



**JNCC Report 814**

**Mapping the IPBES Nexus Assessment to the UK Policy Landscape:  
A preliminary analysis**

**Sarah Scott-Marshall and Hayley-Bo Dorrian-Bak**

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**For further information please contact:**

JNCC, Quay House, 2 East Station Road, Fletton Quays, Peterborough PE2 8YY.

<https://jncc.gov.uk/>

[Communications@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:Communications@jncc.gov.uk)

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## Executive Summary

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) [Nexus Assessment](#) evaluates the important interlinkages between biodiversity, food, health, water and climate change, and highlights a set of 71 “response options” (actions or policies) that provide synergistic benefits across these five nexus elements. This paper provides an assessment of how well a subset of the nexus response options are addressed within key UK and Devolved Government (DG) policies and strategies. Response options relevant to the UK with the greatest cumulative impact across the nexus elements were identified (n=27). The degree to which these response options were addressed within 31 UK and DG sectoral policies and strategies, as well as the UK and DG ‘Plans for Change’, were then assessed using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating system.

Overall, most of the climate change response options were fully addressed in climate policies for the UK, Scotland and Wales (at least 75% of those assessed); these could already be providing cross-sectoral benefits if they are being implemented according to a nexus governance approach. Most of the biodiversity, water and food response options were also identified in the UK-wide and DG policies, though this varied across government policies, and many were only partially addressed and therefore likely to need further refinement to support the delivery of nexus-wide benefits. On the other hand, most of the health response options were not identified in the UK-wide and DG health policies and strategies. Engagement with the departments responsible for developing and implementing health policies and strategies could therefore be considered a high priority.

Very few response options were fully addressed in the UK and DG ‘Plans for Change’, highlighting the need to raise awareness of the importance of the nexus response options to the delivery of key government priorities and cross-sectoral objectives. Some response options were partially addressed in the DG ‘Plans for Change’, particularly those related to biodiversity. Engaging with relevant departments to strengthen policies related to these response options and promote cross-sectoral collaboration will help to maximise the nexus-wide impacts of these policies.

Whilst this analysis identifies key policy gaps in relation to the Nexus Assessment response options, further work is required to identify how well policies relevant to these response options are being implemented. Multi-sectoral workshops that focus on co-developing tangible actions and cross-cutting policies will support the operationalisation of the Nexus Assessment response options in the UK.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background to the Nexus Assessment

The [Nexus Assessment](#) is a thematic assessment of the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food, health and climate change commissioned under the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). The assessment addresses the complex and interconnected nature of the crises of biodiversity loss, water availability and quality, food insecurity, health risks and climate change. Decisions in relation to these five nexus elements are often taken in isolation, resulting in misalignment, inefficiencies and unintended trade-offs. The Nexus Assessment recognises the importance of the interlinkages between the nexus elements and supports integrated decision-making that promotes positive outcomes across all the nexus elements. In particular, the Nexus Assessment highlights a set of 71 “response options” (actions or policies) that support sustainable management across biodiversity, water, food, health and climate change. These response options support transformative change toward just and sustainable futures in line with global policy goals and frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. The assessment also promotes ‘nexus governance approaches’, which provide more holistic and transdisciplinary framings of problems and solutions; include more actors across multiple nexus interactions; emphasise explicit values such as equity and accountability; enable policy alignment, collaboration and integration; and are experimental, adaptive and reflexive.

## 1.2. UK Context

Operationalising the findings of the Nexus Assessment in the UK can help to break-down siloed policymaking and promote synergies between the biodiversity, water, food, health and climate sectors, which can increase the efficiency, value for money and impact of UK policies and practices, delivering a more secure, sustainable, and prosperous future. International treaties and obligations are primarily the responsibility of the UK Government, but the devolved nature of government within the UK means that the four countries (Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland) hold the responsibility for delivering the majority of policies and commitments related to the different nexus elements. Understanding how well the Nexus Assessment response options are already addressed in UK and Devolved Government (DG) policies and where key gaps remain is an important first step towards operationalising the Nexus Assessment in the UK. In particular, the UK Government [Plan for Change](#) and the DG Programmes for Government ([Scotland](#), [Northern Ireland](#), [Wales](#)) outline each government’s priorities and commitments, providing an opportunity to assess how well the nexus response options are mainstreamed in government policy and the extent to which a nexus governance approach is already implemented in the UK.

## 1.3. Aim of this analysis

The main aim of this analysis is to determine if the Nexus Assessment response options are already addressed within key UK and DG sectoral policies and strategies. This will help to identify where policies and strategies could be strengthened to promote better synergies between the biodiversity, water, food, health and climate sectors, thereby supporting the efficiency and impact of policies. Specifically, this analysis assesses the extent to which each Nexus Assessment response option is reflected within overarching government policies and strategies in the ‘nexus’ sectors (biodiversity, water, food, health and climate), as well as the UK Plan for Change and the respective DG Programmes for Government. This provides an indication of which response options are a current UK and DG government priority as of

