followed by community events, TV/radio, shop fronts, roadshows, newspaper adverts, trade shows, conferences and seminars. One group indicated that they did not promote their information provision service as they did not want to be swamped with requests.
- Regulators – who rely mainly on the web, followed by community events, advertising campaigns, newspaper adverts, TV/radio, roadshows, publication schemes, leaflets, a freepost address and a 0845 phone number for enquiries.
• Government agencies – which rely mainly on the web, followed by local library, shop fronts, and proactive marketing media including publications, magazines, booklets, leaflets, lectures, seminars, trade shows, marketing campaigns, Doors Open Day, free open weekend and free school visits.

• NGOs – which rely mainly on the web, followed by newspaper adverts, local library, shop front, roadshows and other media such as press releases, home visits, visits to employers and leaflets to community groups, umbrella groups, advice centres, events workshops and Community Councils.

3.40 During the focus groups, one participant indicated that because the provision of information is not their organisation’s main goal, this service is not promoted. A representative from a regulatory body pointed out that although the provision of information was not their main aim, it was in their best interest to provide information and guidance in order to prevent illegal actions from occurring in the first place.

3.41 The majority of participants at the focus groups felt that people need to be targeted through everyday promotional media such as television. This reflects widespread practice, as illustrated in the Canadian study again. Some focus group participants suggested that promotion of the service should be conducted through a number of different channels, depending on the audience to be reached. The participants suggested free phone lines, postal addresses and publications could be used to promote an environmental information service.

Conclusions

3.42 The research into the ‘demand’ aspects of current provision of environmental information in Scotland indicated the following:

• The Omnibus survey of the public, conducted for this study, found that the majority of respondents have not, to date, wanted information concerning the environment; however, 25% have wanted environmental information at some stage or other. There is a reasonable level of awareness of the new regulations and rights to access environmental information (51%) amongst the general public and they are well represented within the current volume of requests received by organisations that participated in this research. This suggests: (a) those with a vested interest in environmental information would usually find a way in which to access information; (b) given the relative infancy of the legislation, this percentage will possibly increase over time.

• This research also suggests that it may be possible to ignite interest through consumer-inspired demand, for example through an interest in purchasing an energy efficient fridge. This interest could be captured and harnessed to information on broader, more citizen-inspired interests (such as the Scottish Climate Change Programme). By identifying the key opportunities to convert consumer-inspired exchanges of information into citizen-inspired provision of information, it may be possible to stimulate and generate a citizen/Aarhus type demand.

• While interest in environmental issues tends to manifest in response to large scale ‘concerns’, requests for environmental information are more often generated at a local level. This suggests that an information service, whether delivering consumer or citizen-inspired information, should be designed to
meet individual concerns and may need to be presented through local, immediate messaging.

- There is a considerable degree of misunderstanding and misinformation among the public about the location and availability of environmental information. There are low levels of awareness of the relevant authorities currently engaged in meeting FoI and EIR obligations and providing environmental information on request to the public. This constitutes a barrier to those both wanting to access the information, as well as those trying to provide it effectively.

- From the public survey findings, the web is the most common method by which information is accessed, but there is also a need for TV/radio advertising so that awareness about organisations such as SEPA (and their website information provision) is raised.

- In terms of targeting particular sectors of society, it is principally among the more elderly and the less affluent that interest remains to be stimulated. Combined with other evidence on preferred access routes to information, it is apparent that there should be a mix of access routes in addition to websites, and that all of these should be promoted using appropriate messaging for target groups.

- The Omnibus survey findings revealed that of those who had ever wanted environmental information, 61% of the most affluent social grade had ‘followed through’ to actually make a request, while only 39% of those in the least affluent groups had managed to do this. Therefore it is likely to be among the less affluent that most work needs to be done to empower and provide the assistance to carry an interest through to an actual request. The FoES ARK project provides an example of this kind of support.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) See Case Study 13 in Chapter 5
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS: ASPECTS OF SUPPLY

Several key organisations in Scotland have been providing environmental information in some form and to a mix of service users for a considerable time before the recent legislative drivers were introduced. However, the FOI and the EIR, coupled with political engagement in the issue of environmental justice has prompted a commitment to increase the public’s involvement through the more effective provision of environmental information. This Scottish research looks for the first time at existing delivery methods of environmental information and how far these meet the present and future needs of the public in the context of environmental justice.

This chapter includes an assessment of who is currently providing environmental information in Scotland, and some of the issues associated with a service providing environmental information including the nature of environmental data, how to interpret data and data management. The cost, organisational structure and staffing are also discussed.

Environmental information providers

4.1 Even to researchers who work within the environmental field in Scotland on a continuous basis, it was not immediately apparent where one would draw the boundary to include or exclude organisations providing environmental information. This is mainly due to the common definition of environmental information (see Chapter 2) being broad and relatively diffuse, and the ability for organisations to provide selective elements of ‘environmental information’ resulting in a multiplicity of sources without one organisation providing comprehensive coverage.

4.2 To identify the organisations to include in the providers’ survey the research team drew up a list of key players, such as SEPA and local authorities, and then extended this search through undertaking their own ‘enquiries’ to highlight less obvious providers, for example, the British Geological Society and the Deer Commission for Scotland. This process of identification illustrated that it is not immediately clear which organisations in Scotland provide what type of ‘environmental information’ and that the ‘signposting’ was only facilitated through proactive following up of links and new lines of enquiry. The experience of the researchers was further reinforced by many of the focus group participants who felt that often people in Scotland do not know whom to first approach when they have a question about the environment.

4.3 The desk research identified a number of organisations in Scotland that are involved in providing environmental information in some form, or other aspects of environmental information such as regulation, data management or legal advice. It also identified organisations that provide non-environmental information but can illustrate a model of information provision, such as the Healthy Environment Network (HEN) (see Chapter 5 Case Study 6).

4.4 In the context of assessing the need, through this research, for a single source outlet of information, most providers within the focus groups felt strongly that there are many existing groups and networks of people in Scotland that can be used to help facilitate access to information, and that new services are not necessarily needed. However, better signposting between organisations would be beneficial.
Nature of environmental data

4.5 As discussed above, environmental information is not easy to define. In addition to including a wide range of subject categories it can also vary from relatively basic environmental information to data which is more complex, technical and academic. Service providers usually decide the boundaries of their service in terms of subject area and the type of data to be presented. The boundaries of provision may also reflect geographical coverage, funding requirements and/or technical focus and therefore be supplier-led rather than demand-led.

4.6 The focus group discussions reflected the differences particular to environmental information and the difficulty of determining what should be considered as environmental information. Many features of the built environment have been identified by the OSIC as environmental data; for instance, one focus group participant had received a request for a road register and this was considered by the OSIC to be an EIR request. Even though roads are identified as falling within EIR, information providers are not necessarily aware of this. The participants at the focus groups indicated that further guidance with examples provided by the OSIC on this definitional aspect would be welcome.

4.7 Provision of information and advice is also complicated by difficulties of matching data held to the enquirer’s request. Data can be collected using varying definitions, units of measurement, timescales and frequency. This can then present difficulties in aggregating data if collection methods are not consistent. In addition, it may be that a provider does not have the appropriate scale of information; for example, as one focus group participant indicated, they may hold information for particular sites, but do not hold trend data at a national scale, and therefore responding to requests can be onerous if work has to be undertaken in order to meet the request.

4.8 Environmental data is also integrative and the answers to requests can require information to be collated from various sources. It can become confusing if different organisations provide different answers to the same question but this could happen if organisations are using different data sets or combining them differently to provide answers.

Data management

4.9 Data management is a key issue for all information providers as it is complex, expensive, time consuming and pivotal to the success of the service. Often physical barriers such as storage space can determine by default elements of the data management system. For example in this research the focus groups discussed how the introduction of FOI and EIR has improved data management and given this issue more recognition in Scotland. Until recently, redundant information had been retained on an ad hoc schedule (often disposed of when the storeroom was full).

4.10 It was clear from the majority of our focus group participants that there was a strong call for the internal investment of resources in data management, so that there is a single person or team responsible for holding ownership of the information. In the experience of the research team, this less visible part of information provision is often under-resourced and lacking in system structure. This can lead to problems such as duplication and the retention of drafts and useless documents. Furthermore, this
reflects the need for public information provision to be recognised as a core function of an organisation which may have many other functions.

4.11 It was agreed by the majority during the focus groups that better records management can lead to better information provision. One participant suggested that a system such as the Dewey Decimal system in libraries could be applied to the management of environmental information. This type of system is both central and local, in that it is a global system that can be used at a local level in libraries around the world. This participant speculated whether a similar concept could be applied to the information held by public authorities.

**Interpretation of information**

4.12 The interpretation of information is another challenge for providers of environmental information and advice, especially when the service users may represent a wide range of interest, needs and technical abilities. Scientific data can be technical and complex, which makes it difficult to collate and interpret in a format that is meaningful to the general public. The same information can be presented at many different levels, as some people may want to access a detailed technical science paper while others may only need a short summary.

4.13 In a review completed by SEPA in 2004 (Poustie, 2004), it was found that there was less interest in raw data and that people preferred interpreted information; nevertheless, most environmental information is currently provided in raw data form. The study found that people perceive environmental information in a holistic manner and expect to see a full picture. This can be difficult to provide as information on the various components of the environment may be held by a number of different organisations in a variety of different formats.

4.14 The finding above was reinforced by the providers’ survey results that indicated that the majority of bodies surveyed do attempt to provide interpretation or explanatory services to assist the understanding of technical or specialist information, with 19 of the responding organisations stating that they did. For example, one local authority indicated that they offered interpreted information by publishing reports and information on the web, and by providing summary versions of technical reports. Although this may make the information more accessible for some the interpretation is supplier-led and may not meet the needs of the particular request or user group.

4.15 Case Study 1 (see Chapter 5) shows that the EHS3 project uses data from a number of different agencies to create a more integrated system of providing information about environment and health. This is a form of interpretation which helps to take raw data and transform it into information that may be more useful to others.

4.16 A service providing environmental information can employ generalists to help interpret the data for the public. This way, there are two levels of information provision, so that if the public does not understand the information, then they can be referred to someone who can offer assistance. This is similar to the role of the Citizen’s Advice Scotland (CAS)\(^{21}\) who apply the following levels of assistance to

\(^{21}\) Personal communication with Citizens Advice Scotland, via Martyn Evans, Director of the Scottish Consumer Council.
enquirers who approach their staff at Citizen’s Advice Bureaux (CABs) across Scotland:

**Category 1: Signposting:** is when there is a straightforward request for information, e.g. information on bus times or the address of a local councillor. Signposting also includes internal referrals to specialist workers and the issue of leaflet/letter, but no additional information or advice is given.

**Category 2: Listening ear:** is when time is predominantly spent listening to the client's problems, and where little advice or information is given.

**Category 3: Information/advice within the CAB:** is when the advice or information provided requires an understanding of the advice needs of the client but does not involve the worker in negotiations outside the bureau on behalf of the client. This may involve contacts with outside bodies to check details relating to a client's case.

**Category 4: Information/advice/negotiation with outside bodies:** is when there is some negotiation with outside bodies but where this stops short of formal representation work.

**Category 5: Representation work:** is when negotiation has not resolved a situation, and the case becomes representation at the point at which a formal appeal is lodged. This would include employment tribunals, unified appeals tribunals, representation in court.

