NERC Environmental Sustainability Report

2024-25

Natural Environment Research Council

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Foreword

2025 marks 60 years of the formation of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). Throughout 2024-25, we have continued to demonstrate leadership in environmental sustainability through the delivery of our Carbon Pathway Programme and Environmental Action Plan. There has been significant progress across our wide-ranging environmental responsibilities over this period.

To improve transparency and highlight our commitment to environmental responsibility, I am delighted to introduce NERC's first external sustainability report. This report presents our ambition for environmental sustainability and how it is being translated into actions across our organisation and Centres. Tangible projects include renewable energy deployment in both the UK and Antarctic estates, low carbon fuel trials on our ships and aircraft, digital tools being developed to assess carbon impacts, and sustainability management plans applied to Antarctic infrastructure.

We have refreshed and published the NERC Responsible Business Statement and the NERC Estates Strategy. In addition, guided by the new UKRI Sustainability Strategy, future NERC Nature Recovery Plan and updated Greening Government Commitments, we will frame our collective efforts to improve the environmental sustainability performance.

This report highlights our achievements in 2024-25 and sets out the roadmap for further improvements in the coming future. I look forward to another year of continuous environmental sustainability enhancements, aligning how we operate with the research and innovation we fund.

Jennifer Jamieson Ball

Director of Major Programmes and Estates

Natural Environment Research Council

Executive Summary

As part of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is embedding environmental sustainability across our business operations. This responsibility lies with the NERC Major Programmes Directorate, and the Sustainability Team is delivering the commitment in collaboration with our directly-funded Centres and external partners. We are taking actions in line with the four themes of the environmental responsibility set out in the NERC Responsible Business Statement, including carbon management, resource use, physical environment, and natural environment.

In this context, we publish our first NERC Environmental Sustainability Report for the fiscal year 2024-25. This report summarises our compliance with the Greening Government Commitments (GGCs) and the delivery against the four responsible business themes.

In 2024-25, we fully achieved 24 out of 28 GGCs targets. In terms of carbon emissions, we continued to deliver our Carbon Pathway Programme and reduced our global carbon footprint through the deployment of solar power, trial of low carbon fuels, estate decarbonisation, and optimised travel planning for research activities. We created 41,027 tCO_2e of global carbon emissions, compared to the baseline in 2017-18, which was a 19.1% reduction. This will support our roadmap to achieve the UKRI target to reach net zero operational carbon emissions.

We continue to improve resource efficiency. We recycled 79.0% of overall waste and delivered only 0.8% of total waste to landfill sites, meeting the requirements of GGCs. We are implementing the UKRI Responsible Procurement Charter, including the purchase of sustainable products and the reduction in the consumption of water and paper.

Climate resilience is a key priority across our estates in the UK and Antarctica. We have developed plans and conducted risk assessments for the estates to adapt to climate change.

In addition, we work with our Centres to operate UK estates and preserve their biodiversity. In 2024-25, we initiated a project to undertake biodiversity baseline assessments and develop nature recovery plans for our eight main sites. This work will be completed by the end of 2025, which is expected to improve biodiversity conservation and ensure biodiversity net gain across these estates.

Lastly, we have built frameworks in varied formats to engage with stakeholders to drive sustainability actions. Our partners have contributed to knowledge sharing, policy making, and cultural change through diverse activities such as workshops, webinars, and public showcases.

The next financial year will see a new round of five-year GGCs targets and the implementation of a new UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy. We look forward to working with our network of stakeholders to continuously improve our environmental sustainability performance over this strategic period.

1. Introduction

This environmental sustainability report presents the progress of NERC in 2024-25 against the three-level hierarchy of sustainability targets (Fig. 1). At the national level, the GGCs 2021 to 2025 provide guidance and targets for all public organisations to reduce their environmental impacts through seven key actions. At the UKRI level, the UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy focuses on six priority areas to attain environmental sustainability goals, including carbon and resource efficiency.

At the council level, the NERC Responsible Business Statement, the NERC Environmental Policy, and the NERC Environmental Action Plan play a key role in guiding sustainable development, environmental management, and climate action. There are four pillars supporting our environmental responsibility, including carbon management, resource use, physical environment, and natural environment.