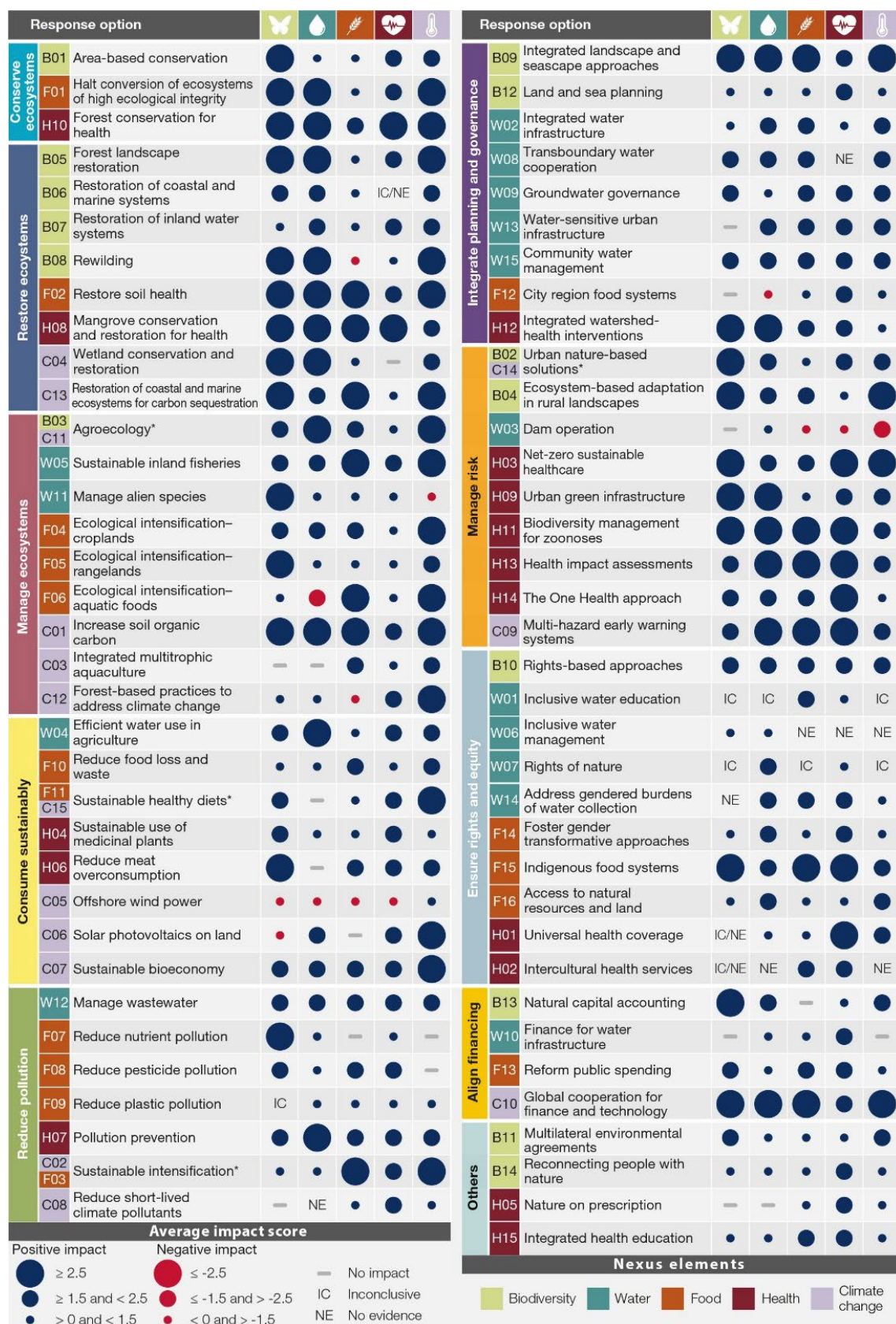
July 2025 (though the updated Environmental Improvement Plan published in December 2025 was also included in this analysis). It should be noted that the policy context can change rapidly.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Refining the Nexus response options

Figure SPM.8 in the Nexus Assessment's Summary for Policy Makers (see Figure 1) was used as the basis for this analysis. Response options that were not relevant to mainland UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) were removed (n=6; e.g. "mangrove conservation and restoration for health"). Each response option was then scored based on its cumulative impact on the five different nexus elements, as indicated by the size (small = +/-1; medium = +/-2; large = +/-3) and colour (red = negative, blue = positive) of the 'impact' circles in Figure 1. Each response option could score between +15 to -15 (highly positive impact to highly negative impact). Response options which scored +10 or more (positive impact) were selected for further analysis. In total, 27 out of the 65 response options relevant to the UK scored 10 or more (see Table 1).





**Figure 1.** Taken from the [IPBES Nexus Assessment Summary for Policy Makers \(SPM\)](#), shown as “Figure SPM.8”. For each of the response options assessed, circles indicate the estimated impacts on each nexus element. Larger circles indicate stronger impacts on that element, and several large circles in a row indicate more widespread impacts across elements. Most impacts are positive (blue), but a few response options have negative



impacts (red) on some nexus elements. Unique alphanumeric codes for each response option indicate its nexus element (B for biodiversity, W for water, F for food, H for health and C for climate change) and its corresponding number used in the Nexus Assessment. Impact scores are based on a thorough review of existing evidence, synthesized and averaged across several component criteria on a scale of -3 to +3 for each nexus element. Response options for which evidence for component indicators was inconclusive (IC) or non-existent (NE) are labelled as such. Response options with an asterisk (e.g. agroecology) were each assessed in two different subchapters, and both alphanumeric codes are therefore shown. For these response options, circles represent an average score from the two subchapters in which they were assessed. For a brief description of each response option or more details on scoring, see Nexus Assessment appendix 4 and subchapters 5.1 to 5.5.

## 2.2. Assessment of response options against government policies and strategies

The most recent overarching policy and/or strategy documents relevant to each nexus element (biodiversity, water, food, health and climate) were identified for each national government (Scotland, England, Wales and N. Ireland), as well as any relevant UK-level policies. This totalled 31 documents across the nexus element categories (biodiversity = 6, water = 5, food = 6, health = 5, and climate = 9; Table 1).

Response options were only assessed against the strategies and policies relevant to their nexus element category (i.e. food response options were only assessed against UK and DG food policy documents). Where response options were assigned two nexus categories (e.g. Agroecology is a 'Biodiversity' and 'Climate' response option), documents relevant to both categories were assessed separately. Three response options were associated with two nexus elements (Agroecology, Urban Nature-based Solutions and Sustainable Intensification).

To determine if response options were sufficiently addressed in their associated strategies or policy documents, relevant sections were reviewed for terms and descriptions related to the response option. Response options were reviewed by two people, who agreed criteria for the RAG-rating system together. Each response option was then assigned a RAG-rating based on how well it was addressed in the document (Fully (G) / Partially (A) / Not identified (R)), using the response option descriptions in Nexus Assessment Table SPM.A2 and Chapter 5 as a guide. Response options scored 'Fully' if there was clear evidence of actions or commitments within the document to implement all or most aspects of the response option; 'Partially' if there was some evidence of actions or commitments to implement a response option, but aspects of the response option were lacking; and 'Not identified' if there was limited or no evidence of actions or commitments to implement a response option. The same methodology was applied to the UK Plan for Change and respective Devolved Government Programmes for Government (hereon "Plans for Change") for all response options to determine whether they were a UK and DG government priority (Table 1). RAG-ratings were reviewed by policy experts for each country, including the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, Devolved Governments and [JNCC country liaison officers](#).

A final RAG-rating was determined for each response option for each government's (UK, Scotland, Wales, N. Ireland) overarching strategies/policies and Plan for Change. Where more than one policy or strategy was assessed per government (e.g. biodiversity response options were assessed against two overarching strategies/policies for Scotland – Table 1), the higher RAG-rating was used. Policies or strategies relevant only to England were used to provide an 'England-level' assessment (e.g. the Public Health England Strategy 2020-2025) and where there were no specific policies or strategies for England, the 'UK-level' assessment was also used as the 'England-level' assessment (e.g. for Climate: the Net Zero

Strategy, Third National Adaptation Programme and Powering up Britain). There were no UK-wide policies or strategies for water identified, and therefore a 'UK-level' assessment for water response options was not undertaken.