4.17 The CAS categories above are designed to build on each other so that the higher workload categories override the lower ones. This applies even if the client raises a number of issues that require different levels of work. Only one workload category is allocated for each contact and is relevant to what has been discussed with that particular contact. Therefore, when dealing with an ongoing case the workload figure can go up and down, but this only applies to categories 1 to 4. When a case becomes a level 5 it will always be that category level as long as there is still active discussion regarding the case with a particular contact. Representation is recorded once a formal appeal is lodged, all contact where representation is discussed after the formal appeals has been lodged will be a category 5 regardless of what is discussed. Therefore for any period the number of workload categories and client contacts will be the same.

4.18 This example from CAS provides a useful system to record the complexity of enquiries and how they should be prioritised. It shows different levels of engagement with the enquirer up to the point where CAS is actively supporting them in categories 4 and 5. A similar hierarchy could be applied to environmental information to capture the spectrum of demand-led reactive information provision to supply-led proactive provision and empowerment of the individual or community.

4.19 Another effective way of organising information is according to the user’s potential interests or concerns. For example, Brent Council ‘life episodes’ information management links directly to the user’s life stage rather than expecting them to understand the structure of the council and be able to navigate this to access information (see Case Study 2). Although there are further examples (Melton Borough Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, South Gloucestershire Council and London Borough of Barking and Dagenham) of information being presented in this manner it is unusual rather than commonplace.
It is important that barriers to information are considered, and that information should be published in a manner that can be accessible to all people (e.g. translated into other languages, provided in Braille and using plain English). It should also be appreciated there are other factors to accessing communities, such as the household and community decision making structure. For example, work done by Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (Garlick, 2005) illustrates there are many social nuances to the way a community functions that will affect how effective a waste provision service can be; including their visibility to the wider community, priorities within the community, the media within which they function, meeting places and places of worship. Research into these factors prior to developing a promotion strategy will help remove barriers that may otherwise not be understood.

Current dissemination of environmental information

The ARK FoES initiative adopts an issue-based approach (see Case Study 13) and this can also be seen in other organisations where certain issues attract proactive supply-led provision whereas other areas of environmental information provision will remain reactive demand-led. An example of this is the proactive provision of information that SEPA has provided for the local authority waste planning issues arising from the National Waste Plan (Waste Action Scotland, 2003), whereas reactive demand-led provision would be provided for issues such as pollution incidents.

The focus groups discussed the benefits of proactive dissemination, but the majority of participants across the different sectors represented felt that this needed to be weighed up against the costs. Proactively publishing information can be costly, and may not be worthwhile if it is never requested. The majority thought that information should be published as issues arise, in order to match public demand. It was felt that a balance between cost and benefit would need to be achieved, so that the information published would be useful. On this theme, one participant colourfully observed “the road to hell is paved with unvisited websites”.

This contrasts with the Scottish Consumer Council’s (SCC) recent research, indicating that the public feel that local authorities should be more proactive in trying to disseminate information, using methods such as (SCC, 2004a):

- Presentations to local groups such as Community Councils
- Production of videos presenting information in graphic format
- Displays of current environmental issues in public places such as libraries and shopping centres
- Use of free local papers, local radio and TV

The balance between the expense of proactive information provision (which is potentially under-used) and the need to do so nonetheless (if effective public provision of environmental information is to be achieved) is one of the main challenges of information supply. ARK provides a community focussed service directly addressing potential environmental in-justice. Their geographical coverage is restricted by resources with one member of staff covering the whole of Scotland. The local authorities, on the other hand, have a higher density of geographical coverage but may be concerned that proactively spending resources on information could result
in wastage and it is therefore easier to provide most information in response to
demand.

4.25 The real or perceived risk of spending resources on potentially unused information
provision is partly due to the difficulty of knowing what would be well received. Information
is likely to be well received where there is a need or imminent need for it. An example of this which has been highlighted through this research is the provision
of information about recycling and lifestyle change. One of the National Waste Plan
targets is to provide 98% of households with kerbside recycling facilities (Waste
Action Scotland, 2003). This has been implemented in many local authority areas
with a combination of the development of infrastructure accompanied by motivational
and instructional information proactively provided to the householder. The findings of
the survey of the public discussed in Chapter 3 indicate that there is now considerable
demand for this initially supply-led provision of information.

4.26 The Environmental Issues (wave 4) report (TNS System Three, 2004) summarises the
key findings from an evaluation of the impact of the Scottish Executive’s former
environmental awareness campaign ‘Do a Little Change a Lot’ (DALCAL). It is
noted that general attitudes towards the environment have shifted slightly but not
consistently in a positive direction, for example, fewer people are unsure about their
personal role in protecting the environment but more people claim not to think about
how their lifestyle effects the environment or that they should do more to protect it.
The apparent decrease in commitment is sometimes linked to lack of infrastructure to
‘follow through’ and sustain awareness, although there is a positive trend to note with
recycling, where infrastructure has increased in coverage. This accompanies a shift
away from TV advertising that heightens awareness but may not necessarily
courage retention of information.

Effect of EIR on provision of information

4.27 A focus group participant pointed out that the EIR affects the possession of data but
not necessarily the ownership. This is important to note as reports that are written by
one entity (e.g. a consultant) and then submitted voluntarily to another (e.g. a local
authority) may then be released into the public domain. Whether this may make some
entities more reluctant to release information to public authorities is yet to be
established.

4.28 Those who hold environmental information are exempt from providing information if
it is deemed to be commercially sensitive, but the subjective decision on commercial
confidentiality is left up to the holder of the information.

4.29 There can be environmental and economic implications associated with releasing
certain information into the public domain. For instance, SNH will not release
particular information about sensitive sites as this could potentially cause further harm
or damage to the sites. The release of some information, such as floodplains map, is
sensitive as it could result in the devaluation of land and have an impact on
investment.

4.30 Due to these implications, organisations may become reluctant to release data. For
instance, the EHS3 Case Study (Case Study 1 in Chapter 5) is based on voluntary data
from its participating agencies. If these public authorities cease to release data then
this could be detrimental to the project.
Access to information

4.31 This scoping study found that the most common methods of disseminating environmental information by providers to users when it was requested include email, letter, telephone and website and in that order (see Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1 ‘What media are used to disseminate information?’ (information providers’ survey n=25)](image)

4.32 Within these figures, it appeared that local authorities mainly use email and letters to disseminate information. Research organisations, such as the British Geological Survey, rely on email, telephone, letters, briefing notes and newsletters equally. Environmental agencies, such as SEPA, rely mostly on email, although letters are also frequently used. The NGOs were similar to the research organisations and use email, telephone, letters, briefing notes and newsletters equally to disseminate information.

Public preferences in accessing information

4.33 It appears from this research that there is a preference for some of the more traditional methods, such as letter and telephone, plus email to access information, as shown by the results of the focus groups, the providers’ survey and survey of the public. This has been corroborated by other studies conducted across Scotland. One 2003 survey found that 67% of respondents disagree with the idea that new ways of contacting the Council should replace more traditional methods of getting in touch (Perth and Kinross Council, 2003).

4.34 The majority of the focus group participants also agreed that there is no need to develop new technologies and that the most effective way of publicising information and services to people is through the systems that they already use, such as:

- Newsletters
- Community centres
- Libraries
- Housing associations
- The Body Shop and health food stores
• Doctor’s surgeries
• Youth (Young Scot website, internet, competitions, handbook)
• Churches
• Community Council networks
• Environmental Information Officers within local authorities

4.35 A study conducted for one local authority demonstrated that, in terms of preferred method of contact, there was an increased use of the telephone by the public. The respondents indicated that they preferred speaking directly to someone who could assist them. The survey found that over 70% of the respondents contacted the Council by telephone (Duncan, 2001). Another survey conducted for East Lothian Council in 2005 found that the majority of respondents (64%) had never used the internet personally (East Lothian Council, 2005).

4.36 These preferred methods are further reinforced by a survey completed by the Perth and Kinross Council, which found that the three most likely methods of contacting the Council would be phoning the relevant service (32%), phoning the switchboard (25%) and visiting the local office (11%). The next most popular methods were visiting the office in the city centre (10%), sending an email (8%), sending a letter (7%), approaching a councillor or MSP/MP/MEP (4%) and visiting the Council website (3%). It should also be noted that current developments such as the Efficient Government agenda is working to promote the internet for public information as it is the most cost effective mechanism for delivering such services. With effective promotion this may enhance its use and popularity.

4.37 Although the internet and websites may be considered as increasing in popularity, a survey completed by the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar found that there were only 0.4% of enquiries were via the internet whereas 60% of contacts were by phone (Macpherson Research, 2003). This use pattern by remote dwellers was shared by the more urbanised users in Tayside. Dundee City Council conducted a survey that found that contact was made mostly by a general phone call to the Council (46%) followed by a personal visit to the Council office (46%), letter (3%), email (2%) and website (1%) (Ashbrook, 2004).

4.38 This research and the surveys above found that overall the telephone was the most popular method of contacting a local authority, followed by an in-person visit to Council offices. It must be noted that these results demonstrate preferred methods of contact, and do not necessarily mean that the local authority was asked for information (e.g. they may be following up on a payment or challenging a fine).

4.39 However, in contradiction to this, the results of the survey of the public found that the most popular methods of obtaining environmental information were websites, and then post and telephone (see Figure 4.2).

22 www.youngscot.org.uk
4.40 These findings support existing evidence by another study conducted in 2002, which investigated the sources of information that people use to retrieve environmental information (Haklay, 2002a). The four most popular sources included national newspapers, TV/radio, local newspapers and the internet.

4.41 There are possible explanations for these apparent differences. For example, it may be that providers are not able to measure what type of information is accessed by websites and therefore perceive it to be artificially low. The other surveys discussed above were asking about a range of services, not just environmental information, and more importantly were looking at the preferred method of contact with the local authority rather than the preferred method of accessing environmental information. Differences such as these and others may have led to these apparently conflicting results.

4.42 Information provision usually benefits from a mix of methods of dissemination as different media lend themselves to different types of information and access. For example, websites are useful for reaching a wide audience, but may not be easily accessible by everyone, particularly those in remote communities not ‘wired up’ yet. One Canadian report (Environics, 2001) presented evidence that a telephone hotline, in combination with a website, was the most effective way to provide easy access to environmental information.

4.43 Preferences for accessing information are also influenced by other factors such as time. Another study completed in Canada (Westworth, 2002) found that the time required to access data and the accessibility of various data sources were two primary constraints, each being identified by 78% of the respondents. Therefore, a service providing environmental information must be quick and convenient to access (i.e. in terms of travel time, downloading documents from the internet or wait times on a telephone hotline).

4.44 The focus group participants agreed with this, and indicated that many documents available on the internet comprise large files and can take a long time to download, or may be in the wrong format and cannot be accessed properly. In addition, there is an abundance of useless information on websites, which can be difficult and time-consuming to sift through in order to locate relevant information.
Cost and value of information

4.45 In considering the resource needed for the interpretation and preparation of information, and in order to help ascertain what value people place on the environmental information they request, the survey of the public asked how much the public would be prepared to pay to obtain environmental information. The majority of respondents (52%) were not prepared to pay for environmental information at all, with another 24% of respondents ‘unsure’ and only 3% willing to pay ‘whatever it costs’. It is interesting to note that this unwillingness to pay for environmental information was not related to social group with little differences between social groupings as illustrated clearly in Figure 4.3.