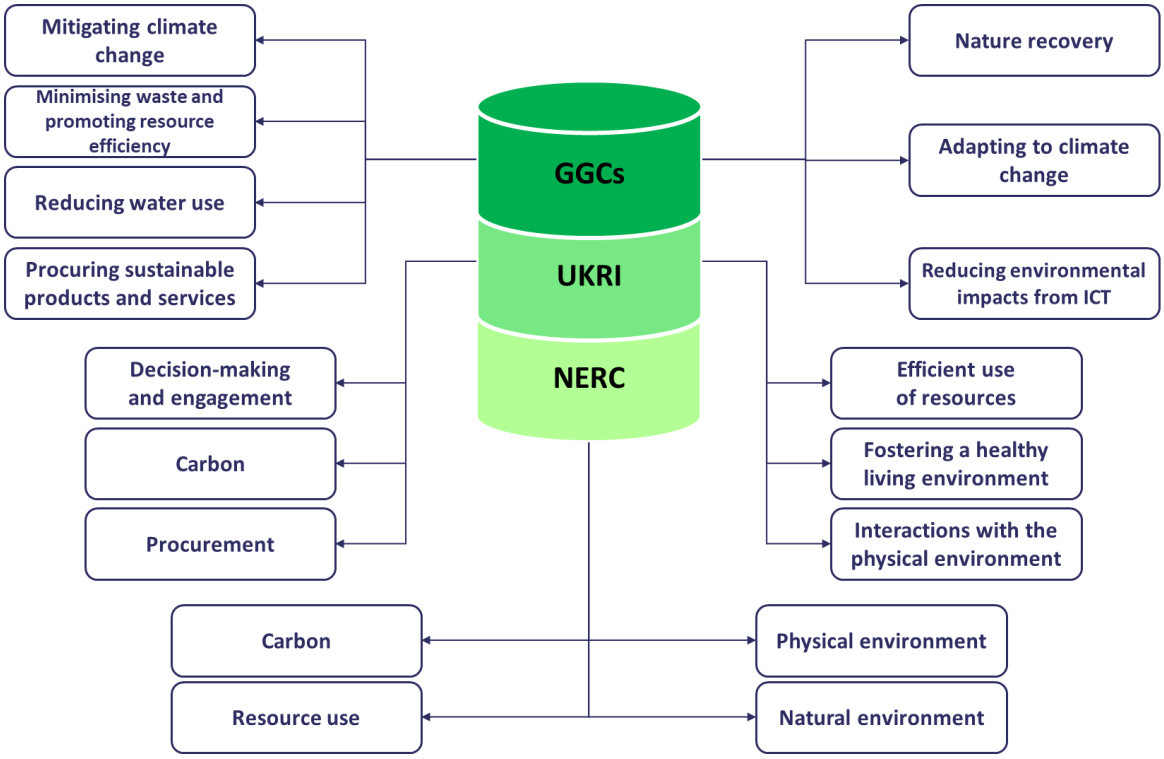


Fig. 1. Three-level hierarchy of sustainability targets

NERC worked alongside the UKRI Environmental Sustainability Programme Team, directly-funded Centres, and external partners to drive forward sustainability actions in 2024-25. To assess our performance, data has been collected across the NERC Head Office (HO), the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), and the British Geological Survey (BGS). Additionally, the data from the ships operated by the National Oceanography Centre (NOC), and the aircraft operated by the National Centre for Atmospheric Science (NCAS) is also included as it is within the reporting boundary of our Carbon Pathway Programme and has significant impacts on the environment.

This report reviews our sustainability performance in 2024-25, against 2017-18 as the baseline year. It is noteworthy that the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) and NOC were parts of NERC in 2017-18, so their carbon emissions and resource use were counted in the baseline but excluded from 2019-20. In terms of the GGCs, only the UK operations are reported, including carbon, domestic business travel, and resource use. For transparency, the global operations of our ships, aircraft, and Antarctic estates are included to analyse our environmental footprints within this report.

The report highlights our progress against GGCs, ISO 14001 on environmental management, Carbon Trust's Route to Net Zero Standard, and the environmental pillar of the NERC Responsible Business Statement. It is structured in four major sections to align with the four environmental themes. It will be renewed after each fiscal year to review our environmental sustainability performance and facilitate further action plans.


SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

2. Carbon Management

2.1 Carbon reporting

We follow the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol to report our carbon footprint across three scopes on a global scale (Fig. 2). This approach ensures that we are aware of our wide range of impacts to deliver the Carbon Pathway Programme and reach the net zero target. This reporting scope is broader than the data submitted to UKRI and GGCs, as we are required to report only our UK-based carbon emissions, excluding data such as ships and aircraft.

In addition, we are improving our carbon reporting through Carbon Trust's Route to Net Zero Standard. We have also been working to understand our wider Scope 3 emissions, such as those from funded science and capital investments.

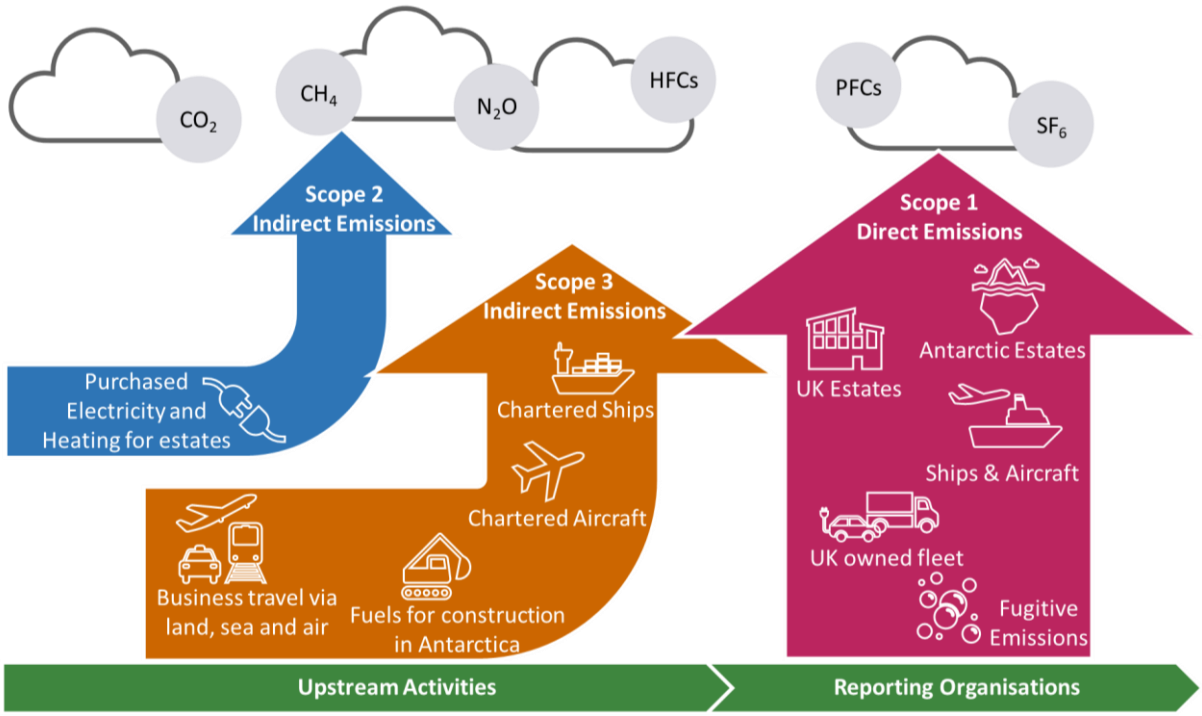


Fig. 2. Three scopes of data reporting on global carbon emissions

Route to Net Zero Standard. Credit: Carbon Trust

2.2 Compliance with GGCs

The GGCs set out seven targets for climate change mitigation and net zero carbon. We used the Red/Amber/Green rating scale to assess our progress against these goals (Table 1).

In 2024-25, we fully achieved all the targets, which highlighted a fruitful delivery of our Carbon Pathway Programme and joint efforts with our Centres. In terms of GHG reduction, we made huge reductions in our UK-based emissions, which exceeded the GGCs targets. We also operated more Ultra-Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) than the GGCs required. In addition, we aligned with the UKRI travel policy to report business travel and cut emissions from the activity.