**Table 1.** The 27 Nexus response options selected and the 31 UK and Devolved Government policy/strategy documents and four 'Plans for Change' they were assessed against. Where UK policies and strategies relate only to specific countries, this is indicated in the Government column. Note that there is no UK-wide water policy or strategy. The three response options associated with two nexus elements are marked with an asterisk.

Nexus response option	Government	Policy / Strategy
<b>Biodiversity</b> <b>B02:</b> Urban Nature-based solutions* <b>B03:</b> Agroecology* <b>B04:</b> Ecosystem-based adaptation in rural landscapes <b>B05:</b> Forest landscape restoration <b>B09:</b> Integrated landscape and seascape approaches <b>B10:</b> Rights-based approaches	UK	<a href="#">National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)</a>
	UK - England	<a href="#">Environmental Improvement Plan 2025</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Biodiversity: delivery plan 2024 to 2030</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Nature Recovery Plan for Wales</a>
<b>Water</b> <b>W04:</b> Efficient water use in agriculture <b>W05:</b> Sustainable inland fisheries <b>W15:</b> Community water management <b>W12:</b> Manage wastewater	UK - England	<a href="#">Plan for Water: our integrated plan for delivering clean and plentiful water</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Our Sustainable Future Together: Long Term Strategy (draft)</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">A Sustainable Future Together: Scottish Water</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Water Strategy for Wales</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Sustainable Water: A long term water strategy for Northern Ireland</a>
<b>Food</b> <b>F01:</b> Halt conversion of intact ecosystems <b>F02:</b> Restore soil health <b>F03:</b> Sustainable intensification* <b>F04:</b> Ecological intensification – croplands	UK - England	<a href="#">A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Good Food Nation (in prep)</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Healthy, Safe, Sustainable: Driving Scotland's Food Future. Food Standards Scotland Strategy for 2021–2026</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework</a>
	UK - England, Wales, Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Food you Can Trust: FSA Strategy 2022-2027</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Food Matters: Wales</a>

Nexus response option	Government	Policy / Strategy
<b>Health</b> <b>H03:</b> Net-zero sustainable health care <b>H07:</b> Pollution prevention <b>H09:</b> Urban green infrastructure <b>H10:</b> Forest conservation for health <b>H11:</b> Biodiversity management for zoonoses <b>H12:</b> Integrated watershed-health interventions <b>H13:</b> Health impact assessments <b>H14:</b> The One Health Approach	UK	<a href="#">UK Health Security Agency Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026</a>
	UK - England	<a href="#">Public Health England Strategy 2020-2025</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Public Health Scotland's three year plan: 2022 – 2025</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Working together for a healthier Wales – Long Term Strategy 2023 - 2035</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Health and Social Care Northern Ireland: A three-year plan</a>
<b>Climate</b> <b>C01:</b> Increase soil organic carbon <b>C02:</b> Sustainable intensification* <b>C07:</b> Sustainable bioeconomy <b>C09:</b> Multi-hazard early warning systems <b>C10:</b> Global cooperation for finance and technology <b>C11:</b> Agroecology* <b>C13:</b> Restoration of blue carbon ecosystems <b>C14:</b> Urban nature-based solutions*	UK	<a href="#">Net Zero Strategy</a>
	UK	<a href="#">Powering up Britain</a>
	UK	<a href="#">Third National Adaptation Programme</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2025-2029</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 (2021-25)</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Climate Adaptation Strategy</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024</a>
<b>Plan for Change</b> All of the above response options were assessed against each 'Plan for Change'	UK	<a href="#">Plan for Change</a>
	Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'</a>
	Wales	<a href="#">Welsh Government - Programme for Government - Update</a>
	Scotland	<a href="#">Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland</a>

### 3. Results

High level RAG-ratings and conclusions are outlined below. For a full breakdown of the RAG-rating assessments for each nexus response option in relation to each relevant policy/strategy document and each 'Plan for Change', please see the accompanying Excel document.

#### 3.1. Biodiversity

All six of the biodiversity response options assessed were partially addressed within the UK-wide biodiversity strategy (Figure 2 and 9; Table 2). At the country level, both Scotland and England have four biodiversity response options fully addressed in their biodiversity policies (Figures 6 and 7), whilst Northern Ireland and Wales have two (Figures 5 and 8). Just one biodiversity response option was not identified in England's (B10: Rights-based approaches) and Northern Ireland's biodiversity policies (B05: Forest-landscape restoration), whilst two were not identified in Wales's biodiversity policy (B05: Forest-landscape restoration, B03: Agroecology).

None of the biodiversity response options were identified in the UK Plan for Change (Table 3). The 'Plan for Change' for Scotland and Wales both fully addressed response option 'B05: Forest-landscape restoration'. All other biodiversity response options were partially addressed in Wales's, Scotland's and Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change', with two exceptions. 'B09: Integrated landscape and seascape approaches' was not identified in the Scotland 'Plan for Change' and 'B05: Forest-landscape restoration' was not identified in Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change'.

#### 3.2. Water

Just one of the four water response options was fully addressed in the England water policy (W12: Manage wastewater), whilst the other three were partially addressed (Figure 7; Table 2). Three of the water response options were fully addressed in Northern Ireland's water policy, and the other one was partially addressed (W05: Sustainable inland fisheries; Figure 5). Two of the water response options were fully addressed in the Scotland's water policies (W12: Manage wastewater, W15: Community water management). Only one water response option was fully addressed in Wales's water policy (W15: Community water management), and one partially addressed (W12: Manage wastewater). Notably, W05: Sustainable inland fisheries, was not fully addressed in any of the government water policies (Figure 4). There is no UK-wide water policy.

The 'W12: Manage wastewater' response option was fully addressed in Scotland's and Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change', and partially in Wales's 'Plan for Change' (Table 3). The 'W04: Efficient water use in agriculture' response option was also partially addressed in the 'Plan for Change' for Wales. No other response options were identified in the UK or DG 'Plans for Change'.

**Table 2. Sectoral policies.** The number of response options assessed as Fully/Partially/Not identified in relation to how well they are addressed within the UK and DG policies and strategies related to their nexus element category. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the total number of response options which were assessed for each nexus element. Note that an 'England-level' assessment is provided for UK government policies that only apply to England (see Table 1 for further details). There is no UK-wide policy for water.