![Figure 4.3](image-url)

Figure 4.3 ‘If you required this particular service how much would you be prepared to pay for it if at all?’ separated according to social group (Omnibus results, n=1,001)

4.46 The focus group discussions demonstrated a common view from most organisations represented that the general public should have access to information at no cost. However, some participants felt that there were certain circumstances where it is fair to charge a fee for information, such as where extra time would be needed to locate and retrieve information. In addition, most organisations indicated that they would charge for commercial requests on the grounds that there would be a commercial benefit in supplying the information.

4.47 Although there was a common view supporting the public’s right to free access to information, there was also some caution expressed about overuse or abuse of the providers’ services, and the strong view that this needed to be discouraged. For example, some focus group participants felt that there should be a charge for reviews and appeals to the OSIC, in order to deter people from making repeated requests. Currently, some public bodies charge a nominal fee in order to dissuade frivolous requests. However, one representative from a local authority noted that it was often too much trouble to chase down these fees.

Structure of organisation

4.48 As discussed previously, the boundaries of environmental information provision will be influenced by the nature of an organisation, its central purpose, funding parameters, technical field and geographical remit. Investigating this further through
the desk study and focus groups, there was a strong indication that the structure of an organisation should not be reflected in its service to the user, especially the public. With further probing in the focus groups, it was agreed that institutional frameworks are not the best way of maintaining and providing information to the public, as this requires the public to have knowledge of how public bodies are organised.

4.49 The focus groups discussed how influential the structure of an organisation can be in shaping the type and format of the data it holds. Participants described a range of scenarios, which could be problematic. For instance, the majority of data may end up being organised around the functions of an organisation, and may not be suitable for other external uses. Depending on the organisation, whose main purpose may not be to provide information, the information may be focused on regulation, environmental protection or a commercial interest. An external request for information would then draw resources away from the main aim of the organisation, which can be disruptive to business; however, under EIR it is a legal necessity.

4.50 Historical drivers also influence the collection and management of data as discussed in the focus groups. For example, in the past, many public authorities collected data to serve a specific function. If the information was no longer useful, then there would be no reason to collect or retain it for possible future public use.

4.51 The structure of a service is not just about information but also how it is staffed and the roles each of these people will play in providing a system of managing and delivering information. The needs of the user should be clearly reflected in this overall structure. A good example of this is the London Borough of Brent Council which has developed a dedicated resource and staffing structure to meet its requirement for its one-stop-shop service, as discussed in Case Study 2 in Chapter 5.

4.52 The results from the providers’ survey indicate that approximately half of the organisations had implemented internal changes in order to comply with the new EIR legislation. Some of the changes that the organisations adopted included creating an ‘Access to Information Team’ to deal with requests and implementing an Advisory Steering Group. This demonstrated an awareness that the structure of the existing organisation or providing team needed to adapt to the increasing demand for environmental information.

**Barriers to providing information: trust and transparency**

4.53 As discussed in Chapter 2, information providers face issues such as a lack of public trust and being held accountable to the public. This challenge was echoed by the focus groups many of whom identified trust and reputation as key factors in determining how effectively an organisation provides environmental information. One participant from a government agency emphasised how frustrating it can be to enjoy little public trust as a legacy of historical reputation. As a government employee, this individual pessimistically asserted “no-one trusts government”. This was not in the sense that government is not trustworthy but means that government itself is frustrated not to be trusted.

4.54 When pressing for more detail on the issues of trust, certain members of the focus groups distinguished between different levels of trust (i.e. trust in the information and trust in the provider). A few participants from public bodies and a campaign group indicated that a service for environmental information should be managed by a group
that is impartial and objective. One participant suggested that schools and libraries are more neutral than Council or government offices, as their main aim is to provide information. This is important as other agencies have other objectives (such as regulation or research), which often conflicts with providing information to the public. This finding from the focus groups is further supported by the Haklay study (2002b) that found that regulatory bodies were one of the least popular sources of environmental information.

4.55 Through our Omnibus study there was clearly higher recognition of the local authorities as a source of help advice or information on the environment than of SEPA (see Figure 3.2). It may be that if the regulatory body has issues with popularity that the local authorities who have stronger links with the public should have a more proactive role in the provision of environmental information. This would involve overcoming any barriers that the local authority may have to being more accountable and transparent as a point raised by a local authority representative at a focus group indicated.

**Barriers to accessing information: staff awareness and attitudes**

4.56 Once a member of the public has decided that they wish to access information and who to contact, it is important that their experience encourages them to follow through with their enquiry, especially if they may need to contact more than one organisation before they find the right source of information. In the context of environmental justice the success of the enquirer should not be determined by their level of confidence and knowledge. Customer satisfaction surveys are essential to assess whether the service provider is meeting the needs of the user. This was reinforced by the focus group participants, the majority of whom suggested that customers should be monitored and asked ‘Did this information meet your needs?’ and ‘How can we meet your needs better?’

4.57 In order to meet the information service users’ needs, training and awareness raising are essential to allow staff to deliver the service effectively. Our focus groups advised that this should include practical assistance, such as a list of information sources that can be referenced when directing the public to sources of information.

4.58 In terms of improving service levels, the providers’ survey revealed some of the measures that Glasgow City Council have implemented in order to raise staff awareness about the provision of environmental information, including:

- A staff magazine
- Memos
- Material on intranet
- Training for key staff
- A guidance manual

4.59 The importance of the customer-friendly interface was reinforced by the majority of focus group participants who emphasised that staff within public bodies need to facilitate requests by being helpful and friendly, so that the public is not discouraged to ask for assistance. Where present, unfriendliness was seen as a very strong barrier, stopping many people from accessing environmental information.
Although service levels have been identified as an ongoing issue for service providers closely linked to issues of trust and reputation many local authorities are already seen as providing high levels of service. For example, a survey completed for East Lothian Council found that 78% of customers thought staff at the Council were helpful and 85% found the staff were friendly (Duncan, 2001). Of those that were dissatisfied, 43% said that their dissatisfaction was due to their problem not being solved properly (Duncan, 2001). This indicates a need for staff to proactively seek an answer, even if it is out with their particular field of expertise.

The results of the Perth and Kinross Council survey showed that 79% of respondents found it easy to find out who to contact and 66% found it easy to get through to the right person (Perth and Kinross Council, 2003). Another 89% found the member of staff who dealt with their enquiry either very helpful or fairly helpful, and 72% of people who had contact the Council in the past 12 months, found the information they needed (Perth and Kinross Council, 2003). However, it may also indicate that to unlock the supply and demand flow of environmental information more is required to stimulate this than improved levels of service. As enquiries increase and possibly become more complicated or technical, results of such surveys may not be so favourable unless continuous performance monitoring and improvement is taking place.

Staff awareness and attitudes to the public and the service they are providing are crucial to effective information provision. This was highlighted by several members of the focus groups who made the following key points: staff need to take ownership of enquiries and try to respond, rather than deflect the enquiry without accurate signposting; staff need to realise that information held by public authorities is held in trust for the public; staff must caution against inappropriate attitudes of superiority and should be appreciative of the right for access to information. In addition, senior management should provide visible support of any new policies on environmental information, so that their staff take requests seriously and react appropriately.

Public use of information

The aim of providing environmental information and advice is to assist the public to make or influence decisions or satisfy an interest in the environment generally. Once the information has been provided, further interaction between the provider and the user of information may be limited unless one or both parties proactively re-engage with the other. This means that often the provider has no further involvement or influence over how the service user then interprets or uses the information provided. An exception to this is the FoES ARK project, which actively helps communities interpret and engage with environmental information (see Case Study 13).

The issues around re-interpretation by the service user have been highlighted by Haklay (2001) who provides insight into the difficulty of the provider controlling the public’s use of information. When a user receives information they will apply filters which are based upon their local knowledge, memories, expertise and skills, interests, map reading and IT skills. Therefore, just because information is packaged in a certain way, there is no guarantee that it will be interpreted in its intended context. Users will view information depending on their individual identities, political agendas, perceived contexts, personal views, interests and concerns. The intentions in
information provision are not easily followed through and what may seem clear to the provider may not be to the user.

4.65 Certain environmental information, for example, ground contaminants in a local park, may indicate a level of risk to users of that amenity. However, without sufficient context or interpretation it will be difficult to assess the level of risk. The term ‘risk literacy’ was discussed during the focus groups, and it was felt that it can be difficult to communicate risk to the public, and that it is ultimately the perceptions they bring to the information that will determine their personal assessment of risk. From an environmental health perspective, this can be difficult as a risk may be small but it can create a large amount of fear, which in turn can disproportionately affect the well-being of that individual or community.

4.66 In the context of the media the representation of environmental data and associated risk can cause further difficulties. The majority of the focus group participants felt that information presented in the media is very accessible and has a strong influence on the general public, which can be a concern as often the press can misinterpret or misrepresent data. For instance, one participant referred to a news article that stated that Glasgow was the third most polluted city in the UK, but did not report that the data used was from a single monitoring site and not representative of the entire city.

Conclusions

4.67 Our research into the ‘supply’ aspects of current provision of environmental information in Scotland indicated the following:

- Several key organisations in Scotland have been providing environmental information in some form and to a mix of service users for a considerable time before the more recent legislative drivers. However, the FOI and the EIR coupled with First Minister’s commitment\(^{23}\) to environmental justice has prompted a commitment to increase the public’s involvement through the effective provision of environmental information.

- This research found some complexity around the methods by which the public wished to access information and therefore how providers should promote and provide it. The results from the public survey demonstrated a clear preference for website provision. However, earlier research into provision of information from local authorities illustrated the importance of telephone access followed by an in-person visit to Council offices. Overall it was found that a mix of methods was important to reach the widest audience and disseminate a range of information types.

- Although there are a considerable number of information providers currently active, the public require clarity and guidance on the nature of environmental information, and how this is provided, by whom. This would be the backbone to an effective signposting service.

- Data management has improved since FOI and EIR but good practice is patchy and not shared across all providers. Analysis of current supply and the

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\(^{23}\) First Minister, Jack McConnell first major speech on sustainable development, 18th February 2002
views of those both using and providing it highlighted the following key elements of better provision: (a) Data management requires further resources in terms of dedicated teams and staff development and training. (b) Increased resources could contribute to the development and provision of effective interpretation services for the public, which should be presented on a hierarchy of levels shared and understood to all providers. (c) The information must be organised in a user friendly way and should not rely on enquirers’ understanding of the organisation to access effectively. Staff also need to be able to respond to enquiries in a friendly and proactive way.
CHAPTER FIVE  CASE STUDIES

An element of the scoping study research was to investigate examples of information providers from a UK and international perspective. The findings were used to identify key providers, trends and drivers, in order to develop the providers’ survey and interview framework. The research also highlighted a number of case studies which could be used to illustrate good practice and the different elements of effective information provision. The case studies discussed in this chapter provide practical insight into some of these different elements of effective provision which are discussed further in Chapter 6 when looking at options for the provision of environmental information.

5.1 To inform the study with existing good practice, examples of different models of information providers were examined including: one-stop shops (London Borough of Brent Council), a call centre (Consumer Direct), an on-line service (DICEH and most public authorities), GIS (Environment Agency’s ‘What’s in Your Backyard’), information networks (HEN), government portals (USA and Australia environmental portals), single interest (Green Consumer Guide) and real time services (SEPA Bathing Waters signage programme). Details of each case study are outlined below.