Table 1. Assessment of NERC's performance in climate action in compliance with GGCs

Category	GGCs 2021-2025	Progress in 2024-25	Assessment
GHG reduction	Reduce the overall GHG emissions by 62% from a 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 64.8% reduction compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
	Reduce direct GHG emissions from estate and operations by 30% from a 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 72.6% reduction at UK estates compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
Fleet	25% of fleet to be ultra-low emission vehicles by 2022	55.6% of the fleet was ULEV	Fully Achieved
Business travel	Reduce the emissions from domestic business flights by at least 30% from a 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 37.1% reduction compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
	Report the distance of international business flights	Reported the distance of all types of business flights	Fully Achieved
GHG removal	Report on the implementation of policies to compensate for emissions	UKRI does not purchase carbon offsets in line with the UKRI Position Statement on Carbon Offsetting	Fully Achieved
Travel policy	Update travel policies to consider lower carbon options first in each planned flight	Aligned with the UKRI travel policy and applied a travel hierarchy	Fully Achieved

2.3 Carbon emissions in 2024-25

We reported 41,027 tCO_2e of global emissions in 2024-25, making a 19.1% reduction from 50,697 tCO_2e in the baseline year (Fig. 3). After a considerable drop during the pandemic, carbon emissions have experienced fluctuation in recent years because of the resumed research activities and mitigation projects.

In line with the reporting method agreed across UKRI, we report our global carbon emissions by means of without Radiative Forcing (RF) and location based. This approach applies a national average electricity grid emission factor to calculate the average carbon intensity. It focuses only on GHGs without considering other factors such as aerosols and water vapour, which also cause climate impact. For transparency, we report the emissions on other bases, which present slight differences. We also applied the Well-to-Tank (WTT) approach to report emissions in the upstream supply chain of fuels for business travel (Table 2).

In addition, we undertook trials of low carbon fuels in 2024-25, including Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) on ships and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) on aircraft. The direct carbon impact of burning these low carbon fuels was 4,303 tCO_2e. These fuels are produced from biomass (such as animal fat) that absorbs an equivalent amount of carbon from the atmosphere during its growth. Hence, the emission through the

combustion is considered zero, which is reported separately as memo data for transparency and considered outside of the three reporting scopes.

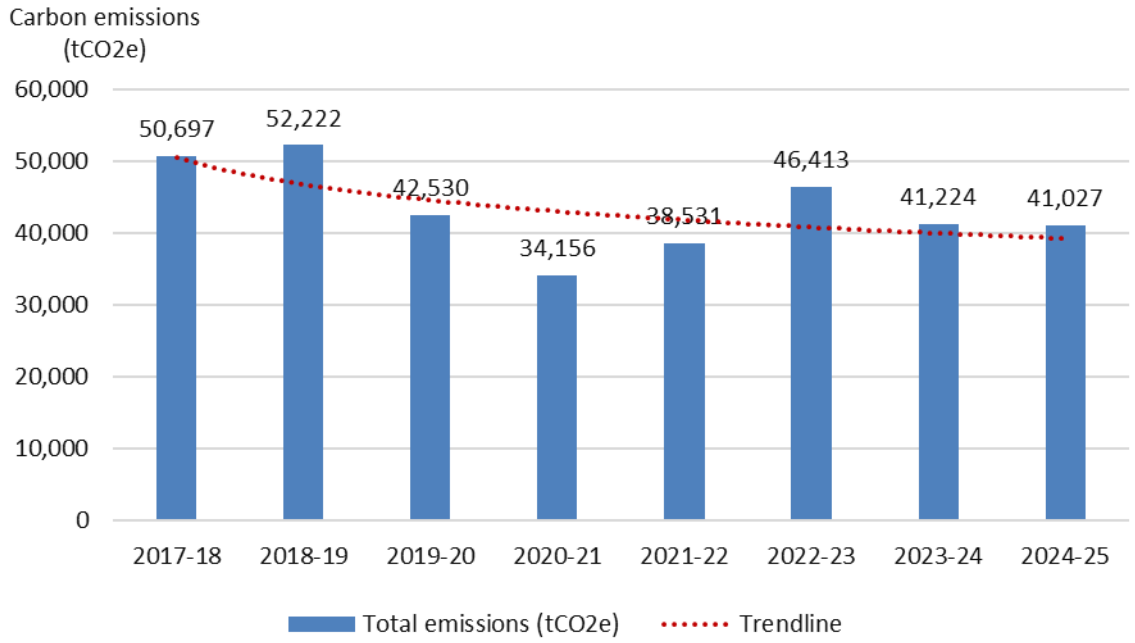


Fig. 3. Yearly carbon emissions (tCO_2e) from 2017-18 to 2024-25

Table 2. Comparison of carbon emissions (tCO_2e) by varied reporting means in 2024-25

Without RF, Location Based	Without RF, with WTT Location Based	With RF, Location Based	Without RF, Market Based	With RF, Market Based
41,027	41,586	42,685	39,909	41,567

Carbon by scopes. In 2024-25, Scope 1 emissions were 35,922.65 tCO_2e, sharing 87.6% of our global carbon footprint (Fig. 4). This included all the direct emissions from estates and operations on a global scale. We made a 20.4% reduction in Scope 1 emissions, mitigating from 45,133.86 tCO_2e in the baseline year. This was mainly achieved through the decarbonisation of ships and aircraft. Thanks to the installation of solar power on the estate and the improvement of energy efficiency, we made a 53.1% reduction in Scope 2 emissions. However, Scope 3 emissions rose from 2,897.24 tCO_2e to 3,878.95 tCO_2e, which was largely due to Antarctic construction projects, chartered ships, and chartered aircraft.

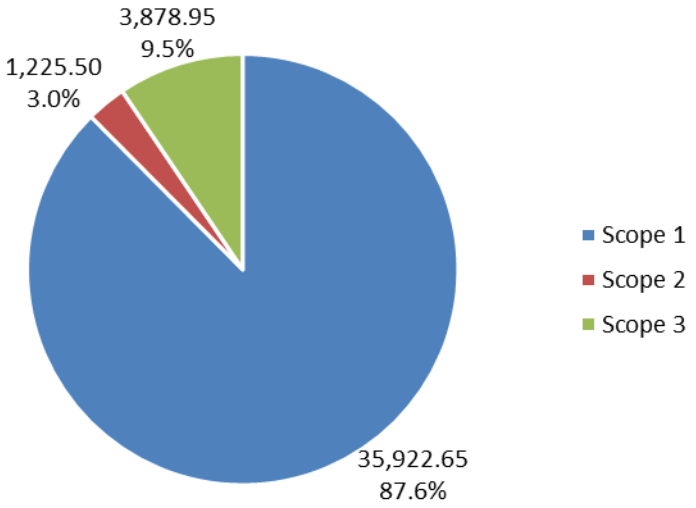


Fig. 4. Carbon emissions (tCO_2e) by scopes in 2024-25

Carbon by sources. We fund ships to carry out research around the world oceans and Antarctica. This consists of three Royal Research Ships (RRSs), including RRS Sir David Attenborough (SDA), RRS James Cook, and RRS Discovery, as well as chartered ships. Ships have been the major source of our global carbon emissions from 2017-18, contributing to 72.8% of the total carbon footprints in 2024-25 (Fig. 5).

