

Biodiversity Metric 3.1

Frequently Asked Questions

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Further information

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1. Principles and Process

Are there Good Practice Principles for Net Gain and how does the metric address these?

Natural England encourages metric assessors to adhere to the Biodiversity Net Gain [10 best practice principles](#) developed by CIRIA/CIEEM/IEEMA and British Standard for biodiversity net gain and development projects (BS 8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain), available through the British Standard Institution.

The metric tool also has a list of internal rules and principles, which are intended to guide and signpost the user through best practice and flag risks. These are found within Chapter 2 of the User Guide. The metric rules and principles must be followed when using the metric. Decision makers should be confident that all rules and principles of the metric are adhered to when determining the validity of submitted material.

How do I achieve a percentage gain target if my baseline is zero?

The baseline of a site is measured in Biodiversity Units.

If a site has a baseline of zero Biodiversity Units, advice should be sought from the relevant decision maker (e.g. Local Planning Authority) to agree on the appropriate number of target Biodiversity Units for that site. In this scenario any gains should be reported in Biodiversity Units.

Do you offer any sector or scenario specific guidance?

The metric has been designed for application across a wide range of scenarios. Natural England have compiled the following illustrative case studies, which demonstrate how the metric can be applied in different scenarios. *Note: These are not prescriptive. Application of metric may vary from project-to-project within a given sector, depending on the ecological circumstance.*

- Residential Development
- Port Development
- River Restoration
- Cabling for Offshore Wind Development

Natural England is currently working on further examples and will add these in due course.

2. Accessing the Metric Tool

Which Version of the Biodiversity Metric Should I Use?

You should use the most current published version of the Biodiversity Metric, unless specified otherwise by the consenting body.

If a project has already begun using a previous version of the Biodiversity Metric we do not recommend changing metrics mid-project, as this may result discrepancies between calculations.

What is the difference between the macro or macro-disabled biodiversity metric tool?

The macro enabled biodiversity metric calculation tool offers the most user-friendly experience.

- It has in-built navigation functions to offer a more streamlined process.
- Inserted pictures automatically format.
- The rows and columns of worksheets can be condensed to only show relevant information.
- Navigation tabs at the bottom of the page populate only when selected through the main menu by the user.

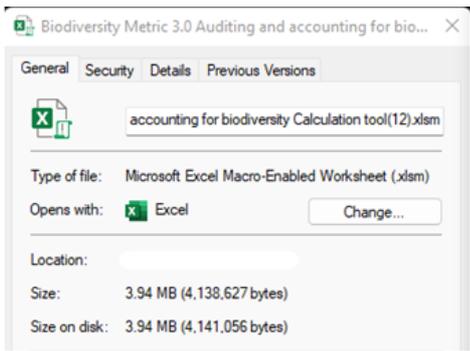
The metric is also available as a macro-disabled version, which can be used if your or your organisations I.T. settings / configurations do not allow for macro-enabled documents. The macro-disabled version does not support the above functionality.

The macro version of the tool is not working, how can I fix this?

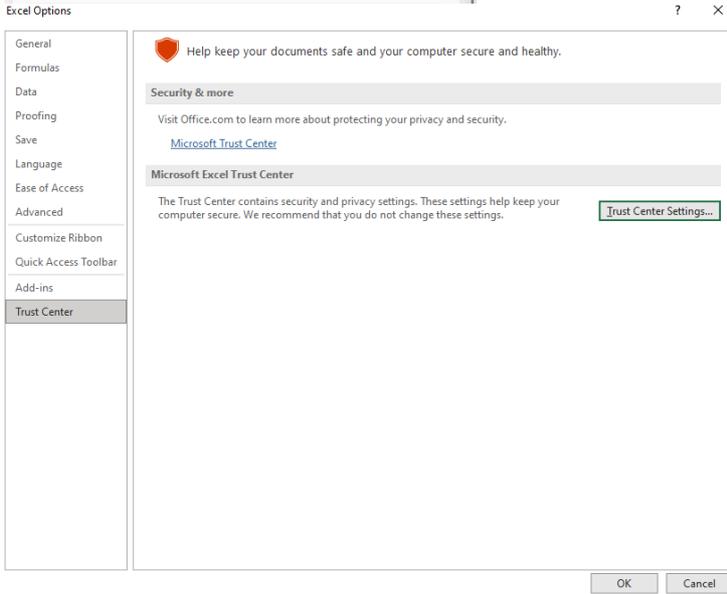
Some users have reported issues with the macro version of the biodiversity metric tool. Typically, this is due to local user system configurations, Microsoft Trust Centre settings and document permissions.

Although macros are disabled in the macro-disable version, a small percentage of users may encounter similar issues in the macro-disable version due to local security settings.

Natural England cannot provide specific advice on security settings, as local configurations may vary, however the navigation options to access these settings are provided below.



Document properties can be selected by right clicking the file in file explorer and selecting 'Properties' from the bottom of the dropdown menu.



Trust Centre Settings can be accessed through the Microsoft Excel Options page

(File, Options, Trust Center, Trust Center Settings).

Can I use the biodiversity metric tool on alternative software platforms?

The metric tool has been designed for use with Microsoft Excel. Natural England cannot guarantee proper function of the biodiversity metric tool with other software.

I am a user of assistive technology and cannot effectively use the biodiversity metric tool. Will this be resolved?

Natural England is currently exploring options on how best to present the metric tool to allow for equal access by all users.

3. Metric Rules and Multipliers

How do I resolve a trading rule violation?

The metric will flag when trading rules are violated. To achieve Biodiversity Net Gain all trading rules must be satisfied.