### Biodiversity (6)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK	0	6	0
Scotland	4	2	0
Wales	2	2	2
N. Ireland	2	3	1
England	4	1	1

### Water (4)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
England	1	3	0
Scotland	2	1	1
Wales	1	1	2
N. Ireland	3	1	0

### Food (4)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK	0	4	0
England	0	4	0
Scotland	0	1	3
Wales	0	3	1
N. Ireland	0	4	0

### Health (8)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK	0	4	4
England	1	0	7
Scotland	0	1	7
Wales	0	3	5
N. Ireland	0	1	7

### Climate (8)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	7	1	0
Scotland	7	0	1
Wales	6	1	1
N. Ireland	0	5	3

### 3.3. Food

None of the four food response options were fully addressed in any of the UK-wide and DG food policies (Figure 2; Table 2). All four food responses were partially addressed in the England, Northern Ireland and UK-wide food policy. Three responses were partially addressed in the Wales's food policy (F01: Halt conversion of intact ecosystems, F03: Sustainable intensification, F04: Ecological intensification) and one in the Scottish food policy (F02: Restore soil health).

None of the four food response options were fully addressed in any of the UK and DG 'Plans for Change' (Table 3). However, three were partially addressed in Scotland's 'Plan for Change' (F02: Restore soil health, F03: Sustainable intensification, F04: Ecological intensification) and one in Wales's 'Plan for Change' (F04: Ecological intensification).

### 3.4. Health

Only one of the eight health response options was fully addressed in a health policy document: 'H07: Pollution prevention' in the England health policy (Figure 2; Table 2). This response option was also partially addressed in both the health policy for Wales and the UK. 'H03: Net-zero sustainable healthcare' was partially addressed in the health policies for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the UK, but not identified in the England health policy.

The 'H13: Health Impact Assessments', 'H09: Urban green infrastructure', 'H10: Forest conservation for health', 'H11: Biodiversity management for zoonoses', 'H14: One Health approach', and 'H12: Integrated watershed-health interventions' response options were not identified in the UK and DG health policies (Figure 4), with three exceptions. 'H13: Health Impact Assessments' was partially identified in the health policy for Wales, whilst 'H11: Biodiversity management for zoonoses' and 'H14: One Health Approach' were partially identified in the UK-wide health policy.

Only one of the eight health response options was fully addressed across the UK and DG 'Plans for Change': 'H09: Urban green infrastructure' in Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change' (Table 3). Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change' also partially addressed 'H03: Net-zero sustainable healthcare', 'H07: Pollution prevention' and 'H12: Integrated watershed-health interventions' response options. The health policy for Wales partially addressed 'H07: Pollution prevention'. All other response options were not identified in the UK and DG 'Plans for Change'.

### 3.5. Climate

Seven out of the eight climate response options were fully addressed in the UK-wide and Scottish climate policies, and six were fully addressed in the Welsh climate policies (Figure 2; Table 2). In the UK-wide policies, 'C10: Multi-hazard early warning systems' was only partially addressed, and in the Scottish and Welsh climate policies, 'C02: Sustainable intensification' was not identified. In the Welsh climate policies 'C07: Sustainable bioeconomy' was only partially addressed. There were no climate response options fully addressed in Northern Ireland's climate policies, with five partially addressed and three not identified (C10: Global cooperation for finance and technology; C13: Restoration of blue carbon ecosystems, C02: Sustainable intensification; Figure 5).

None of the climate response options were identified in the UK Plan for Change (Table 3). Just one response option was fully addressed in each of Scotland's (C10: Global cooperation for finance and technology), Northern Ireland's (C09: Multi-hazard early warning systems) and Wales's (C13: Restoration of blue carbon ecosystems) 'Plans for Change'. In

each of Scotland's, Wales's and Northern Ireland's 'Plan for Change', three response options were partially addressed and four not identified. Notably, 'C02: Sustainable intensification' was not identified in any of the UK and DG 'Plans for Change'.

**Table 3. Plans for Change.** The number of response options assessed as Fully/Partially/Not identified in relation to how well they are addressed within the UK and DG 'Plans for Change'.

#### Biodiversity (6)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	0	0	6
Scotland	1	4	1
Wales	1	5	0
N. Ireland	0	5	1

#### Water (4)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	0	0	4
Scotland	1	0	3
Wales	0	2	2
N. Ireland	1	0	3

#### Food (4)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	0	0	4
Scotland	0	3	1
Wales	0	1	3
N. Ireland	0	0	4

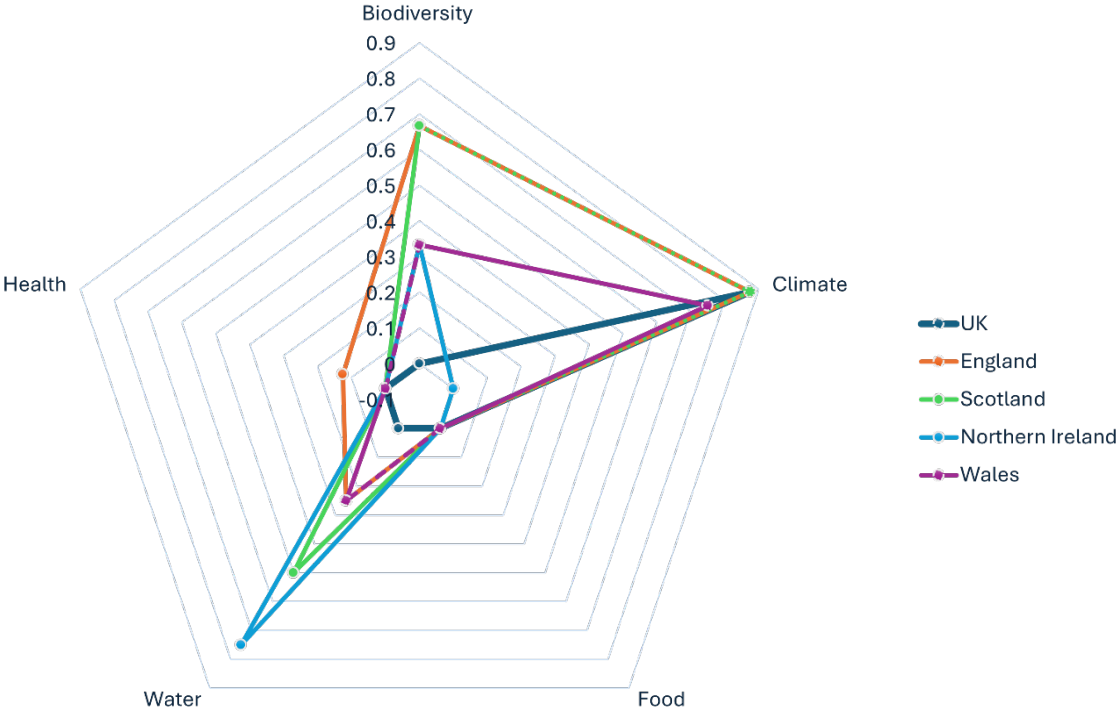
#### Health (8)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	0	0	8
Scotland	0	0	8
Wales	0	1	7
N. Ireland	1	3	4

