

THE IMPACT OF SWEEP

How placing nature at the heart of business decision-making delivered commercial and environmental benefits, to South West England and beyond.

The natural environment and the economy are two complex systems whose fate is bound together. Yet they have long been placed in opposition to each other.

Working closely with businesses, the South West Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity – SWEEP – used multi-disciplinary research, expertise and evidence to create new sustainable products and services, guide decision-making and upskill employees. This resulted in new revenue and profit streams, cost savings and improvements in business efficiency and organisational capacity, as well as environmental gains.

Three principles underpinned SWEEP's collaborations with business.

1. Partnership working: projects were co-designed with highly engaged, forward thinking businesses.

2. Specialist impact teams: connected academic experts and business to co-create and accelerate the translation and development of knowledge.

3. Impact advisory panel: programme strategy and delivery were guided by a business-led advisory panel, ensuring research activities responded to current business needs.

“
SWEEP's input has been a real game changer. I am now thinking more strategically about new product ideas and communicating more confidently about how my business helps boost biodiversity and deliver health and wellbeing benefits.”

Matt O'Connell, Managing Director, Sylvawood Agriculture Ltd.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

£25M

Cost savings to business and public purse

£115M

Partner investments influenced or informed

2,464

People trained in the use of SWEEP tools

£78M

Funding leveraged

£35M

GVA and 327 FTE jobs supported by leveraged funding (to 2028)

1 SWEEP outputs **informed or influenced 178 business cases, strategies and investments** of a range of organisations in the South West and beyond, from large companies like South West Water to small businesses like visitor attraction The Lost Gardens of Heligan.

2 Analysis **helped to identify a new aquaculture investment zone in North Devon** that could support the seaweed, scallop and mussel farming sectors, generating a potential £280m each year and creating 4,025 jobs.

3 SWEEP's 'whole catchment' approach to water management for South West Water **helped secure £15m in new funding** from water regulator Ofwat, is helping to **reduce the company's operation costs** whilst also delivering improvements in biodiversity and water quality, and secured its business plan all-important 'fast-track' status, worth £200m.

4 The SWEEP pollinator team worked with Sylvawood Seeds to optimise the biodiversity gains of its wildflower seed mixes. The diversification of the company's product offering resulted in **new partnership deals** with the RSPB and the National Trust, and a **38% increase in forecast revenue**.

5 SWEEP's Operational Wave and Water Level model, which generates site-specific coastal hazard forecasts, has helped Bombora Wave Power **prevent wave damage to its state-of-the-art £20m Wave Energy Converter machine**. The SWEEP forecasts allow Bombora to plan experiments on its machine in advance, and react more quickly when they need to shut it down in high seas.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES

- SWEEP demonstrated how researchers from across the range of environmental sciences can partner with business, to benefit both business activity and nature.
- Specialist, well-resourced impact teams act as a bridge between academic researchers and commercial partners, resulting in more efficient, outcome-driven collaboration.
- Impact-focused collaboration developing robust evidence bases, can strengthen investment cases, leverage innovation funding, and help businesses to pursue new approaches.

WORK WITH US

To access our freely available tools and resources, and case studies of how our research delivered business benefits, read our [impact summary report](#) and visit the SWEEP website: www.sweep.ac.uk

Businesses interested in collaborating with our researchers can contact us at sweep@exeter.ac.uk



University of Exeter



UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH



Plymouth Marine Laboratory



Natural Environment Research Council

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