Marine Gas Oil (MGO) is the major fuel used on ships. Since 2023-24, HVO has been trialled on three RRSs to reduce the consumption of MGO (Fig. 6). In 2024-25, HVO shared 14.0% of all fuel consumption, contributing to carbon reduction from ships. Likewise, SAF has been used on the Facility for Airborne Atmospheric Measurements (FAAM) aircraft since 2022-23 (Fig. 7). In 2024-25, SAF shared 17.4% of all fuel consumed by the FAAM aircraft, playing a significant role in its carbon mitigation.

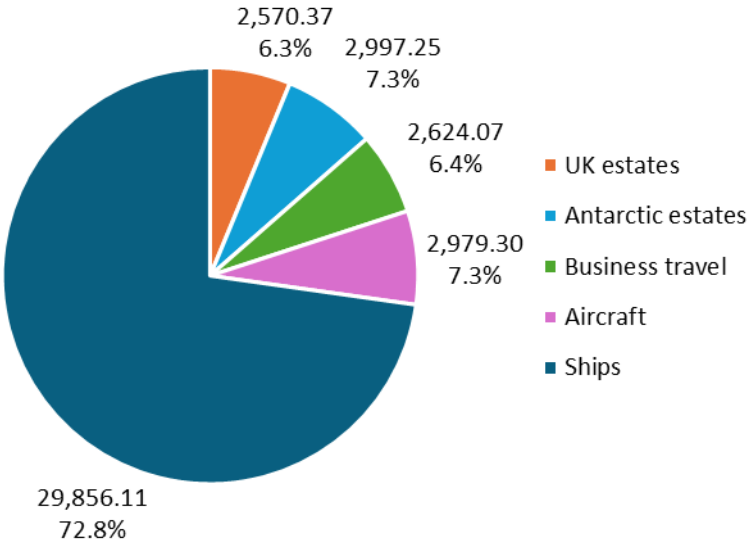


Fig. 5. Carbon emissions (tCO_2e) by sources in 2024-25

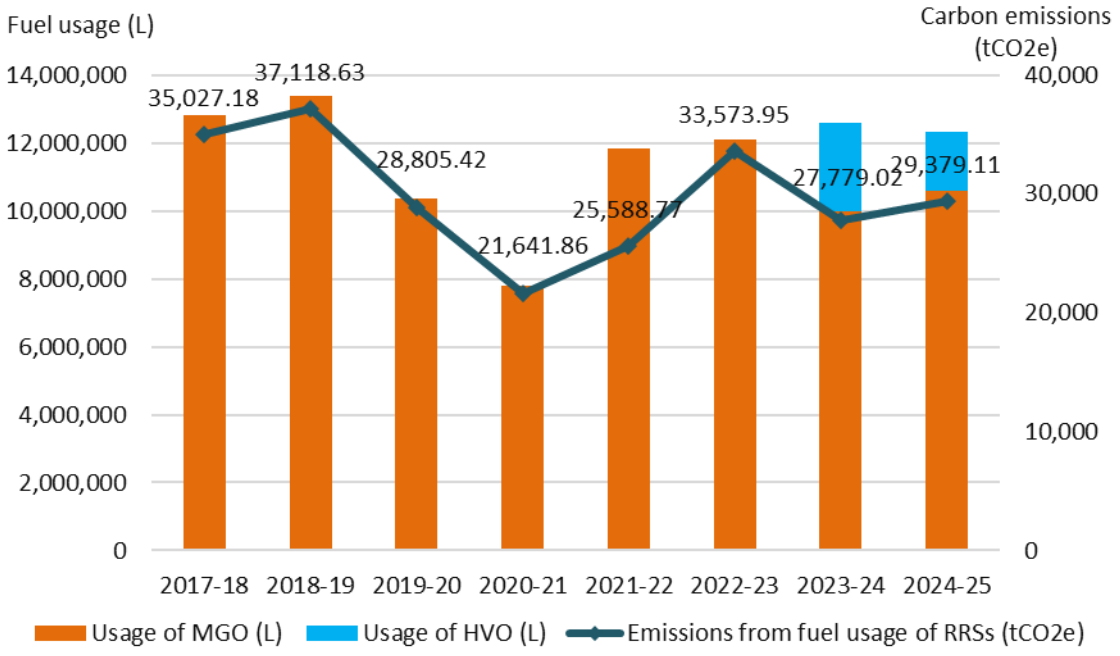


Fig. 6. Yearly fuel usage (L) and carbon emissions (tCO_2e) of RRSs from 2017-18 to 2024-25

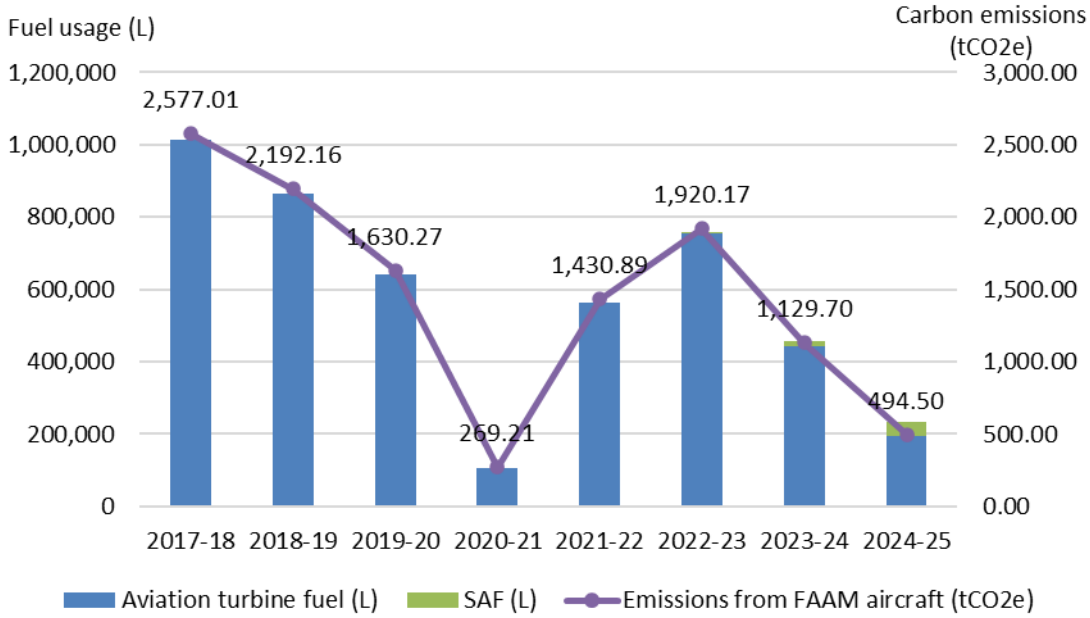


Fig. 7. Yearly fuel usage (L) and carbon emissions (tCO_2e) of FAAM aircraft from 2017-18 to 2024-25

Carbon by organisational units. In 2024-25, BAS and NOC contributed the most to our carbon footprints across five organisational units as a result of research ship operations (Fig. 8).