Case Study 1 - Environmental Health Surveillance System for Scotland (EHS3)

5.2 In Scotland, a system called Environmental Health Surveillance System for Scotland (EHS3)\(^2\) has been introduced, which is a multi-agency collaboration involving area NHS boards, NHS Information & Statistics Division, local authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Water Authorities and other relevant agencies.

5.3 It is designed to collect, hold and, as appropriate, analyse and interpret environmental and health data throughout Scotland. Much of this data is currently available but is under-utilised. In keeping with the principles of surveillance, data gathering will be ongoing and regular outputs will be agreed which will inform policy and action to promote improved environmental standards and public health. With appropriate development, the system will also have potential as a predictive tool for managing environmentally influenced (including weather-related) fluctuations in demand for NHS services. A further important characteristic of EHS3 is its dynamic character with an ability to change emphasis and enhance outputs in response to circumstances as they emerge.

Case Study 2 – London Borough of Brent Council: One-Stop-Shop

5.4 The one-stop-shop service offered by this Council consists of shops that are located around the Borough, a telephone call centre and an on-line service on the internet.\(^2\) The one-stop-shops have disabled access, a loop system, a minicom facility, language interpreters, a private interview room and an appointment service. They can also accommodate for people with hearing disabilities. The call centre hours are from 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am - 1pm on Saturday providing relatively extensive access.

\(^2\) Website: http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/scieh/environmental/ehs3.htm
\(^2\) Website: http://www.brent.gov.uk/OSS2.nsf?OpenDatabase
5.5 The one-stop-shops have a display of up-to-date information including leaflets and publications about council services, local and national organisations, and Central Government Departments. The service helps signpost customers to relevant voluntary groups, registered charities, community groups and statutory organisations in Brent.

5.6 The on-line services include a searchable FAQ section, an A-Z index, online forms and property information. Properties can be searched by address or post code for the following:

- Maps and aerial photographs
- Council Tax information
- Refuse collection days
- Information about councillors and local MP
- Polling stations
- Area Consultative Forums
- Neighbourhood statistics e.g. house prices
- Location and contact details for services in proximity to the property (e.g. accommodation, doctors, recycling, advice groups etc)

5.7 The Council is amending the website so it is more personalised to the user. This will mean that users can bookmark pages and will be able to see what information the Council holds on them (e.g. how much council tax is owed or how a complaint is being dealt with). Local users will also be able to pay their council tax and parking fines online.

5.8 The Council has developed ‘Life Episode’ pages on the Council website where information is grouped by situations (i.e. having a baby, starting school or moving home) as well as council services. The use of ‘life episodes’ is becoming increasingly popular especially with government websites and is focussed around the user’s needs rather than the structure of the organisation.
Figure 5.1 Organisational Structure for Brent Council's One-Stop-Shop
Case Study 3 – Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) : Consumer Direct

5.9 Consumer Direct is a telephone and online consumer advice service, supported by the Department of Trade and Industry in the UK.[26] The aim is to provide clear, practical, impartial advice to help consumers sort out problems and disagreements they may have with suppliers of goods or services.

5.10 The advice and information provided is free, although telephone calls are charged through a 0845 number. A Welsh-speaking Consumer Direct adviser is available, along with a minicom service. The information and advice helpline is available from 0800-1830 Monday to Friday, and 0900-1300 Saturday, excluding bank holidays and public holidays.

5.11 The service employs highly trained advisers to listen to specific concerns and then provide appropriate advice or information. If further help is needed, such as specialist advice or face-to-face assistance, the adviser will refer the customer to another agency that is better placed to assist. This case study represents a proactive demand-led service aiming to empower the enquirer and help them follow through their information request.

Case Study 4 – The Danish Information Centre for Environment and Health (DICEH)

5.12 DICEH is an independent information centre established with the purpose of:

- offering specific and action oriented information to consumers about the environmental and health impacts related to consumption
- supporting an open dialogue between the consumers and trades about environmental and health uncertainties and risks related to consumption

5.13 The mission of the Centre is to assist consumers in handling daily risks, by offering action oriented information and by offering open dialogue on uncertain topics.

5.14 DICEH is a private foundation that is funded by the government, and provides information to consumers about the environmental and health risks associated with products. The Centre has been in operation since January 2003 and is funded by the Ministry of the Environment. They have 3.5 full-time staff, but work with many other organisations in order to provide their service. Their Executive Committee includes members from a variety of different consumer oriented organisations.

5.15 The Centre is currently evaluating its services to see if it overlaps with other activities in the environmental industry, and to determine if its organisation and funding are optimal in terms of future needs. The Centre takes advantage of free advertising in newspapers and by writing letters to magazine editors. They also distribute a flyer.

5.16 In terms of reducing their costs, the Centre also distributes an electronic newsletter to subscribers, which can be a cost-effective way of promoting its services. They are also increasing their reliance on providing information over the web, by updating their

[26] Website: http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/about.shtml
information continually. If a telephone request comes in, then the answer will also be published on the website in order to reduce the resources required per customer.

Case Study 5 – Environment Agency UK : ‘What’s in Your Backyard?’

5.17 This is a national website for England and Wales, which allows the user to enter their post code in order to find out about the quality of the environment in their local area.

5.18 This site mainly covers issues concerning water such as bathing water quality, discharges into the sea, river quality, floodplains, pollution inventory and groundwater protection. There is also a link for potential home buyers who require a property search relating to flood risk, landfill sites and industrial discharges. There is a charge for this service, but all other information on the website is available free of charge.

Case Study 6 – Public Health Institute Scotland : The Healthy Environment Network (HEN)

5.19 HEN is set up under the auspices of the Public Health Institute of Scotland (PHIS), which provides administrative and facilitative support. HEN is responsible through the network steering group to the PHIS.

5.20 This network provides a forum for an interface between organisations and professions whose activities have the capacity to change and preserve the environment in the interests of human health. It encourages multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working to address issues around the environment and health. It supports demonstration projects and conducts or commissions analyses of issues which require collaboration between different agencies.

5.21 The network offers an independent multidisciplinary response to events, policy initiatives and directives which might influence the physical environment and thus health.

5.22 The network is inclusive, recognising the wide range of professions and organisations which have the capacity to influence the environment. It draws on expertise within and beyond the network to nurture the development of specialist subgroups which will address challenges within specific aspects of the physical environment.

5.23 The network aims to promote the role of the environment and its effect on health. It aims to foster mutual understanding and shared purpose between organisations and professions through a series of seminars and workshops, using the insights gained to tackle problems directly. It will help to identify, select and prioritise areas which impact on health, and work on them by forming short life working groups with specific outcomes and endpoints.

5.24 HEN acts as a forum for the exchange of information between member organisations and professions and will fulfil the following functions:

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27 Website: www.miljoeogsundhed.dk
28 Website: http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/maps/?lang=e
29 Website: www.phis.org.uk/doc.pl?file=pdf/NetworkRemitDec02.doc
• work to obtain wider recognition for the role that the environment plays in determining the health of the population, and develop practical strategies for improving health through the environment

• bring a broad perspective (that of the whole of the community whose work impinges on the environment) to issues affecting the health of the population

• develop and strengthen practice, by encouraging working across traditional boundaries

• work to improve education and communication about and within Public Health

• contribute to national policy developments by
  ▪ acting as a sounding board for cross-cutting issues on the environment and health
  ▪ facilitating the provision of advice on the environment and health
  ▪ facilitating the distribution of consultation documents

• communicate scientific issues and comment on the relative risk of competing exposures

• strengthen the public health information base and oversee the development of the environment section of the PHIS website

• act as advocates for research on the environment and health and identifying gaps in the knowledge or evidence base

**Case Study 7 – USA Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Office of Environmental Information (OEI)**

5.25 The OEI was created in 1999 as a new information office for the EPA.\(^{30}\) It has four main goals including collecting environmental information, centrally managing the EPA’s information technology infrastructure, improving public access to environmental information and improving the quality of environmental information.

5.26 This is a large organisation, with over 200 front line staff providing environmental information. They have over 500 requests every month that come in via a help line, website, written and face-to-face, with most requests coming from the general public.

5.27 Most of the information is provided on climate change, air quality, drinking water, river and coastal water quality, soil and contaminated land, human health and safety, derelict or unused sites, hazardous waste, waste management, emissions / discharges and releases to the environment and environmental policies and legislation.

5.28 This is an organisation that provides a national service and is therefore very large and highly decentralised. They have outreach programs designed to help provide information, and these are implemented by communication specialists.

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\(^{30}\) Website: http://www.epa.gov/oei/
In order to ensure the organisation is providing a good level of service, the EPA has partially implemented an electronic customer relationship management system (e-CRM). This system helps to create a strong knowledge base, based on frequently asked questions. The EPA indicated that this has resulted in a 70% reduction in incoming inquiries, because the user can locate the information they are seeking in the FAQs.

**Case Study 8 – Australia Government Environment Portal**

The Environment Portal is a gateway to the online services and information provided by Australian, State and Local Governments. The information is organised into seven environmental themes (atmosphere, biodiversity, coasts and oceans, environment protection, heritage, inland waters and land). Information can also be accessed in terms of themes such as service, resource and location, or through an alphabetical site index.

The aim of the portals is to provide the user with easy online access to government information and services, where users can find what they are looking for without having to know the structure of government. This portal system was developed from the Customer Focussed Portals Framework, part of the Government’s Online Strategy. The customer groups and subject/topics were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer Groups</th>
<th>Subject/Topics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups</td>
<td>Culture and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Environment</td>
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<td>Seniors</td>
<td>Government</td>
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<td>Women</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Youth</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>Industry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Law and Justice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a longstanding Australian Government objective to enable people to interact online without needing to understand how government is structured. Their 1997 Investing for Growth statement recommended improvements in the quality, user friendliness and consistency of government services as an objective. The 2000 Government Online strategy outlined a framework to accelerate progress towards this objective.

The framework consists of:

- a set of portals based on customer groups
- a set of portals based on topics or subjects
- the key point of access at the Australian Government Entry Point

• a staged development approach where applicable

• an agency network to develop and manage the portals in order to facilitate close co-ordination and co-operation among resource providers across agencies to provide customer oriented services

• responsibility for the development and delivery of online services remaining with owning agencies

• an agreed set of cross-portal standards, such as Australian Government Locator Service Metadata

• governance arrangements

5.34 These portals aim to:

• Have their own unique web presence

• Provide a single point of access to a range of resources that are developed and maintained by several government agencies

• Provide resources from all tiers of government; enable the discovery of a comprehensive array of information and services that relate to the portal theme

• Provide customer focussed discovery processes that suit the customer group, e.g. a ‘families portal’ may have life events, such as birth of a baby, going to school, etc.

• Provide customisable features to enable users to personalise the portal around what is important to them

• Be developed and managed by a consortium of agencies that have primary responsibility for the delivery of services to the portal audience

Case Study 9 – UK - Green Consumer Guide

5.35 The Green Consumer Guide is a UK website that provides current news on green consumer issues, and also provides information on various “green” sources of consumer products. It is run by an independent media company based in the NE of England, who specialise in direct electronic marketing and product advertising.

5.36 This site is driven by the user, in terms of whether they are an individual, a corporate or government consumer. The links are practical, up-to-date and driven by the type of user.

