



## Recommendations for improving science-policy communication

### The brief in brief

The purpose of this SPIRAL brief is to highlight that opportunities and responsibilities for improving communication are relevant to both policy and science and across scales (from individuals to organisations)<sup>1</sup>. It provides an overview of activities and approaches which can help to improve communication of both scientific and policy knowledge relating to ecosystem services and biodiversity.

### Looking across the table

In many situations it can feel as if the onus for improving communication falls to individuals. It is certainly true that communication depends on interest and commitment from individuals in both policy and science arenas, and it is perhaps easy to picture how a researcher could go about 'packaging' findings from a paper or research project in order to inform policy colleagues. However, recommendations are also relevant at higher scales. For example, the options available to individuals are constrained and dependent on their work teams, parent organisations and funding opportunities, and in turn these relate to sectorial expectations and career structures. Improving communication will depend on both individual and institutional commitment and prioritisation. In the table on the next page we have therefore listed recommendations at three scales: i) individuals, ii) teams and iii) organisations.

### Looking down the table

The reality of science-policy communication often resembles a messy network and in real life, there exist no

<sup>1</sup>The information in the brief is based on interviews carried out with science and policy actors in three case studies: the UK NEA, the implementation of the WFD, and deer management in Scotland. This information was complemented by discussions in a workshop held in June 2012. For more information on each of these case studies, please see other SPIRAL briefs.

separate easily identifiable 'camps' of scientists and policy-makers. For example, where do those working in statutory environmental agencies fit in? However, scientific research and policy-making do have distinct differences in purpose and ethos, and the onus for improving communication falls on both.

### Theoretical and academic background

Consideration of policy and science processes and the understanding of SPIs as processes of coproduction of knowledge and of interactive two-way communication are contained in separate SPIRAL briefs, at <http://www.spiral-project.eu/content/documents>. The view of science-policy interfaces which underlies our project is described in van den Hove, S. (2007) *A rationale for science-policy interfaces*, *Futures*, 39(7), 807-826, and an accessible review and comparison of science and policy links across Europe is provided by Nutley, S., Morton, S., Jung, T. and Boaz, A. (2010) *Evidence and policy in six European countries: diverse approaches and common challenges*, *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 6(2), 131-144.

### Looking for more information on science-policy interfaces?

For more SPIRAL results, see companion SPIRAL briefs at <http://www.spiral-project.eu/content/documents>

This brief is a result of research and interactions within and around the SPIRAL project. This brief was written by Kerry Waylen (JHI) and Juliette Young (CEH).

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	Individual	Teams	Organisation
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for training courses and other opportunities to learn about policy processes.</li> <li>Recognise that 'policymakers' are diverse and have diverse views. Some have science backgrounds.</li> <li>Use visual materials.</li> <li>Use different communication tools, e.g. scenarios, user guides, videos or online best practice guides, maps, social media.</li> <li>Be prepared to adapt approaches according to your audience.</li> <li>Plan to publish reviews. These are helpful to non-researchers, and can fit with academic motivations.</li> <li>Contextualise the presentation of research or specific findings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss plans and outputs throughout projects, and from the design stage, not just at the end.</li> <li>Policy briefs can be useful but must be disseminated and linked to other communication outputs.</li> <li>Organise field trips and practical demonstrations.</li> <li>Allow communication strategies to evolve and be flexible.</li> <li>Learn from experience in interdisciplinary research.</li> <li>Proactively seek out ways to present research and its implications to different audiences.</li> <li>Preface all reports with accessibly-written executive summaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research and fund training for communication skills and understanding of policy processes for scientists.</li> <li>Explore potential for broader assessment of impact), and create and publish in high journals aimed at policy.</li> <li>Encourage scientists to get acquainted with policy processes and support those who wish to operate at the science-policy interface.</li> </ul>
Both science and policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek out events where other disciplines and sectors will attend.</li> <li>Explore job-shadowing, i.e. scientists and policy-makers observing the day-to-day job of the other.</li> <li>Cultivate personal contacts though recognise that everyone is under time pressures.</li> <li>Look for training courses and opportunities to improve communication and networking skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan projects and budgets to spend time and resources on science-policy interfaces and communication.</li> <li>Explore the use of scenario-building and other tools as a process for building shared understanding.</li> <li>Provide directories of experts /subject-specific contacts.</li> <li>Consider the merits of cross-reviewing: for example in addition to academics reviewing academic papers (peer-review) and policy-makers reviewing policies, explore the merits of academics reviewing policy, or policy-makers reviewing academic outputs</li> <li>Plan topic-focused events that allow mingling from those with different backgrounds.</li> <li>Organise field trips to bring together researchers and stakeholders across levels (e.g. from policy to land-manager).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote general understanding about science and its role in society.</li> <li>Provide incentives (monetary and career) for interaction between science and policy.</li> <li>Promote discussions about career structures and motivations.</li> <li>Fund and support interdisciplinary research.</li> <li>Fund training or resourcing for "linker/broker/facilitator" individuals and "linker" events to build science-policy relationships (do not just focus on tangible "Knowledge Exchange outputs").</li> <li>Develop a communication strategy to help identify and prioritise audiences and partners.</li> <li>Provide funding for networking events.</li> </ul>
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise that many researchers are personally motivated to see their research used and valued.</li> <li>Recognise that 'scientists' are diverse and do not have knowledge of all issues relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services.</li> <li>Subscribe to feeds about relevant news and policy brief sites.</li> <li>Seek out opportunities to learn how science works in general, as well as to learn about specific job-related topics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be transparent about questions, and expected needs for current and/or future knowledge. Putting this into a briefing note for researchers can be a helpful starting point for discussion.</li> <li>Welcome conversations about defining questions or problems.</li> <li>Consider developing a list or network of scientific experts and researchers to help you.</li> <li>Provide space and resources to allow teams and individuals to learn and to build contacts beyond the policy sphere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote transparency and wider understanding (e.g. through training course) of policy and decision-making and implementation processes.</li> <li>Explore if and why science is valued compared to other forms of evidence.</li> <li>Liaise with funders to ensure funded projects (i) are clearly aware of policy priorities, and (ii) encourage communication e.g. enforce clearly written summaries from tender stage.</li> <li>Liaise with funders to develop projects that allow flexibility for interaction between science and policy.</li> </ul>