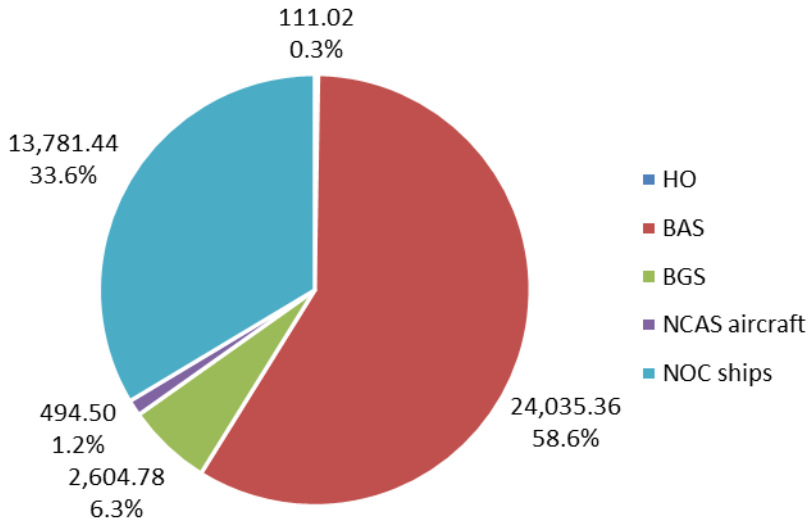


Fig. 8. Carbon emissions (tCO_2e) from organisational units in 2024-25

2.4 Roadmap towards net zero

UKRI and NERC have committed to net zero emissions against the 2017-18 baseline. Historically, NERC also adopted two ambitious science-aligned targets, to cut carbon emissions by 40% by 2024-25 and 70% by 2034-35 compared to the baseline year. We made carbon reduction by 19.1% in 2024-25 (Fig. 9), which did not meet the first interim target. This progress was reviewed in late 2024 to support the development of future carbon mitigation plans in line with new GGCs and UKRI strategies.

Carbon reduction has been realised mainly through marine decarbonisation as ships are the key source of our global carbon emissions. Compared to the baseline, the emissions of ships were cut by 5,290.94 tCO_2e by 2024-25, reduced by 15.1%, and accounted for 54.7% of all the reduction. However, there are many uncertainties and challenges in the carbon reduction of the ship sector. We are exploring diverse approaches through our Future Marine Research Infrastructure programme, including drones, autonomous underwater vehicles, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), to facilitate science in innovative low-carbon ways that could previously only be delivered by ships alone.

In addition, there has been notable decarbonisation across the UK estates and aircraft, which cut carbon emissions by 52.7% and 37.7% respectively. Across the UK estates, projects including solar power and electrification have contributed to the reduction. Regarding aircraft, retrofitting, low carbon fuel, route planning and drones have all helped to cut carbon emissions. In comparison, Antarctic estates are the only operational area recording a rise in carbon emissions, growing by 11.6%. This resulted from the construction activities of the Antarctic Infrastructure Modernisation Programme (AIMP).

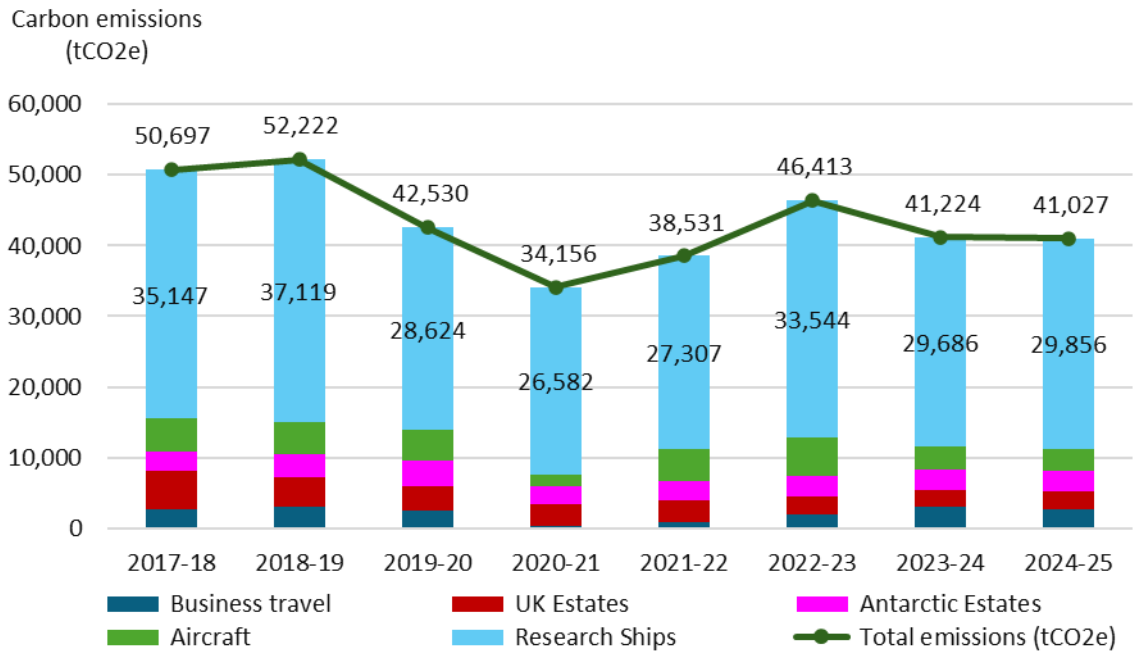


Fig. 9. Yearly carbon emissions (tCO_2e) by sources from 2017-18 to 2024-25

2.5 Business travel

In 2024-25, we created 2,624.07 tCO_2e of carbon emissions through business travel globally. Compared to the baseline, this was only a 1.1% reduction. Consequently, we missed the target to reduce our emissions from business travel by at least 25% by 2024-25 as set out by the NERC Environmental Policy.