5.37 The site also provides an interactive map that provides links to the Environmental Departments within all the Local Councils in the UK.

32 Website: http://www.greenconsumerguide.com/index.php
Case Study 10 – US EPA – AIRNow

5.38 The US EPA and other agencies (including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, news media and tribal, state and local agencies) developed the AIRNow website to provide the public with access to national air quality information. The AIRNow website provides daily air quality forecasts and real-time air quality conditions for more than 300 cities in the US. These maps are updated daily every hour. The site also includes links to more detailed regional and local air quality websites.

5.39 The air quality data used to generate the maps and forecasts on the website are collected using approved techniques. In order that the maps are as ‘real-time’ as possible, the data must be displayed as soon as practical every hour. The information does undergo so preliminary data quality assessments, but the data are not fully verified and validated prior to being placed on the internet. It is felt that the quality assurance procedures used by monitoring organisations are adequate for certifying data.

Case Study 11 - The London Borough of Newham Council : Local Service Centres

5.40 In 1998 Newham Council took the first steps in implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and opened a call centre together with a Local Service Centre. Since then, a further seven Local Service Centres have opened which means that all Newham residents are within walking distance access to Council services. The CRM services include:

- a corporate call centre (100 seats)
- eight LSCs (100 seats)
- back office support (100 seats)

5.41 The Service Centres are able to resolve 95% of all Council enquiries on the first contact without the need to reference to back office, and have recorded customer satisfaction at 96%. The Service Centres typically receive approximately 500,000 calls per month to the corporate call centre, 75,000 calls come in to the switchboard and over 1,000 emails. The total number of visitors to the Service Centres is around 50,000 per month. A telephone service and internet service has been introduced to support housing repairs, environmental services, social services and education.

5.42 Newham Council identified the integration of data improved customer service as:

- the more the front line staff know about the customer, the better the service
- communicate changes in circumstances only once
- improved quality of customers’ interaction with the Council (consistent and timely use of information)

33 Website: http://cfpub.epa.gov/airnow/index.cfm?action=airnow.main
34 Website: http://www.newham.gov.uk/portal/homepage.jsp?g11n.enc=ISO-8859-1
5.43 It was also identified that the new system improved Council efficiency as:

- it improved performance in anti-fraud work and eligibility checking
- better informed corporate decision-making

5.44 By having the data in one repository, it makes it possible to gain a holistic view of the customer. Enquiries can be tracked from initial contact through to back office. There is monitoring of case load and complaints handling.

5.45 This service indicates the importance of monitoring performance, and has developed a programme of measuring benefits using classes of benefits (economy, internal management, more motivated workforce, process improvement, quality of service, risk reduction, strategic fit, revenue enhancement and acceleration) and stakeholders (citizen, Council, Council employees, government, subject matter expert, customers). These can then be mapped against each other in a matrix to show the impact of a system and how it can help that particular individual or stakeholder group.

**Case Study 12 - The Canadian Rural Information Service (CRIS)**

5.46 CRIS is a one-stop-shop for information relevant to rural Canada.\(^{35}\) It provides information on rural renewal, community development, funding sources and opportunities for rural youth. CRIS serves rural residents, community organizations, rural businesses, rural practitioners, and government and educational institutions.

5.47 CRIS delivers these services through the internet, telephone, fax or mail depending on the needs of the customer.

5.48 Most of the information provided by this organisation is through the website, rather than through the help line, written enquiry or face-to-face contact. Most requests for information come from the general public and are in regards to drinking water, land use and planning, farming and energy efficiency.

5.49 CRIS promotes itself through the web and also by distributing brochures at fairs at conferences, in order to target people in rural communities. In order to disseminate information effectively, the service provides its responses in numerous formats including email, website, telephone and letter. Their website uses pathfinders and directories in order to proactively direct users to the information they require.

5.50 It appears from this service, which specifically targets rural communities, that the users of the service will determine how it is promoted, what type of information is held and how this information is disseminated. In terms of targeting the rural community, CRIS has focussed its information on issues that are specific to remote areas and has made the information easy to access over the website and by a toll-free telephone help line.

\(^{35}\) Website: [http://www.rural.gc.ca/cris/about_e.phtml](http://www.rural.gc.ca/cris/about_e.phtml)
Case Study 13 – Friends of the Earth - Accessing Relevant Knowledge (ARK)

5.51 ARK aims to increase access to scientific knowledge and expertise to communities facing environmental injustices.36

5.52 This project has been designed to help communities understand and make sense of complex, technical scientific reports. Such documents, although available to the public, are not always written with a public readership in mind and can be difficult to interpret or understand. Presented with information from 'experts', many people are put off by scientific jargon or feel unqualified to question it and pursue the matter further. The public is then obliged to take it on trust that industry and governing authorities will take care of their interests. Care for the environment remains in someone else's hands.

5.53 ARK encourages communities to voice their concerns about pollution and offers them access to the knowledge and support needed to see those concerns properly addressed. Knowledge is power and ARK aims to equip communities with the information they need to understand their environment and, if necessary, challenge industry and government on a level playing field.

5.54 Services that ARK provides include:

- Advocacy and practical support for communities concerned about environmental pollution
- Direction to appropriate sources of information and environmental records
- Help interpreting scientific reports and understanding the underlying science
- Access to basic pollution monitoring equipment and training
- Community workshops & fact sheets on campaigning against pollution, industry practices and relevant science
- Email questions and answers for individual queries related to environmental pollution
- Foster dialogue and links between communities, industry and government to include communities in decision-making that affects them

Case Study 14 – DEFRA and Devolved Administrations - Air Quality Northern Ireland

5.55 Air quality data for Northern Ireland (and the rest of the UK) is currently available online.37 Launched on 16 May 2002, this service reports hourly up-dates on air quality in sixteen regions and sixteen urban areas of the UK, and regionalised 24-hour forecasts on levels of air pollution. Information is available from a freephone number, TV Teletext and the internet.

36 Website: http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk/nation/ark.html
37 Website: http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/index.php
Case Study 15 – Welsh Air Quality Forum - Air Quality Wales

5.56 Air quality data for Wales is also available online. The database contains tables of measured concentration data and statistics from the air quality monitoring sites operated by the National Assembly for Wales and other members of the Welsh Air Quality Forum. Automatic networks produce hourly pollutant concentrations, with data being collected from individual sites by dial-up modem. Non-automatic networks measure less frequently (either daily, weekly or monthly), with samples being subjected to chemical analysis, and final pollutant concentrations calculated from these results.

Summary of good practice relevant to Scottish context

5.57 The above case studies were chosen because they aim to be effective providers of information to the public in either the environmental or non-environmental field. They illustrate some of the characteristics that are essential to successful provision from the users’ perspective. These criteria include: effective access, data management and interpretation, promotion and engagement with the user, and public participation.

5.58 Access to information must be quick and convenient. As it may not be realistic that information will always be found at first attempt, it is important that effective signposting functions smoothly in order to guide the public to the correct source of information. These issues have been addressed by Case Study 11, The London Borough of Newham Council, who implemented Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and opened a call centre together with a Local Service Centre. These Service Centres are able to resolve 95% of all Council enquiries on the first contact without the need to reference to back office, and have recorded customer satisfaction at 96%.

5.59 In terms of information delivery, this study found that due to the broad range of users and the wide spectrum of information and levels of interpretation required, it is likely that a mix of media is most appropriate. This was demonstrated by Case Study 12, The Canadian Rural Information Service (CRIS), which delivers its services to rural Canadians through the internet, telephone, fax or mail depending on the needs of the customer.

5.60 Effective access is also facilitated by the ability of the staff working with the service provider to be positive and proactive. Appropriate staff recruitment and training are essential to generate working practices that enhance effective access. For example, Case Study 3, Consumer Direct, employs highly trained advisers to listen to specific concerns and then provide appropriate advice or information. If further help is needed, such as specialist advice or face-to-face assistance, the adviser will refer the customer to another agency that is better placed to assist.

5.61 In terms of data management, this study reinforces the preference for the information to be presented in a manner that is intuitive or customer focussed. An example of how this can achieved can be drawn from Case Study 8, the Australia Government Environment Portal, which provide customer focussed website links that suit the customer group, e.g. a ‘families portal’ may have life events, such as birth of a baby, going to school, etc.

38 Website: http://www.welshairquality.org.uk/
5.62 Due to the wide spectrum of environmental information, from the general to the highly technical, there needs to be a recognition that information should be provided in a user friendly way. This could be assisted, by services such as, Case Study 13, Accessing Relevant Knowledge (ARK), which offers face-to-face support to help the user understand the implications of the information.

5.63 Effective provision of environmental information should not be a passive activity but a process of active engagement with the user. The ARK project provides a useful example of this, where there is a gradual shift from supply-led proactive provision to demand-led reactive provision.

5.64 In order to disseminate information effectively to the greatest number of people, the main focus should be a website, as this is the most cost-effective way of reaching the largest number of people across the largest geographical spread. However, until online access is more widespread, other complementary media are essential including television, radio and local advertising. Phone numbers, contact names and links to the websites of participating organisations would be provided on the website demonstrated effectively by Case Study 8, Australia Government Environment Portal, a gateway that links the online services and information provided by Australian, State and Local Governments.

5.65 The effective provision of environmental information should assist in delivering public participation in environmental decision making, but will only be able to achieve this if it successfully informs the public. Although the provision of environmental information will improve the knowledge infrastructure, there needs to be active community engagement to stimulate interest and follow through when this is ignited. Again, ARK (Case Study 13) provides an example of this but this is a very limited service at present.
CHAPTER SIX  OPTIONS FOR THE PROVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

This study has examined the different ways in which the Scottish Executive could consider guiding public authorities towards improving and building upon existing practice in order to facilitate greater access to environmental information and respond to requests for such information. In particular, this chapter compares existing practice with alternative approaches, taking into account the merit of establishing a national service to provide environmental information. The options discussed in this chapter inform conclusions and recommendations for the effective provision of environmental information for Scotland.

6.1 Desk research undertaken by this study has highlighted some of the contradictions inherent in providing environmental information (Haklay, 2002b). This is evident on the supply side in terms of the structure of the organisation and on the demand side where there is so much variation in type, behaviour and needs of the service user that there is no single answer to effective provision of information. In many ways this is an inherent challenge and, if the aim is to enable all members of all communities to have access to information and in so doing enhance their ability to participate in decisions that affect the quality of their local environment, then there is no neat solution.

6.2 There is however an approach combined with modelling which allows a move in the right direction. The Haklay thesis (2002b) proposed a general conceptual model, shown in Figure 6.1, for providing public access to environmental information. This model demonstrates the complexity of developing a system that can be used by all stakeholders and all the issues that need to be addressed.

![Conceptual model for an environmental information service](image-url)

Figure 6.1 Conceptual model for an environmental information service
Developing a service providing environmental information that can be accessed by all members of the general public is a substantial task, which entails a number of complex issues. A Canadian study found that:

“One of the greatest challenges is getting across the complexity of the forces shaping the human impact on the environment, and hence the broad spread of responsibility for action and the range of actions needed. People tend to look for a single mechanism, a particular group of people to blame, and a single solution.” 39

Chapter 5 investigated various examples of providing environmental and non-environmental information. In terms of developing a service providing environmental information for Scotland, a number of models may be considered, including:

- A one-stop-shop
- A call centre
- Online service
- Graphic representation of data (i.e. Geographic Information System (GIS))
- An information network
- Government portals
- ‘Single interest’ service
- ‘Real-time’ service

Our research has shown that many large, regionally diverse countries such as Canada, Australia, Denmark and the US have developed services providing environmental information that serves the general public at a national level. Some focus group members indicated that there was a need for a similar ‘gateway’ in Scotland to help promote the provision of environmental information.