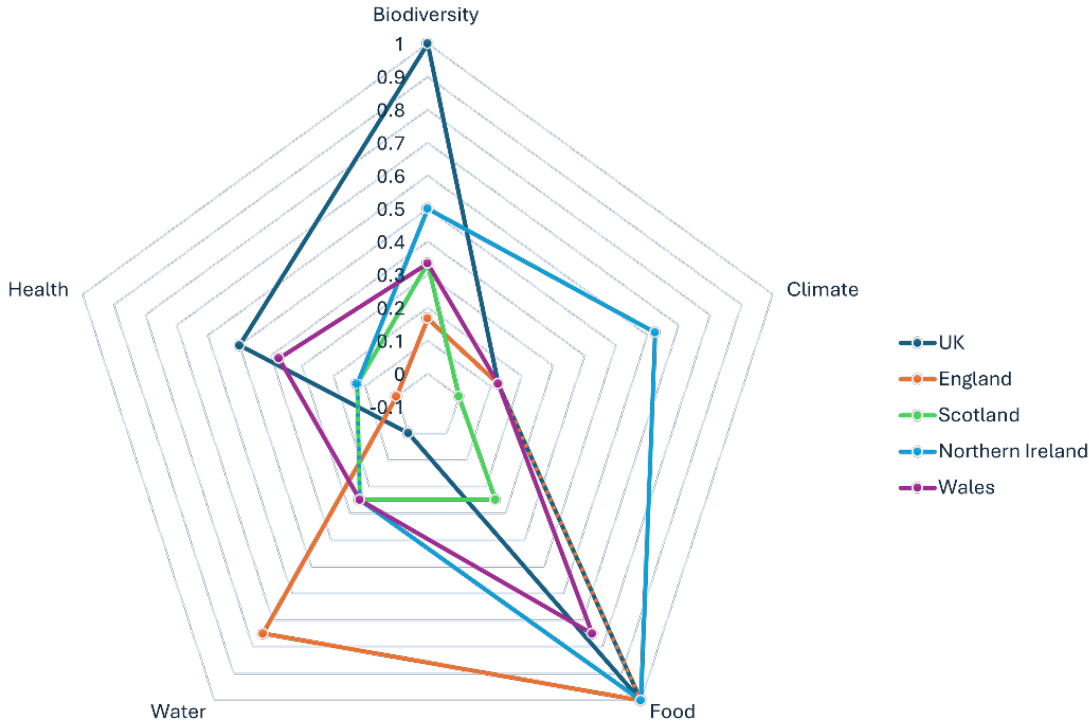
#### Climate (8)

Nexus element	Fully	Partially	Not identified
UK / England	0	0	8
Scotland	1	3	4
Wales	1	3	4
N. Ireland	1	3	4

