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Enumeration, valuation, and evaluation – an ecosystem by any other number

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Abstract:

For over twenty years, the ABS has developed ways of producing and presenting environment-economic accounts provide guidance for decisions about improving both economic and environmental performance. During this time, it has produced a range of accounts, statistics and indicators related to issues of importance to Australia's economy and citizens. Global interest in environmental-economic accounting is rapidly developing in response to increasing awareness of the importance and condition of the world's natural resources. With this, the diversity of methods for estimating the values of ecosystems and their goods and services is increasing. Values are sometimes produced based on the definitions and concepts of formal Corporate or National Accounting Standards and sometimes from more flexible economic valuation methods. The range of approaches and methods for valuation can produce confusion. However, if the meaning of the numbers is clear and the method of estimating them is transparent, a range of values, looking at different aspects of ecosystems, can improve understanding of the nature of environmental-economic problems and the quality of decisions about them. Different methods of valuation of ecosystems and the meaning they convey are discussed. Accounts are distinguished from statistics and values that appear in Accounts are distinguished from values that assist with deliberation about choices for the future.