Flights are the major source of carbon emissions from business travel since the baseline year, accounting for 91.0% of the total in 2024-25 (Fig. 10). Flights can be further divided into four categories (Fig. 11). Long Haul International and International (non-UK) flights are the major sources of the total emissions. BAS and BGS are the key contributors as their scientists travel globally to conduct research and attend conferences.

In 2024-25, we generated 22.12 tCO_2e emissions through domestic flights, a 17.3% growth compared to 18.87 tCO_2e in the baseline year. We have been making joint efforts with BAS and BGS to review business travel and reduce carbon emissions. There is clear guidance supporting the staff to apply for approval before booking flights, and a travel hierarchy has been adopted across UKRI to prioritise virtual attendance and reduce flights, especially domestic flights.

The GHG Protocol requires that organisations use life cycle emission factors to calculate scope 3 emissions related to fuels consumed in the organisations' value chain. In terms of business travel, the WTT approach is used to report emissions in the upstream supply chain of fuels. In 2024-25, NERC reported 2624.07 tCO_2e emissions from all business travel, and the WTT emissions were 559.13 tCO_2e.

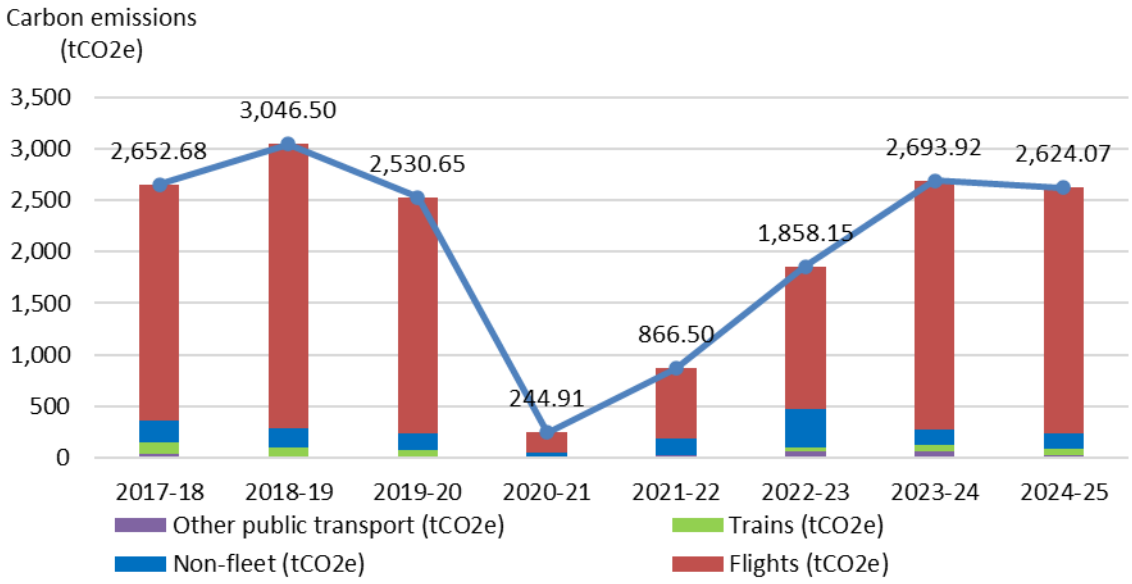


Fig. 10. Carbon emissions (tCO_2e) from business travel from 2017-18 to 2024-25

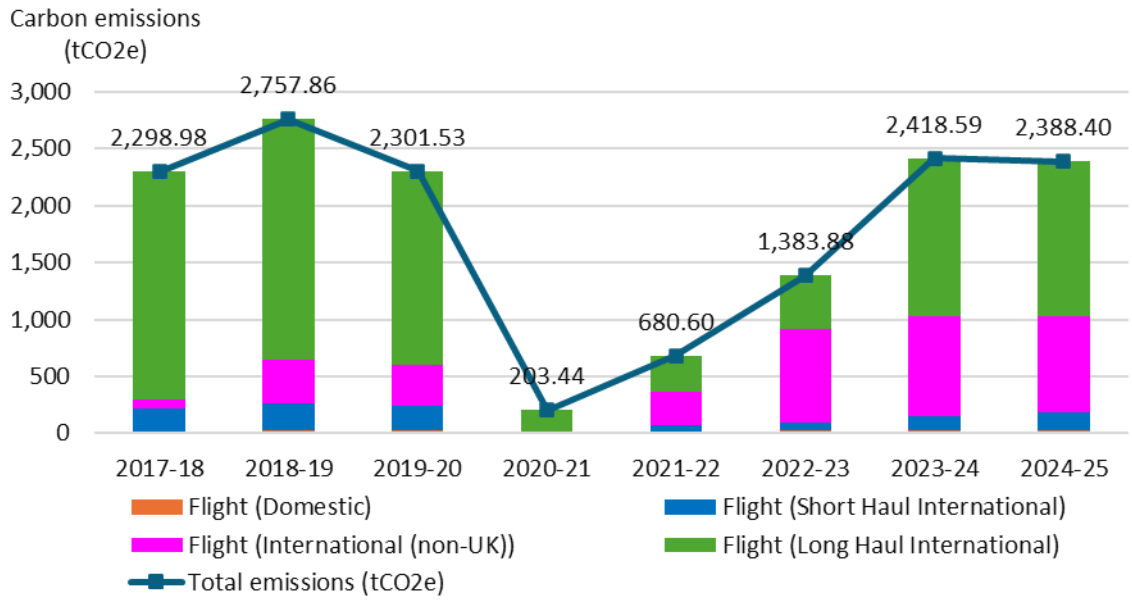


Fig. 11. Carbon emissions (tCO_2e) from flights from 2017-18 to 2024-25

2.6 Key projects of carbon reduction

In 2024-25, we worked alongside our Centres to carry out diverse projects to drive forward carbon reductions. Some highlights of the year are introduced below:

Trials of HVO and SAF. We collaborated with BAS, NOC, and NCAS to deliver trials of HVO on ships and SAF on aircraft. In 2024-25, HVO contributed about 14.0% of total fuel consumption in three RRSs, and SAF shared about 17.4% of total fuel usage on FAAM aircraft. This greatly contributed to the carbon reduction in these sectors.