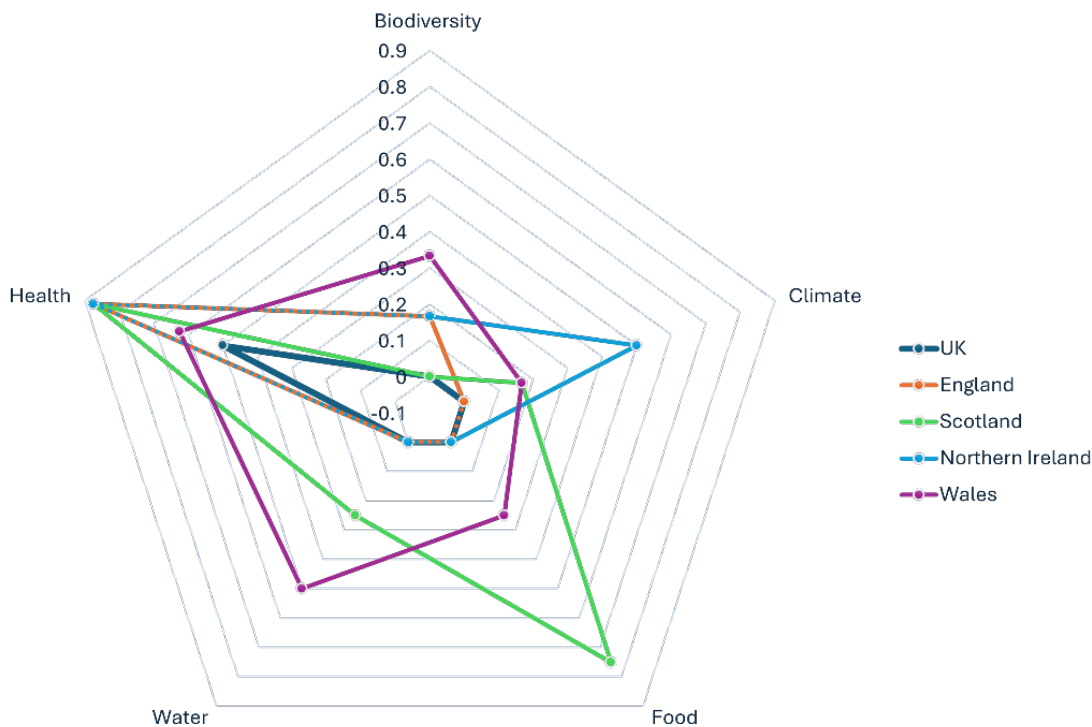




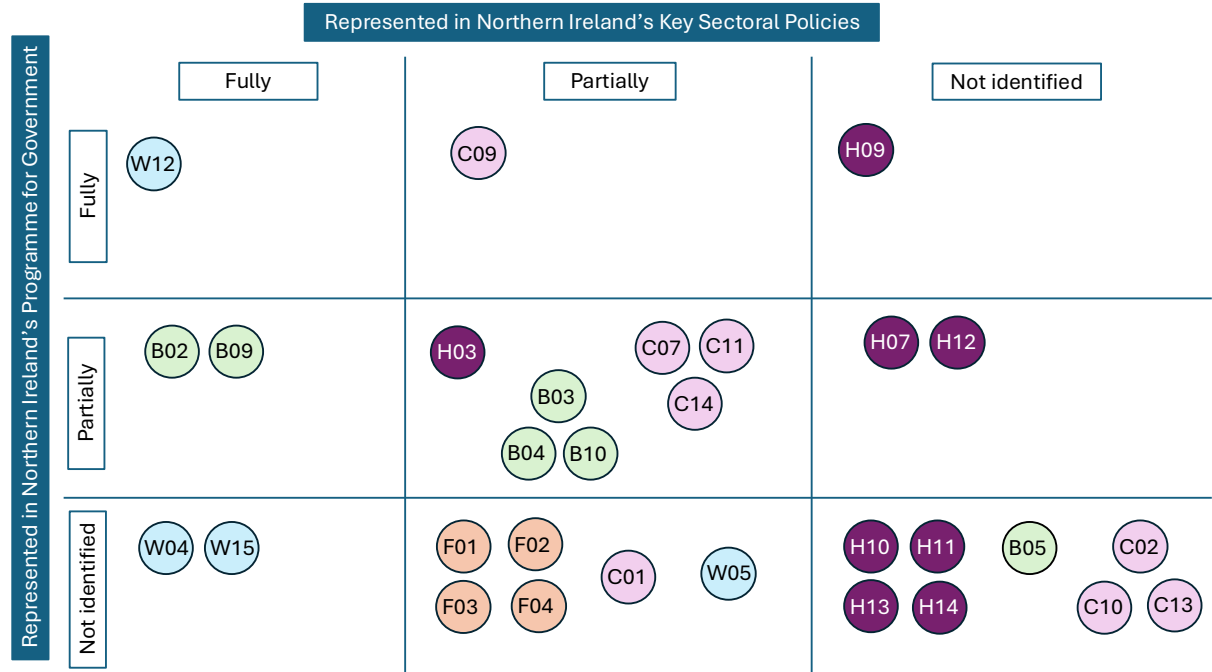
**Figure 2.** The proportion (0-1) of nexus response options which were “fully” addressed in UK and Devolved Government policies and strategies for each nexus category. Note that there are no UK-wide water policies.



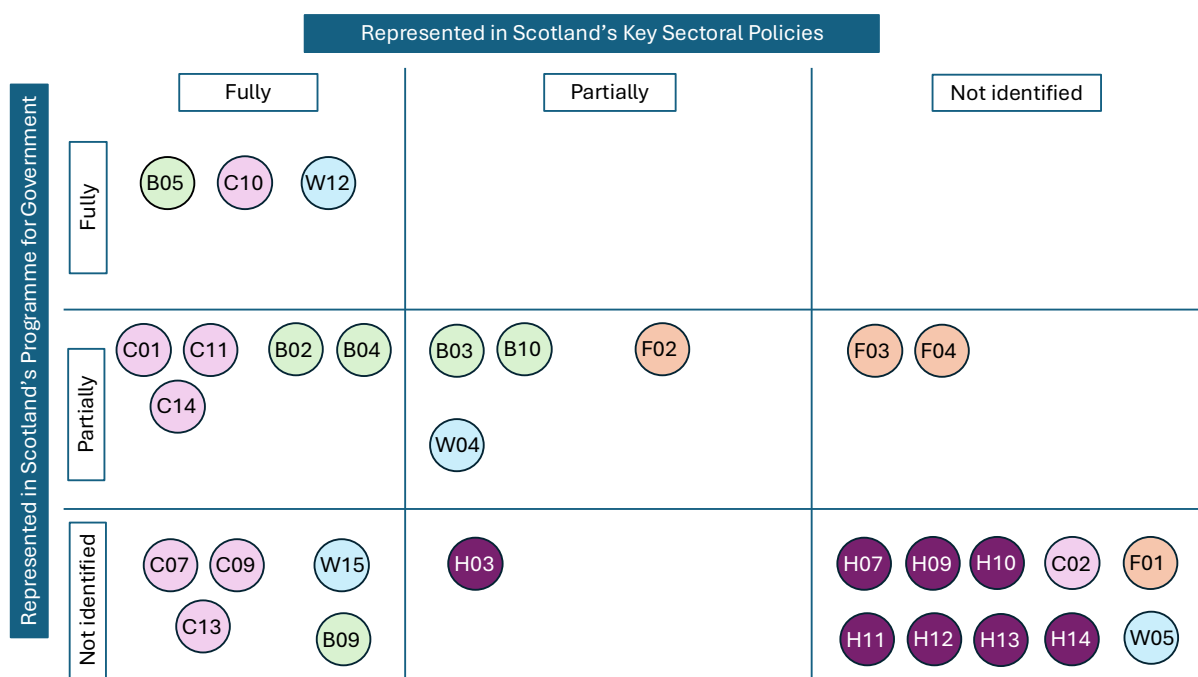
**Figure 3.** The proportion (0-1) of nexus response options which were “partially” addressed in UK and Devolved Government policies and strategies for each nexus category. Note that there are no UK-wide water policies.



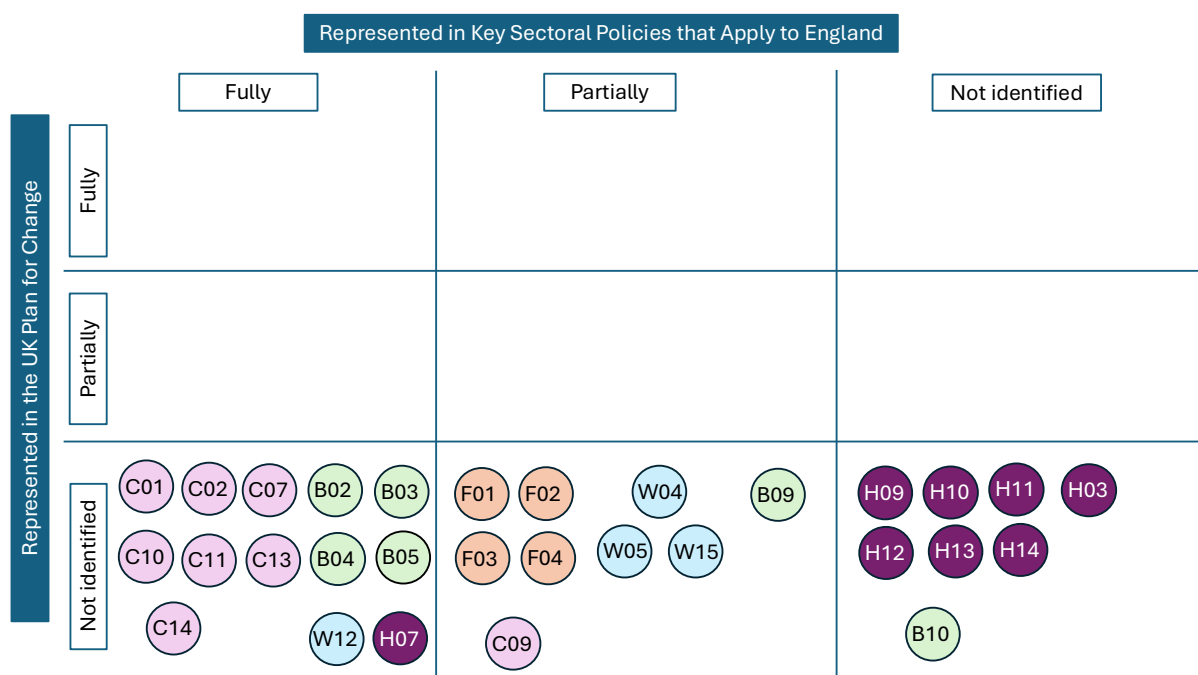
**Figure 4.** The proportion (0-1) of nexus response options which were “not identified” in UK and Devolved Government policies and strategies for each nexus category. Note that there are no UK-wide water policies.