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One-stop-shop

6.6 A one-stop shop is an outlet able to provide the complete range of goods or services that a customer might require and can offer a multitude of services to a client or customer. The idea is to provide convenient and efficient service for customers. A one-stop-shop aims to resolve all queries on the spot, so that all requests for environmental information can be dealt with in one place.

6.7 The one-stop-shop concept has already been adopted by many local authorities in Scotland and could potentially become a model for implementing such a system on a national level.

6.8 The one-stop-shops developed by local authorities under Local Agenda 21 are good examples of providing easy-to-access facilities. A good practice example, Case Study 2, illustrates how the London Borough of Brent Council provision of a one-stop-shop can save a customer time, as all services can be accessed from one point.

6.9 A national one-stop-shop for Scotland may involve housing all environmental information and services into a single location, or it could involve a team of ‘front-door’ advisors able to quickly access and provide information to a customer. Findings from the providers’ survey and further discussion in the focus groups indicated that to avoid duplication a virtual one-stop-shop would be preferable to physically housing environmental information in a new or existing organisation. However, it should not be underestimated the work that would be involved in drawing this together. The London Borough of Brent Council is providing a one-stop shop of services they own and run; in Scotland there is no single provider in this position.

Call centre

6.10 A call centre can facilitate access to information, particularly for those that live in rural or remote areas and others that are not able to visit a one-stop-shop in person. A call centre could involve an office of front-line receptionists that can deal with enquiries and act as ‘gatekeepers’ of environmental information. Some information may be easily accessible and can be provided immediately over the phone. For more complicated enquiries, the receptionist would be able to refer the caller to an appropriate source of information.

6.11 One example, Case Study 12, discusses a service called CRIS that provides information to rural communities in Canada. Not only is the content of the information focused on rural issues, but the method of delivery has to be sensitive to rural needs. Therefore, this service providing environmental information is based on a telephone hotline, even though it also incorporates a website.

6.12 Call centres can employ staff to provide advisory services in order to interpret technical information to the public. Effective call centres often rely on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology in order to track callers and enquiries and ensure that these are being dealt with properly. These CRMs can log enquiries to build Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), which can then be used to facilitate future requests.

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The Consumer Direct hotline (Case Study 3), is an example of a call centre that is used to provide information and advice to the general public. Although their advice is free, users have to pay a telephone charge as they use a 0845 number in order to publicise a single number nationally. The 0845 number allows staff to determine where the customer is calling from, and allows calls to be diverted to other contact centres in different locations. Consumer Direct also provides regional landlines that are toll free, but, as there are so many, these are not publicised as widely.

Call centres are often used to complement other services, for example, Case Study 11 for the London Borough of Newham, is an example of a call centre that is utilised in conjunction with one-stop-shops and an online service.

Through our public survey findings it is apparent that it is principally among the more elderly and less affluent that interest remains to be stimulated. Current research also suggests that a mix of media is required to encourage access to environmental information services and this should include access by telephone. It is likely, therefore, that a call centre or helpline would be an integral part of effective provision of environmental information in Scotland whether this is a ‘one-stop shop’ or a signposting service.

**Online services**

Most public authorities in Scotland have websites and provide some amount of online information and services. An online service can be useful for those that have access to the internet, and particularly for those that live in more remote areas that are ‘wired up’. An online service for Scotland could range from providing an A – Z index and links to other public authorities, or it could be more interactive and allow for access to personal information and online payment systems.

Many organisations have increased their reliance on providing information over the internet in order to reduce costs. The Danish Information Centre for the Environment and Health (DICEH), which is discussed in Case Study, has followed this approach and continually updates their website in order to provide current, relevant information.

In the context of data management and the needs of the user of information it is important that these services are user friendly. Online information can be improved by thinking about how the user may look for information. This way information is clustered into clearly labelled and organised sectors to facilitate customer access.

With the increasing use and access to online information and the recognition that a mix of provision tools is required online services will form part of effective provision of environmental information in Scotland. However, it remains important to recognise that the online service will be one of a menu of options to access the service.

**Use of GIS**

Information provided in a graphical format can often be more useful to users, particularly in presenting environmental information. As the public becomes more familiar with accessing information online, then it may become more appropriate to display environmental information through geographically based systems.
A map-based system has been used successfully for the on-line service on the UK Environment Agency’s website called ‘What’s in Your Backyard?’ (see Case Study 5). This national website allows users to enter their post code in order to find out about the quality of the environment in their local area. Interactive maps are displayed, with a choice of scales for the user, and symbols are used to represent the locations of testing sites and other environmental information. This website is a very good example of how national data can be presented on a local scale, which helps to generate public interest.

GIS could be particularly useful at a national level as it can help to narrow down information searches immediately from a national scale to a local level. This could be relevant for Scotland, due to its varying geography and the remoteness of many communities. The investment of bringing current GIS together in a central database would be considerable; however, this may be very beneficial in the long run.

Information networks

Networks of similar organisations and professional interests can be used to help link agencies and sources of information together from a wide geographic area. Having professionals involved can encourage research and networking about new topics, and can help to provide shared knowledge and learning opportunities.

Information networks can be used to develop seminars and conferences, which can help to inspire learning and public participation. Case Study 6 for National Health Service Scotland, which developed the Healthy Environment Network system (HEN), is a good example of an information network that shares knowledge across agencies and disciplines to address issues around the environment, socio-economic interests and human health. This network encourages learning and participation by running seminars and workshops on relevant topics, and forms short life working groups on environmental issues of public interest.

Health Protection Scotland developed the EHS3 system (see Case Study 1), which amalgamates both health and environmental data in order to provide a ‘value-added’ product. The EHS3 project is managed by industry professionals, and involves the collaboration of a number of different environmental and health agencies. The project compiles regional environmental and health data for Scotland, to help make more sense out of trends that may be shown in different data sets (e.g. an increase in air pollution and an increase in asthma cases in a certain location). This can make data more useable for others.

In order to facilitate communication across national borders, the European Commission has developed a network called Scientific Information for Policy Support in Europe (SINAPSE) that acts as a tool for exchanging information within the international scientific community. SINAPSE assists in the dissemination of scientific advice through an electronic library of accessible scientific opinions and advice issued in Europe.

Findings from the focus groups indicated that the establishment of a network of environmental information providers would be a welcome development and the network could help share good practice and standardise provision. An existing network, such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities Freedom of
Information Officers Network could be a useful ‘base membership’ to grow a network specifically for environmental information providers.

**Government portals**

6.28 Government portals can be used as a central location to link various government departments to one location. These online portals provide a single ‘face’ to the public, which can then guide the user on to the appropriate information using links and signposting. As discussed previously in this report, the presentation of information on a website should be intuitive and not require the user to understand the structure of government departments.

6.29 Case Study 7, for the US EPA’s Office of Environmental Information, indicates how a single gateway system can be used on a large national scale. Case Study 8, for the Australia Government Environment Portal, also acts as a ‘gateway’ to providing information at a national scale. This system is designed to act as a highly centralised, single gateway that facilitates easy public access, although it draws together information from all over the country. The Portal uses signposting to direct users to particular sectors of the environment, such as the atmosphere or biodiversity. This is particularly important as the user does not need to know how the government is structured, they can just follow the signposts for the environmental issue they are concerned with.

6.30 It was suggested during the focus groups that a ‘gateway’ could be adopted in Scotland to guide people to the relevant sources of information. This would be the first point of contact for any environmental information and could be called the ‘Scottish Environmental Gateway.’

**‘Single interest’ service**

6.31 This type of service is focussed solely on one type of user, or one specific issue or topic, and is useful in providing information to specific user groups (i.e. consumers or campaigners). This can target current issues that are of a concern to a specific group of people, and can also be useful in providing more detailed information on a certain issues.

6.32 The single interest service can be used effectively for the provision of consumer information and in particular the delivery of sustainable production and consumption aims of Choosing Our Future (Scottish Executive, 2005a).

6.33 Case Study 9, the Green Consumer Guide, provides information for ‘green consumers’. This is very specific to each type of user (i.e. an individual, a corporate or government consumer), who may be looking for particular information on paint or what type of food to buy.

6.34 The Australian Environment Portal (Case Study 8) has been based on the agency's knowledge of their customer groups and specific subjects and topics. This means that information for each topic can be tailored to the appropriate user group so that if they have a single interest area they can access information specifically designed for their use.
In a Scottish context there will be a role for the ‘single interest’ service, particularly in the interest of increasing the proactive supply-led provision of environmental information. As it is often easier to engage the potential user of information through a single interest rather than a broader provision of information, this may be a more successful approach. However, this research suggests that this is part of a larger service which runs a programme of ‘single interest’ promotions rather than establishes a number of different services.

‘Real-time’ service

A ‘real-time’ service provides information on a continually updated basis, such as a weather forecasting website. For particular types of information, it is necessary to keep relevant up-to-date information in order to keep the public informed.

Some environmental information must be maintained on a very regular basis. Case Study 10, for the US EPA’s AIRNow program, cannot scientifically verify the data that is being used due to these time constraints. Nevertheless, the air quality data used to generate the maps and forecasts on the website are collected using approved techniques.

Similar air quality monitoring programs have also been undertaken in the UK. The online UK National Air Quality Information Archive was developed for the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Devolved Administrations. This website is updated hourly and provides air pollution information for the regions of the UK. Two examples of these are Case Study 14 (Air Quality for Northern Ireland) and Case Study 15 (Air Quality for Wales).

In Scotland, SEPA funds the Bathing Waters Signage programme, which provides daily information on predicted water quality on their website, through a digital telephone hotline and on electronic message signs at ten bathing water sites. It is important that this information is continually updated as the purpose of the signage project is to warn the public when unsafe conditions may exist.

‘Real-time’ services are important for more immediately required information about environmental quality, such as, air, weather and water, where there could be a potential exposure to risk from temporary changes in quality. Due to the requirement for ongoing ‘real-time’ monitoring and verification of data these services are likely to be provided by a few specialist organisations such as SEPA. For the purposes of effective provision of information links to these ‘real-time’ services should be included within any ‘gateway’ or ‘portal’ for environmental information.

Summary

This scoping study has found that it is most beneficial to use a number of techniques in order to develop a service for providing environmental information that can reach the greatest number of people. The variety of methods used will depend on the ‘user’ and will vary regionally and demographically, depending on the needs of the local users.
CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has demonstrated that effective access to environmental information is part of the solution to achieving environmental justice, as it can help to mobilise change and encourage communities to work together to overcome environmental injustices where they exist. This final chapter of the scoping study draws together the conclusions from this research and presents those key elements that the research team recommends for improving and providing effective provision of environmental information. In doing so, it also adds to the growing body of knowledge concerned with environmental information in Scotland.

Introduction

7.1 The research undertaken for this study has shown, above all, that there is no single solution to the effective provision of environmental information. A single solution is not appropriate for the following reasons:

- The users represent too wide and varied a community of stakeholders and interests.