Carbon Advisory Framework. We initiated a Carbon Advisory Framework to assess the carbon impacts generated by our science and capital investments. This project will help us consider our potential carbon footprints and reduction measures during the decision-making of funding.

Climate for Change. We continued with the Climate for Change programme to drive cultural change and embed climate concerns into future policymaking. The Sustainability Team worked with five champions, recruited from various teams within NERC, by exchanging thoughts on our sustainability actions through webinars. BAS launched its Climate for Change project in 2024-25 to drive cultural change and reduce energy demand.

Renewable energy at BAS. BAS completed the installation of a new solar electricity and energy storage system at the Bird Island Research Station in South Georgia. It was commissioned in January 2025 and is expected to reduce emissions associated with the station by 50%.

Carbon metrics. BAS developed carbon metrics to forecast emissions of science and infrastructure projects.

Renewable energy at BGS. BGS succeeded in the installation of ground-source heat pumps at its headquarters in Keyworth. This is now in trial and will provide heating and hot water for two buildings, which will reduce the consumption of natural gas.

Solar panels at Bird Island research station
Credit: BAS

Geothermal heat pump at BGS Keyworth
Credit: BGS

NCAS FAAM aircraft funded by NERC
Credit: NCAS

Trial of HVO on RRS SDA
Credit: BAS


CARDBOARD
PLASTIC

3. Resource Use

3.1 Compliance with GGCs

GGCs set out targets in terms of waste, plastic, paper, water, procurement, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). We fully achieved 13 goals out of 14 (Table 3). We will work alongside our Centres to make further progress in reducing plastic.

Table 3. Assessment of NERC's performance in resource use in compliance with GGCs

Category	GGCs 2021-2025	Progress in 2024-25	Assessment
Waste	Reduce the overall amount of waste generated by 15% from the 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 57.3% reduction compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
	Reduce the amount of waste going to landfill to less than 5% of overall waste.	0.8% of overall waste was landfilled in 2024-25	Fully Achieved
	Increase the proportion of waste which is recycled to at least 70% of overall waste.	79.0% of overall waste was recycled in 2024-25	Fully Achieved
	Measure and report on food waste by 2022	Reported food waste since the baseline year	Fully Achieved
	Report on the introduction and implementation of reuse schemes	Reused furniture and IT devices across all Centres	Fully Achieved
ICT waste	Report on the adoption of the greening government: ICT and digital services strategy	Aligned with the UKRI PC Recycling Scheme	Fully Achieved
	Deliver an annual ICT and digital footprint, waste, and best practice data	Reported relevant waste data in SustainIQ	Fully Achieved
Plastic	Remove consumer single use plastic (CSUP)	Made progress in reducing CSUP in canteens	Partly Achieved
Paper	Reduce government's paper use by at least 50% from a 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 56.7% reduction compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
Water	Reduce water consumption by at least 8% from the 2017 to 2018 baseline	Made a 49.5% reduction compared to the baseline	Fully Achieved
	Ensure all water consumption is measured	Used sub-meters to measure water consumption	Fully Achieved
	Provide a qualitative assessment to show what is being done to encourage the efficient use of water	Undertook a water survey in 2021-22 to improve the efficiency of water use	Fully Achieved
Sustainable procurement	Buy more sustainable and efficient products and services	Aligned with the UKRI Responsible Procurement Charter to make procurement	Fully Achieved
	Report the action taken to buy sustainably	Aligned with the UKRI Responsible Procurement Charter	Fully Achieved

3.2 Waste management

We align with the UKRI Responsible Procurement Charter to ensure the sustainable procurement of products and services. We also partake in the UKRI PC Recycling Scheme to reuse ICT devices. In terms of waste management, we apply the waste hierarchy (Fig. 12) to recycle as much waste as possible and minimise landfilling.

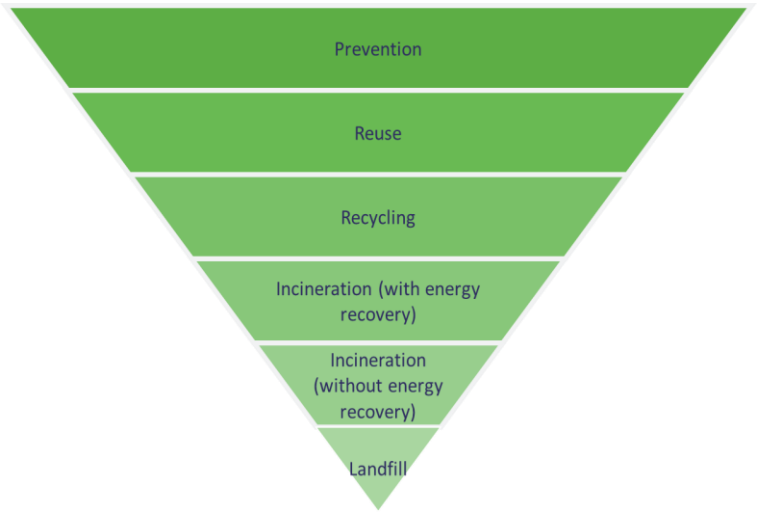


Fig. 12. Waste hierarchy at NERC

BAS introduces a new 'eco-sonde' which is composed of 66% less plastic per unit than previously. BAS procures food in sustainable packaging for Antarctic trips and implements a packaging hierarchy for bottled food and drinks. It has also introduced concentrated tablet-form cleaning products to reduce waste outputs. Additionally, BAS furnished the new Discovery Building at Rothera Research Station with repurposed furniture from the Polaris House office in 2024-25.

Waste growth and carbon reduction. BAS and BGS reported 413.6 t of waste in 2024-25 (HO is located at Polaris House with other UKRI councils, so it does not report waste separately), growing by 75.4% from 235.8 t in 2017-18 (Fig. 13). The growth resulted from the reporting of Antarctic waste disposed of in the UK by BAS since 2019-20. The output rose in 2024-25 year-on-year because of the return of waste from Halley Station for the first time since 2019-20. Compared to the baseline year, carbon emissions from waste dropped from 48.53 tCO_2e to 46.43 tCO_2e, which presented an opposite trajectory of waste outputs. This can be attributed to increased waste recycling and a significant reduction in landfilling.

Waste recycling. The total recycling rate of all waste (including Antarctic waste) was 85.7% in 2024-25, up from 68.8% in 2017-18. This was higher than the recycling rate of 79.0% in terms of the UK waste, highlighting BAS's commitment to its environmental responsibility in Antarctica.