Check that the project is providing the correct type of habitats in sufficient enough areas to satisfy the trading requirements.

If trading rules cannot be resolved through on-site project changes or off-site mitigation then the relevant decision maker should be informed.

Who decides if a habitat / land is of strategic significance?

Strategic significance is determined by published local strategies and objectives.

Local authorities decide which habitats and lands to include, to account for local priorities when targeting biodiversity and nature improvement.

4. Recording Habitats

Can I use meters squared with the metric?

The Biodiversity Metric 3.1 uses hectares as the measure for area habitats. The Small Sites Metric uses meters squared.

There are 10,000 metres in a hectare. If you wanted to use the Biodiversity Metric 3.1 but were working in square metres, then you would simply divide by 10,000 to input the area figures in hectares.

Previous versions of the biodiversity metric tool only functioned correctly when users input data to two decimal places. This issue has since been resolved and users can now enter area data at a higher resolution.

When should I use the 'Fairly Good' or 'Fairly Poor' condition categories?

The 'Fairly Good' or 'Fairly Poor' condition categories are included to allow the competent assessor to use their professional judgement when they feel that the habitat feature includes ecological elements not captured in the standard condition assessment.

If, in considering these elements they conclude the habitat is of greater or lesser condition than would be recorded using the condition assessment criteria alone then these categories can be used. These categories cannot be used to beyond a single change step from the results of the standardised metric condition assessment for that habitat.

The assessor should always justify selection of these categories within the notes section of the metric calculation tool.

Should I record the habitat type underneath urban trees?

Yes. The habitat underneath the canopy of the urban tree should be recorded in addition to the tree itself.

Any ground level habitat should be recorded separately and requires a separate condition assessment.

The metric guidance specifies a ratio of 70:30 of developed land to vegetated gardens when providing post-development measurements for sites. Are roads counted within this split?

The 70:30 split of developed land to vegetated gardens does not include access roads, public streets or communal car parks. Habitats within such features should be recorded as separately within the metric.

Note that the 70:30 split is recommended for use where development plots are not detailed. Where possible the assessor should use detailed measurements to capture areas of vegetated gardens.

My development includes a green wall. How should I record the area for a green wall?

The area of a green wall is taken as the vegetated area of the wall face.

As this is a vertical feature, it cannot be mapped using the GIS tool, and should be input directly into the calculation tool.

Where ground based green walls are planted the area should be calculated based on the projected growth of the green wall over 30 years (or the lifespan of the development, whichever is shorter).

The soil conditions of my site are suitable to support high distinctiveness habitats. Is this a 'remnant habitat', can I apply the rules of Box 5-3 of the user guide?

Box 5-3 of the user guide explains that the restoration of 'remnant' high distinctiveness habitats may be counted as enhancement within the biodiversity metric tool.

Crucially, to be classified as 'remnant habitat' the baseline assessment must include evidence for the presence of remnant plant communities. The suitability of soil conditions alone would not be sufficient evidence that a remnant habitat is present.

5. Rivers and Streams

Why do canals only score medium for distinctiveness when rivers score high?

Canals do not meet the criteria for high (or above) distinctiveness habitat within the Biodiversity Metric as set out in Table 5-1 of the User Guide. This states that high distinctiveness habitats are defined as “*Priority Habitats as defined in Section 41 of the NERC Act requiring conservation action, e.g. lowland fens.*” or “*Remaining Priority Habitats not in very high distinctiveness band & other red list habitats*”.

Note the value of canals cannot be traded across Habitat Units or Linear Units. Therefore, the ‘medium’ distinctiveness of canals should only be considered relative to other habitats within the Rivers and streams module.

Why do tow paths not count as encroachment?

Canal tow paths are a defining feature of a functioning canal. These are exempt from the classification of encroachment to ensure that they do not contribute towards baseline encroachment factors.

The impact of the canal tow path is considered within the Modular River Survey methodology. The methodology assesses structural and vegetative variation to the riparian zone (including any sealed surface, e.g. tow paths).

Note that impacts to area habitats are assessed within the Habitat unit module.

Are farming practices (such as ploughing, spraying, any agricultural management) considered in the metric as riparian encroachment, and if so would they be minor/moderate/or major?

The impact of such practices is captured through the condition assessment of the river / stream which includes land within the riparian zone.

A post development secession of these practices should be sought within a 10m protective buffer from the bank top. This could enhance the condition of riparian habitats, resulting in potential biodiversity unit gains.

A river / stream runs adjacent to my site but is outside of the project boundary. Do I need to assess the watercourse, even though the stream runs outside of my project boundary?

The riparian zone is considered a functional element of the river / stream.

If the riparian zone (measured 10m from the bank top) is within your project boundary then you should include the watercourse in your baseline assessment.

6. Rewilding

Can a rewilding project be used to provide biodiversity units for a biodiversity net gain project?

Yes. Rewilding practices can be used to generate biodiversity units (as measured using the metric).

Because of the nature of rewilding approaches it is recommended that a precautionary approach to the use of the metric is adopted.

I'm rewilding and my hedgerows will be left unmanaged to transition to scrub. Metric rules state that you cannot trade between area and linear habitat types. How should I account for the loss of the hedgerow feature within the metric?

Where natural succession would result in scrub growing directly adjacent to established hedgerows, the following approach should be applied:

- Any hedgerow recorded in the baseline tabs (and retained through the proposals) should continue to be mapped and treated as a hedgerow in the post development tab.
- Any scrub beyond the minimum 1.5m width required for a hedge to be in 'Good' condition (Criteria A2, Table TS1-4 of the Technical Supplement) should be counted towards Area Habitat Biodiversity Units.

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