- There are already a number of organisations and networks that exist in Scotland and an entirely new service to provide environmental information may not be necessary. However, clarity about and within the framework of providers is necessary to assist proactive promotion and an easily identified user-friendly service.

- The majority of enquiries are unique and varied in both subject matter and technical complexity. The use of environmental information is subject to a number of variables, which include: the area and place for which the information is needed, the activity for which the information is required, and the interests and positions of the information user. These characteristics of environmental information mean that it is more effectively provided by a number of organisations representing different geographical areas and areas of interest than a single source of information.

- The need for environmental information is complex and can represent a balance of consumer and citizen interests. The relationship between the enquirer and the provider is also a balance between proactive supply-led provision and reactive demand-led provision of environmental information. This means that there is no one-size fits all solution.

The need for effective provision of environmental information

7.2 There is a considerable weight of legislative and policy drivers and obligations that support the need for the effective provision of environmental information. Central to this is the Scottish Executive commitment to improving environmental equality and public participation through substantially increasing the public’s access to and engagement with environmental information.
Ultimately, access to information cannot guarantee environmental justice, but it can lead to greater procedural justice. Just having access to information is not enough, as there also needs to be opportunities for people to participate in decision-making, as stated in Principle 10 of the Rio declaration:

“Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens...each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities...and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes” (United Nations 1992, Principle 10).

This study suggests that there are certain key inconsistencies in the current provision of environmental information whether from the supply or demand side. Effective provision must therefore address overlaps and gaps in provision, and assess how critical it is to address these.

Aims of the effective provision of environmental information

The key aims which stem from this study’s assessment of (1) the policy context, (2) the demand and supply aspects of provision and (3) examples of good practice, are that environmental information provision should:

- Address environmental and social equity issues by understanding and working with the user requirements through proactive, consultative and tailored information provision.
- Improve public awareness of the ability to access environmental information, with all information providers having a clearly defined role in provision and promoting this appropriately.
- Build the public’s trust through providing friendly and transparent access to information coupled with continuous improvement through active monitoring and evaluation programmes.
- Through proactive and supply-led information provision, engage and empower the public as consumers and citizens in relation to environmental concerns.

The desired characteristics of effective provision of environmental information

This study has consistently highlighted key characteristics that should be incorporated into the design of a service providing environmental information.

- Effective access
- Data management and interpretation
- Promotion and engagement with the user
- Public participation
Effective access

7.7 It is clear from this research and from studies referred to in this report that there are aspects of a service providing environmental information which are essential to its success from the users’ perspective. Firstly, once interest is ignited it should be clear to the member of the public whom to approach, and for appropriate information to be found on the first attempt in the majority of cases. At present there are many different environmental organisations and it is not clear to the public what roles these organisations have. Nor is it necessarily clear to the providers where the centre of gravity in terms of provision is based. This means that there is a need for very clearly defined and promoted roles of the different organisations.

7.8 On a practical level once access to information has been achieved this should be quick and convenient (i.e. in terms of travel time, downloading documents from the internet or wait times on a telephone hotline).

7.9 Although it is an ideal that information can be found at first attempt this will not always be possible as the enquiry may be multi-faceted or unique rather than ‘repeat-business’. This makes it even more important that effective signposting functions smoothly in order to guide the public to the correct source of information.

7.10 This study uncovered inconsistencies around the methods of access with some studies indicating that users wished to retain the ‘traditional’ methods (telephone, letter, face-to-face) whilst the survey of the public showed some preference for web-based and email access. With a broad range of users and a wide spectrum of information and levels of interpretation required, it is likely that a mix of media would be most appropriate. This mix would need to be decided upon depending on sensitivities such as geographical remoteness and access for equalities groups.

7.11 Effective access is not a static issue and needs to be flexible enough to change with time and the current issues of relevance to the general public.

7.12 It is recognised within this study that providing access is a time consuming and expensive process. The public funding for such services should be to some extent proportionate to the level of demand or the need for proactive supply-led provision. However, within the context of increasing equity and the community need for information, charging should not be usual practice. There will be variations to this depending on who the user is (e.g. commercial), the extent of funding and the public will to pay for information additional to that already available (e.g. site-specific monitoring).

7.13 Effective access is also facilitated by the ability of the staff working with the service provider to be positive and proactive. Appropriate staff recruitment and training are essential to generate working practices that enhance effective access. Effective provision of information in Scotland would benefit from an increased understanding of the importance of the role held by information officers, call centre staff and managers of information services. Identifying and pooling good practice followed by the development of appropriate training resources would assist in the development of a standard and style of service that would facilitate more effective public access to environmental information.
**Data management and interpretation**

7.14 Efficient data management is crucial to the smooth running of all information services. This study established that the EIR and FOI had increased the focus on data management but there were still substantial improvements required for these systems to be functioning at an optimum level. In order for the information provided to meet the needs of the public this study reinforces the preference for the information to be presented in a manner that is intuitive or customer focussed.

7.15 Our research also suggests that information provision will be enhanced if there is a clear hierarchy of types of information and if this was in a common format between all providers. The information provision must consider the regional and social variations of potential users, with an emphasis on providing information that is personal, local and relevant. The hierarchy of information provision by the CAS (signposting, listening ear, information/advice, negotiation and representation work) provides a model which could be applied to the management and provision of environmental information.

7.16 Due to the wide spectrum of environmental information from the general (such as recycling advice), to the highly technical (such as contamination reports), there needs to be a recognition amongst providers of the responsibility to provide all information in a user friendly way. We suggest that this could be assisted (as with ARK) by the offer of face-to-face support to help the user understand the implications of the information. Providers will probably require additional support for this, either centrally from the Scottish Executive or through resource being made available within their organisation. It is important to note that this sharp end of the information provision is the crux of improving public access to information, and therefore the public’s ability to participate. In the context of environmental justice more effort should be made to improve this aspect of provision.

**Promotion and engagement with the user**

7.17 Effective provision of environmental information should not be a passive activity but a process of active engagement of the user. The ARK project provides a useful example of this where there is a gradual shift from supply-led proactive provision to demand-led reactive provision. In order to address the equity strand of environmental justice there needs to be a rebalancing between the provider and the user such that the user starts making demands on the service and exercising their right for information.

7.18 Promotion of the service has the ability to unlock the flow of information from provider to user, once the proper infrastructure is in place. A good example of this is the phased approach to introducing new environmental services such as kerbside collection of recyclable materials.

7.19 The promotion of current services or a national service providing environmental information in Scotland should focus on the development of a ‘brand’ or recognisable logo that can raise public awareness of this source of environmental information. The public should be able to recognise this ‘brand’ and identify, for example, that this is the first point of contact to approach when searching for environmental information.

7.20 In order to promote these services, a number of methods should be used, with a particular focus on those methods that are currently widely preferred by the public.
The promotion should be undertaken in two stages, firstly to launch initiatives and establish their presence; and secondly, to broaden and maintain their profile as a reputable source(s) of environmental information.

7.21 Information should be disseminated through a variety of media, and should focus on those media that are currently used most often such as telephone, personal visits, email, websites and post.

7.22 Promotion can focus on key groups and single issues to stimulate demand for information. For example, the survey of the public found that the 25-34 age group were most concerned about lifestyle change whereas the 55-64 were most concerned about health. Findings such as these can be used to develop the promotion of single interest strands within a wider programme of information provision.

7.23 As this research indicates, the communication plan may focus on the use of television advertisements, posters and leaflets. The television advertisements should be shown nationally and should be timed to reach the broadest spectrum of the general public. Posters and leaflets should be distributed on a national basis, but should have a local focus. The leaflets and posters should be displayed in small communities in order to reach the greatest number of people, and it suggested that post offices, local councils or Community Councils may be able to assist with this.

7.24 It is important that promotional activities are linked with similar and national campaigns formerly used in Scotland, such as the ‘Do a Little Change a Lot’ (DALCAL) campaign. This helps the audience connect to the bigger picture and avoids campaign ‘fatigue’ as the messages are seen as linked rather than separate and additional.

7.25 In order to disseminate information effectively to the greatest number of people, we suggest that the main focus would be a website, as this is the most cost-effective way of reaching the largest number of people across the largest geographical spread but other complementary media are essential including television, radio and local advertising. Phone numbers, contact names and links to the websites of participating organisations would be provided on the website.

7.26 Key issues of particular environmental significance or public interest should be highlighted as ‘headlines’ on the website. These key issues can also become the focus of information campaigns, in terms of leaflet distribution or television advertisements.

7.27 It is important that barriers to information are considered, and that information should be published in an inclusive manner.

Public participation

7.28 The second of the three main ‘pillars’ of the Aarhus Convention is ‘public participation in environmental decision making’. The effective provision of environmental information should assist in delivering this aim but only if it successfully informs the public.

7.29 One of the biggest challenges to address to encourage public participation is reaching target populations that are ‘socially and economically excluded’, and indeed ‘individuals who felt it was inevitable that they live in polluted areas’ (Adebowale,
2004). Although the provision of environmental information will improve the knowledge infrastructure there needs to be active community engagement to stimulate interest and follow through when this is ignited. Again, ARK provides an example of this but this is a very limited service at present.

7.30 Further guidance may follow the new regulations which will come into force to address ‘public participation in environmental decision making’ pillar of the Aarhus Convention in early 2006. It is likely that the impact of these new regulations will be seen in areas such as EIA. This might include the increased involvement of, for example, pressure groups and may bring about further change in terms of how decisions are reviewed.

7.31 Trust can be improved and built upon through public participation. Two-way consultation on services and concerns will help the public develop some ownership of such services and see them as meeting their needs rather than potentially being a by-product of an organisation that holds environmental information.

7.32 It will be important to anticipate future demands, and assess what environmental issues will be of interest to the public.

Proposed Recommendations

Although there is no single neat solution, this research has highlighted a number of areas to be addressed in order to effectively provide environmental information. The main recommendations put forward by the research team are provided below.

7.33 The main recommendations from this research are as follows:

- To develop a national signposting service
- To undertake a national exercise to clarify the roles and scope of different providers
- To develop agreed guidelines and standards for a hierarchy of information provision
- To expand proactive community based projects such as ARK
- To develop a national training initiative for environmental information providers
- To develop a monitoring and evaluation strategy
- To establish a strategic level steering group
- To establish a network of environmental information providers

7.34 This research demonstrates the need for a national signposting service. In order to do this a national exercise should be undertaken to clarify the roles and scope of different providers so that these can be clearly understood by the organisations involved and promoted to the public. This work will form the basis for a national signposting service to be set up along the lines of a portal which provides links to all the environmental information providers.
To support the national signposting service, data management and interpretation should continue to be improved with the development of agreed guidelines and standards for a hierarchy of information provision.

To address the equity and public participation strand there should be an expansion of proactive community based projects such as ARK. The spatial and operational spread of such services would require further detailed assessment to consider whether to use existing networks or create new ones.

In order to improve the consistency and the consumer focus of information provision there should be a national training initiative for the main environmental information providers, especially front line staff who interact directly with the public. A training programme should be developed that has the ability to pool and build on good practice that currently exists and provide a dynamic learning environment to optimise these skills.

The results of research show that monitoring of services is generally ad hoc and poor. It is vital to measure success and a monitoring and evaluation strategy should be established with guidelines provided to all environmental information organisations. Such a strategy would need to incorporate public awareness and satisfaction criteria as a key measurement to achieving the ‘equity’ strand of effective provision.

