

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Business Perspective



The commercial relevance of the natural environment may not be immediately apparent to the average business, but business impacts can be extensive and wide-ranging. Many products and materials used by businesses cause environmental damage, although this is often experienced in a remote region. For example, the rare earth and other metals contained in the technology products that drive our information economy have to be mined, with potentially disastrous impacts on the natural landscape and ecosystem. This can both displace indigenous people, causing unwanted social impacts, and damage habitats, putting species at risk of extinction. These effects may seem remote and irrelevant, but consumers are becoming concerned about the ethical choices of brands and increasingly less willing to buy products associated with environmental or social harm further up their supply chain.

Campaigns like Friends of the Earth's 'Make it Better' help to bring supply chain impacts to the attention of both consumers and manufacturers. By being mindful of these "hidden" impacts, and taking concrete steps to reduce them, businesses can demonstrate high ethical standards and build trust which assists with customer retention and creates new business opportunities.

Closer to home, the UK already has effective legislation to prohibit the pollution of land, air or waterways and compliance represents the absolute minimum requirement. For businesses that wish to do "more good" rather than "less bad", protecting the natural environment and promoting biodiversity in and around commercial premises can improve working conditions and staff morale. It also demonstrates good corporate responsibility, which carries a reputational benefit. Landscaping can help with energy efficiency, for example by using vegetation screens to protect against solar gain through south-facing windows and thereby reduce the need for mechanical cooling. Environmental clean-up events are a popular staff volunteering activity and adopting a local green space can be a valuable way of creating a positive relationship with domestic neighbours.