**Figure 5.** How well the nexus response options are represented in Northern Ireland's key sectoral policies (columns) and Programme for Government (rows). Response option alpha-numeric codes relate to those used in the Nexus Assessment SPM (see Nexus SPM Figure 1).



**Figure 6.** How well the nexus response options are represented in Scotland's key sectoral policies (columns) and Programme for Government (rows). Response option alpha-numeric codes relate to those used in the Nexus Assessment SPM (see Nexus SPM Figure 1).



**Figure 7.** How well the nexus response options are represented in the key sectoral policies that apply to England (columns) and the UK Plan for Change (rows). Response option alpha-numeric codes relate to those used in the Nexus Assessment SPM (see Nexus SPM Figure 1). Note that Policies or strategies relevant only to England were used to provide an 'England-level' assessment (e.g. the Public Health England Strategy 2020-2025) and where there were no specific policies or strategies for England, the 'UK-level' assessment was also used as the 'England-level' assessment (e.g. for Climate: the Net Zero Strategy).

		Represented in Wales's Key Sectoral Policies		
		Fully	Partially	Not identified
Represented in Wales's Programme for Government	Fully	C13		B05
	Partially	B04 B09 C11 C14	H07 W12 C07 F03 F04 B02 B10	B03 W04
	Not identified	C01 C09 W15 C10	F01 H03 H13	H09 H10 H11 F02 C02 H12 H14 W05

**Figure 8.** How well the nexus response options are represented in Wales's key sectoral policies (columns) and Programme for Government (rows). Response option alpha-numeric codes relate to those used in the Nexus Assessment SPM (see Nexus SPM Figure 1).

		Represented in UK Key Sectoral Policies		
		Fully	Partially	Not identified
Represented in UK Plan for Change	Fully			
	Partially			
	Not identified	C01 C02 C07 C10 C11 C13 C14	H03 H07 C09 H11 H14 F01 F02 F03 F04 B02 B03 B04 B05 B09 B10	H09 H10 H12 H13

**Figure 9.** How well the nexus response options are represented in the UK's key sectoral policies (columns) and Plan for Change (rows). Response option alpha-numeric codes relate to those used in the Nexus Assessment SPM (see Nexus SPM Figure 1). Note that there are no UK-wide policies for water.

## 4. Discussion

Overall, most of the climate change response options were fully addressed in the climate policies for the UK, Scotland, and Wales (88% fully addressed for the UK/England and Scotland; 75% for Wales; 0 for Northern Ireland), and these could already be providing cross-sectoral benefits if they are being implemented according to a nexus governance approach. Most biodiversity response options were identified in the UK-wide and DG policies (100% identified for the UK and Scotland; 83% for England and Northern Ireland; 67% for Wales), though many were only partially addressed and are more likely to need further refinement to support the delivery of nexus-wide benefits. None of the food response options were fully addressed in any of the UK-wide and DG policies and strategies, but many were partially addressed (100% partially addressed for the UK, England and Northern Ireland; 75% for Wales; 25% for Scotland) and therefore could also be further strengthened to deliver nexus-wide benefits. The degree to which the water response options were addressed in the DG water policies varied, though most were either fully or partially addressed (100% identified for England and Northern Ireland; 75% for Scotland; 50% for Wales). On the other hand, most of the health response options were not identified in the UK-wide and DG policies and strategies (88% not identified for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland; 63% for Wales; 50% for the UK). Engagement with the departments responsible for developing and implementing health policies and strategies to promote relevant response options and a nexus governance approach could therefore be considered the highest priority.

Very few response options were fully addressed in the UK and DG Plans for Change; out of the 27 response options assessed, just three were fully addressed in both the 'Plan for Change' for Scotland and Northern Ireland, and two for Wales. Notably, no response options were identified in the UK Plan for Change. This suggests there is a need to better communicate the importance of the nexus response options to the delivery of multi-sectoral objectives and key government priorities to improve their uptake in overarching government policy. Some response options were partially addressed in the DG 'Plans for Change', particularly those related to biodiversity (100% either fully or partially addressed for Wales; 83% for both Scotland and Northern Ireland). Engaging with relevant departments to strengthen policies related to these response options so that they provide nexus-wide benefits will help to maximise the impacts of actions already being prioritised by the UK and DG governments.

Whilst there may be more specific sectoral policies that fully address some of the response options, the aim of this work was to assess if the response options were captured in the overarching UK and DG sectoral policies. These overarching sectoral policies are more likely to be utilised and promoted by different sectors, stakeholders and practitioners. Ensuring response options are reflected in these policies will improve their visibility and wide-scale implementation.

Due to variance in the detail and length of different strategies and policies, comparison between them is difficult. For example, the UK Plan for Change provides much less detail regarding actions than the Programme for Government for Wales. It is recommended that these results are not used to compare the differences between the DG's, but rather to support the UK and DG governments in the identification of potential policy gaps (Figures 4-8) and next steps related to the implementation of the nexus response options.

Some of the nexus response options also map to UK Reserved matters and could be considered less of a priority to implement at the DG level. For example, 'C10: Global Cooperation for Finance and Technology' relates to International Climate Finance, which is managed at a UK level. However, several of the DG's also have their own mechanisms to support this response option, which are important to recognise and promote.

It should be noted that some response options scored poorly in the initial scoring and selection process because of a lack of available evidence – for example, the Nexus Assessment outlines that there are evidence gaps around the impacts of ‘W06: Inclusive water management’ on food, water and climate (Figure 1). Moreover, whilst some response options can have negative impacts on a nexus element (e.g. ‘Rewilding’ and ‘Offshore wind power’), impacting their overall scoring, this does not necessarily suggest they should not be considered as viable options to pursue, but rather that careful planning and management will be required to mitigate potential negative impacts on nexus elements.