A national steering group, potentially housed within the Scottish Executive, should oversee progress at a strategic level and review the national monitoring and evaluation results to identify further improvements to effective provision. Each of the members of this group would have specific roles in terms of strategic planning, marketing, public affairs and communication, finance, IT services and website maintenance, and ‘new products’ (i.e. seminar topics, new media etc).

To help share good practice and standardise provision it would be beneficial to establish a network of environmental information providers including professionals from industry, government, local authorities, academia, research organisations, environmental agencies and NGOs. These representatives may be located in areas across Scotland maintaining a local presence, and would not need to be co-located. Regular meetings by the network would review issues such as consistent data management and interpretation.

These recommendations are based on the findings of this research study, which show that there is a need for a clear source of environmental information that is accessible to the general public. This will help to achieve the Scottish Executive goals of environmental and social justice, encouraging public participation in decision-making and developing sustainable communities.
REFERENCES


## APPENDIX 1 RESEARCH TOOLS

**Information Providers’ Survey**

### Company details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Web</th>
<th>Approximate number of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contact details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Tel</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ORGANISATION

1. What are the key objectives of your organisation e.g. your mission statement?

2. Is your organisation aware of any of the following policies?
   - 1998 Aarhus Convention
   - Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
   - Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004

3. Has your organisation made any changes to comply with these policies? For example, training, new staff or promotional material.

4. How long have you been providing responses to requests for environmental information?
   - < 1 Year
   - 1-4 Years
   - 5-9 Years
   - >9 Years
   - Not at all

5. How are you funded?
   - Public/government
   - European Union
   - Private/commercial
   - Charity/voluntary
   - Membership/subscription
   - Other:

6. How many frontline people are employed to directly provide this service?
   - <1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7  Do you work in partnership with other organisations to provide this information?</td>
<td>☐ Yes  ☐ No  If yes, please provide details.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8  What is the rate of uptake of these services, for example, users per month? | **Helpline**<br>☐ <1 user per month  ☐ 1-19 users per month  ☐ 20-49 users per month  ☐ 49-100 users per month  ☐ 100-500  ☐ >500  
**Website**<br>☐ <1 user per month  ☐ 1-19 users per month  ☐ 20-49 users per month  ☐ 49-100  ☐ 100–500  ☐ >500  
**Written Enquiry (email, letter or fax)**<br>☐ <1 user per month  ☐ 1-19 users per month  ☐ 20-49 users per month  ☐ 49-100  ☐ 100-500  ☐ >500  
**Face to face**<br>☐ <1 user per month  ☐ 1-19 users per month  ☐ 20-49 users per month  ☐ 49-100  ☐ 100-500  ☐ >500  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is there a charge to the service user?</td>
<td>☐ No&lt;br&gt;☐ Yes&lt;br&gt;<strong>If so how much?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Who usually requests information from your organisation? Please estimate proportions.</td>
<td>☐ General public&lt;br&gt;☐ Government researchers&lt;br&gt;☐ Commercial organisations/consultants&lt;br&gt;☐ Academic researchers / students&lt;br&gt;☐ Schools/children&lt;br&gt;☐ NGOs&lt;br&gt;☐ Community/advocacy organisations&lt;br&gt;☐ Overseas&lt;br&gt;☐ Other:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>How long does it usually take to respond to a request?</td>
<td>☐ Immediate&lt;br&gt;☐ Half working day&lt;br&gt;☐ Full working day&lt;br&gt;☐ 1-5 Days&lt;br&gt;☐ 6-20 Days&lt;br&gt;☐ 21-28 days&lt;br&gt;☐ 28 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>What are the most common types of request which you provide information about?</td>
<td>☐ Climate change&lt;br&gt;☐ Air quality&lt;br&gt;☐ Drinking water&lt;br&gt;☐ River and coastal water quality&lt;br&gt;☐ Flood Risk&lt;br&gt;☐ Soil and contaminated land&lt;br&gt;☐ Land use and planning&lt;br&gt;☐ Forestry&lt;br&gt;☐ Farming&lt;br&gt;☐ LA service providing Environmental Informationure/access&lt;br&gt;☐ Natural site; e.g. SSSIs etc&lt;br&gt;☐ Biological diversity&lt;br&gt;☐ Human health and safety&lt;br&gt;☐ Food/environmental consumer issues&lt;br&gt;☐ Built structures, including transport infrastructure&lt;br&gt;☐ Derelict or unused sites&lt;br&gt;☐ Energy efficiency&lt;br&gt;☐ Energy generation&lt;br&gt;☐ Noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Does your organisation provide help to improve public understanding of technical and specialist information?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEASURING PERFORMANCE / EFFECTIVENESS</td>
<td>How do you plan to measure your performance in responding to requests for information?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Do you hold management information on the cost of providing information?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Have the number, nature and or source of requests for information changed since the Environmental Information Regulations came into force (January 2005)?</td>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>If they have changed please provide details.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Do you have Service Level Agreements?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMOTION</td>
<td>How do you promote your organisation’s provision of environmental information?</td>
<td>Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Local Library</td>
<td>Shop Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>ACCESSIBILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Do you provide bespoke, generic and/or technical environmental information to users? Tick as many as apply.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Audio/video tape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Conference/seminar presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Campaign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Bespoke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Generic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Technical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Are you proactive in providing information, or do you only respond to requests? Please give details:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Proactive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Respond to request</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>What level of information are you able to provide?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Local</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ National</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Cross-national (UK)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ International (EU and beyond)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>If you are unable to provide the environmental information requested what do you usually do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Agree to provide the information from elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Provide contact details for another provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Decline the enquiry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Please specify:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>What do you understand are the most common barriers to access the environmental information that you do provide?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ No access to IT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Technical nature of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Non-English speaking users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Disabled access to buildings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Visual impairment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Audio impairment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other disability:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Cost to user</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Disabled access to building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Location of service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Capacity of service</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>What measures do you take to address the above? Please give details.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Have you identified any examples of good practice similar to your service?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Please give details:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Does your organisation have any future plans</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Omnibus Survey

Methodology: This methodology would focus on the entire Scottish population and would involve a total of 1,000 telephone interviews.

Our methodology for an Omnibus survey would comprise of the following stages:

- Initial telephone briefing confirming objectives, sample size, format of data etc.
- Information Providers’ Survey design and approval.
- Fieldwork.
- Provision of raw data in a format required by the client (e.g. SPSS, SNAP, Excel). Basic analysis will include the results of each question in Microsoft table form. If required, Progressive would also be able to analyse the data and present results and conclusions as a PowerPoint presentation or summary paper.

Sample: The sample size of 1,000 for each phase would provide a data set with a maximum standard error range of between 0.9% and 3.1% at the 95% confidence interval.

Timing: The Omnibus Study runs from Tuesday to Tuesday and results are available the Wednesday following fieldwork.

Suggested fieldwork dates are:
Tuesday 2nd May – Tuesday 10th May, with results available on Wednesday 11th May 2005.
Questions

Basic standard profiling:
- Gender
- Age
- Social Class
- Region

Q1. **ASK ALL**
Have you ever wanted information about environmental issues?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q2. **ASK ALL THAT SAY YES AT Q1**
Why did you want environmental information for example information about recycling, local pollution, flood risk, planning applications, climate change or global warming? SPONTANEOUS – DO NOT PROMPT
- I was worried about my health
- I was worried about a planning application
- I had concerns about pollution in general
- I had concerns about the environment in general
- I had a local concern about pollution
- I had a local concern about the environment
- I am interested in what’s going on in my local area
- I am interested in environmental issues
- I am interested about local recreation and amenities
- Other reason, specify ________
- Unsure

Q3 Did you request information? YES/NO

Q4. **ASK ALL THAT SAY YES AT Q3**
What did you use the information for? SPONTANEOUS – DO NOT PROMPT
- To recycle/lifestyle changes
- To campaign against something
- To help with planning developments
- Other use, specify ________
- Can’t remember

Q5. **ASK ALL**
Are you aware that you have the legal right to be able to access environmental information if you wish since January 2005?
- Yes, definitely aware
- Yes, think I’m aware
- No
- Unsure
Q6. **ASK THOSE THAT SAY YES TO Q5**
Can you please tell me the name of any organisations that offer help, advice or information on the environment? SPONTANEOUS AWARENESS – DO NOT READ OUT

- Local council
- Scottish Executive/Government
- SEPA/regulator
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
- NGO/environmental charity. For example, Friends of the Earth. Please specify
- Private Consultancy
- Other, specify __________
- Unsure

Q7. **ASK ALL**
Lots of environmental information is readily available and is free, however, there are specialist services that can be offered, for example monitoring of local air quality or water testing. If you required this particular service how much would you be prepared to pay for it if at all?

- Not at all
- <£10
- £10-£30
- £31-£70
- £71-£100
- >£100
- Whatever it cost

Q8. **ASK ALL**
If you were to request information on the environment what would be your preferred method of obtaining information? SPONTANEOUS – DO NOT PROMPT

- Phone
- Personal visit
- Proactive (leaflet)
- Proactive (community meeting)
- Access a website
- E-mail
- Face to face
- SMS text message
- Post
- Some other method, specify __________
- Unsure
Focus Groups

Please find below a set of questions to consider prior to the Focus Group session that you will be attending next week. The discussion will be drawn from the following four themes and associated questions, but it is not intended to be prescriptive. The sessions will allow for flexibility and the exchange of views and experiences.

Your role, as a participant in the Focus Group, is to contribute your own experiences, lessons learned and potential suggestions in terms of access to information.

1. **Directing People to Information/Provision of information**
   - How do the public determine who to ask? Who is the first point of contact? How does signposting to help the public find the ‘right information’
   - Should there be a cost to the public to access information?
   - What is the best way to promote services?
   - How can marginalized groups be identified and gain access? (e.g. remote communities, age, literacy, culture, language, disabilities)
   - Are the time constraints in terms of finding and providing the ‘right’ information an issue?
   - How should more complex information and technical assistance be provided?
   - How can good practice be monitored?

2. **Interpretation**
   - How is data collected, compiled and reported?
   - How is the information assessed a ‘fit for purpose’?
   - Is some information too technical or expensive to be made use of?
   - What is the process for new data to be prepared for provision to the public?
   - Is more funding required to carry out interpretation?
   - How is data presented?
   - How is data validated?
   - How effective are FAQs/methods of providing general information?

3. **Community Involvement, Change and Empowerment**
   - How effective are self help actions: gathering other people in the neighbourhood to discuss the issue, swap information, and gauge the level of interest in the community for finding out more information?
   - Does the community need a greater knowledge of laws and rights?
   - Does the community need a greater knowledge of science behind environmental regulations, investigations and monitoring?
   - Can existing infrastructure such as: Community Management Schemes, Eco-Schools, local authority Environmental Health Officers assist?
   - How do we address trust and reputation – who is best placed to provide information?
4. **Future steps**

- Can improved access to environmental information help bring greater environmental justice for communities?
- What are the barriers and opportunities?
- Can you provide examples of information provision (including non-environmental) and your thoughts on what works and what doesn’t?
- Do we need a central facility? What subject areas would this cover? What would it look like and how would it be promoted?

For further information, please contact Jean Welstead at Enviros Consulting at 0131 555 9523 or jean.welstead@enviros.com