Response option descriptions and RAG-rating assessments (included in the accompanying Excel file) should be considered alongside the results to avoid misinterpretation. For example, the response option ‘C07: Sustainable bioeconomy’ focuses on the creation of an “economic model based on the use of renewable natural capital, including biological resources”, which could be interpreted as including solar, tidal and wind. However, these forms of renewable energy are not mentioned in the response option description and are largely covered by other response options (C05: offshore wind; C06: solar photovoltaics on land). Therefore, commitments related to solar, wind and tidal power were not considered in the analysis of C07.

Finally, whilst there may already be some evidence of nexus response options in UK policies, the [Nexus Assessment](#) also emphasises that scaling (‘up’, ‘out’, ‘down’ and ‘deep’) is required to accelerate their adoption, implementation and amplification. This analysis has largely looked at the ‘scaling up’ of response options: whether they are institutionalised in national policies. However, efforts also need to be made to ‘scale out’: implement response options in new places, ‘scale down’: localise adaptive response options, and ‘scale deep’: change relationships, and unsustainable and unjust world views, mindsets or beliefs that that indirectly drive biodiversity loss. Financial and economic policy reform is needed to support such actions; by shifting incentives, changing business models and promoting the redirection of resources towards biodiversity restoration through a just and equitable transition, this can support the achievement of related nexus-wide benefits.

## 5. Recommendations

Adopting a nexus governance approach to the development, implementation and management of actions related to the biodiversity, water, food, health and climate sectors will improve the ability to deliver cross-sectoral benefits and minimise negative trade-offs across the nexus elements. Specifically, this involves producing more holistic and transdisciplinary framings of problems and solutions, including more actors across multiple nexus interactions, emphasising explicit values such as equity and accountability, enabling policy alignment, collaboration and integration, and using more experimental, adaptive and reflexive approaches.

Based on how well the nexus response options are already addressed in UK and DG policies and strategies according to the results of this analysis, three overarching actions could support better implementation of the nexus response options in the UK:

- **Evaluate** the effectiveness of response options that are already fully addressed in UK and DG policies, strategies and 'Plans for Change'. Future activities should focus on determining whether these response options are being effectively implemented on the ground and delivering Nexus-wide benefits. Demonstrating how these response options can support the delivery of multiple government objectives will support their wider implementation and prioritisation.
- **Strengthen** response options that are only partially addressed in UK and DG policies, strategies and 'Plans for Change'. These response options scored 'partially' because some aspects of the response option that relate to the delivery of nexus-wide benefits were not identified. Strengthening these response options to fully incorporate all key aspects outlined in their Nexus Assessment description and ensuring they follow a nexus governance approach would help to maximise nexus-wide benefits across different sectors. This will require engaging with the government departments responsible for developing and delivering these response options and promoting more multi-sectoral collaboration.
- **Promote** response options that were not identified in UK and DG policies, strategies and 'Plans for Change'. Future activities should focus on identifying those with the greatest potential to deliver nexus-wide benefits in a UK context, then highlighting the potential cross-cutting benefits of these response options to relevant departments and promoting a 'nexus governance approach' to their development, implementation and management.



## 6. Potential next steps

This analysis provides an initial assessment of how well the Nexus Assessment response options are currently embedded in key UK-wide and DG policies and strategies, providing an important first step in the operationalisation of the Nexus Assessment in the UK. There are several potential next steps that could provide a better understanding of the state of play, as well as next steps required to improve cross-sectoral working and the delivery of nexus-wide benefits.

Potential next steps:

- Extending the analysis to include all nexus response options relevant to the UK.** This analysis has focussed on the response options likely to have the greatest impact across sectors to help prioritise limited resources. Other response options may also be relevant to consider in a UK context, including those identified to have negative effects on other nexus elements (see Figure 1) if mitigation strategies can be implemented.
- Identifying and engaging with relevant delivery departments to assess on-the-ground implementation of the response options in the UK.** This analysis has assessed the extent to which Nexus response options are incorporated within policy. An important next step will be to determine how effectively the response options are being implemented on the ground in line with a Nexus governance approach, and whether they are delivering nexus-wide benefits across sectors.
- Identifying and engaging with relevant policy departments to assess true policy gaps.** This analysis has focussed on the overarching sectoral policies/strategies related to the nexus response options. Whilst some response options may be missing from the overarching sectoral policies, they may exist within more specific sectoral policies, such as the Northern Ireland Blue Carbon Action Plan 2025 – 2030 or Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029. In cases where nexus response options are only addressed in specific sectoral policies, efforts could be made to highlight these within the overarching sectoral policies/strategies to address these gaps and promote their wider implementation. Nexus assessment response options that are not included in overarching or specific sectoral policies/strategies may be a priority for policy development.
- Updating the analysis to incorporate new or updated policies and strategies.** The overarching policies and strategies in this document are periodically updated, and new policies and strategies are continuously emerging. This analysis provides a snapshot of the current policy landscape (in July 2025) in relation to the nexus assessment response options. Repeating this analysis at some point in the future will allow progress to be assessed. The analysis could also be extended to capture more specific policies/strategies (as outlined above). However, highlighting specific sectoral policies/strategies related to the nexus response options within the overarching sectoral policies/strategies is likely more important to improve their visibility and widescale implementation.
- Promoting more coordinated policy development and implementation through cross-sectoral workshops.** Workshops at the UK and DG level could be used to discuss tangible actions to develop or strengthen policies and activities related to response option implementation in the UK, with the goal of achieving synergistic benefits across the biodiversity, food, water, health, and climate sectors. Policies that can deliver cross-cutting benefits could then be amplified in overarching government

policies, such as Scotland's Programme for Government, to ensure their widescale implementation.

- **Targeted communications strategies.** The results of this analysis suggest that the nexus response options related to water, food and, in particular, health, are poorly addressed in their related sectoral policies. Communications strategies could therefore be focused on engaging with, for example, health departments and the health sector, to raise awareness of the cross-cutting benefits of the response options and to promote their integration within health policies. This may be best achieved through engagement from influential actors, such as Senior Civil Servants in Defra, or pre-existing cross-White Hall groups, such as the Global One Health Collective. An important next step could therefore be to promote the results and recommendations of this work with influential actors in the biodiversity sector.

These potential next steps are not mutually exclusive, and it is likely that some combination of those related to developing a better understanding of the state of play and those related to improving cross-sectoral working are needed to advance the operationalisation of the Nexus assessment in the UK.