Landfilled waste. The rate of landfilled waste was reduced to 0.7% in 2024-25, a significant drop from 12.7% in 2017-18. This demonstrates that we have been delivering our environmental commitment through better waste management.

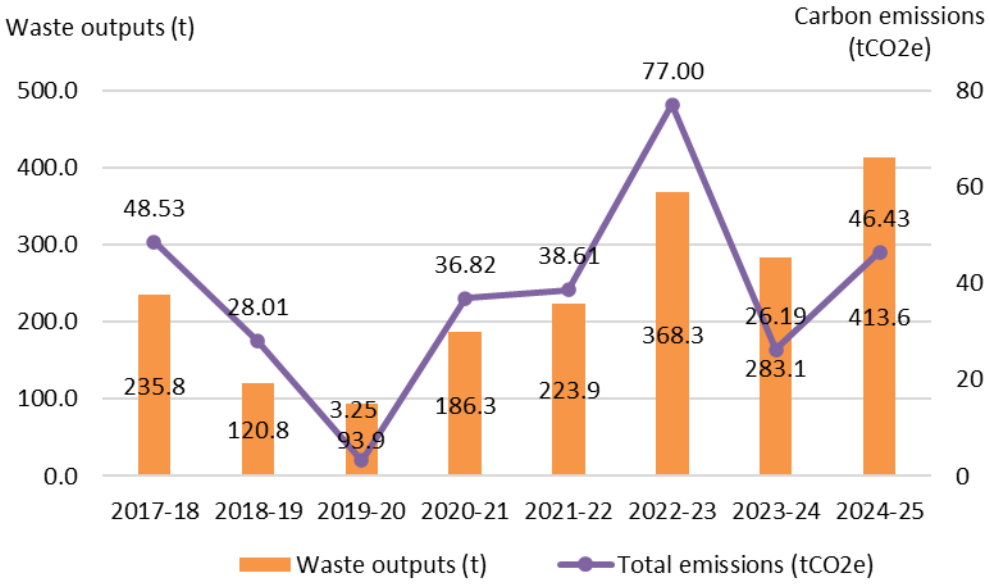


Fig. 13. Yearly waste outputs (t) and carbon emissions (tCO_2e) from 2017-18 to 2024-25

3.3 Water consumption

BAS and BGS consumed 15,677 m^3 of water in 2024-25 (HO is located at Polaris House with other UKRI Councils, so it does not report water separately), up by 11.6% compared to 14,045 m^3 in 2017-18 (estimated because of some missing data). In addition to the growing number of employees, some increase in the consumption is attributed to water loss due to known pipe leakage events, which are timely detected and resolved.

3.4 Paper usage

BAS and BGS (HO is located at Polaris House with other UKRI Councils, so it does not report paper separately) consumed 1655 reams of paper in 2024-25, decreased by 35.4% from 2560 reams in 2017-18. This showcased a significant increase in resource efficiency. The purchase was of both recycled and non-recycled paper, sharing 48.6% and 51.4% respectively. In the future, we will collaborate with Centres to promote paperless work and encourage the supply of recycled paper.

4. Physical Environment

4.1 Compliance with GGCs

GGCs set out two targets for climate change adaptation (Table 4). We achieved both. We are actively implementing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan and conducting flood risk assessments across our estates.

Table 4. Assessment of NERC's performance in the physical environment in compliance with GGCs

Category	GGCs 2021-2025	Progress in 2024-25	Assessment
Climate change adaptation	Conduct a climate change risk assessment across estates and operations	Conducted flood risk assessment and developed action plans across estates and operations	Fully Achieved
	Develop a climate change adaptation action plan	Developed NERC Climate Change Adaptation Plan	Fully Achieved

4.2 Climate change adaptation

The NERC Climate Change Adaptation Plan covers four areas, including risk assessment (focused on flooding and overheating risk), risk awareness, future considerations, and ensuring impact. To deliver the plan, key pieces of work have focused on understanding the risks posed by climate change. A gap analysis has been carried out across the UK estates to understand where further assessments might be required in the future following initial assessments. Besides, BAS has conducted a risk assessment of the Antarctic estates to understand how the changing climate might impact their estates in the future.

It is important that whilst the estates are transformed to achieve the NERC carbon target, they are also adapted to meet the needs of our future climate. Therefore, as part of the NERC Estates Strategy and the upcoming transformation programme, climate risks will be assessed and considered as part of delivery plans to ensure we have estates that fully meet the needs of the future.

The plan will be reviewed in 2025-26 to reflect any changes within the new GGCs and the new UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

4.3 Estate management

We are working with Centres to make our UK and Antarctic estates more sustainable and climate resilient. We have developed the NERC Estates Strategy, which will improve the sustainability performance of the UK buildings through the implementation of new environmental standards.

BAS has implemented Sustainability Management Plans in its AIMP projects to improve the sustainability of Antarctic estates. In terms of laboratory management in the UK, BAS is currently at the Bronze certification level of the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) and is working towards Silver and Gold levels. BGS has achieved the Gold certification of LEAF for its 13 laboratories.

5. Natural Environment

5.1 Compliance with GGCs

GGCs set out targets to boost nature recovery and biodiversity conservation (Table 5). We fully achieved two targets. For the rest requirements that were partly achieved, we have been working alongside internal and external partners to make further progress.

Table 5. Assessment of NERC's performance in the natural environment in compliance with GGCs

Category	GGCs 2021-2025	Progress in 2024-25	Assessment
Nature and biodiversity	Develop and deliver nature recovery plans	Prepared for the assessment of biodiversity baseline and development of nature recovery plans to be delivered in 2025-26	Partly Achieved
	Integrate biodiversity considerations into all relevant service	Integrated biosecurity and biodiversity into research and operations. Estate management will comply with new legislation and plans	Partly Achieved
	Deploy nature-based solutions	Worked with contractors to maintain green space and optimise mowing regime. Further actions will be conducted in line with nature recovery plans	Partly Achieved
	Raise awareness of staff and managers about biodiversity	Integrated biosecurity and biodiversity into research and operations	Fully Achieved
	Report progress against key biodiversity indicators and targets	Centres reported their achievements in biodiversity with case studies to contribute to the UKRI annual report	Fully Achieved

5.2 Biodiversity

Following previous successful biodiversity enhancement projects, NERC has been working to create a consistent biodiversity baseline across eight UK estates. The project is due to be completed by the end of 2025 and will provide a coordinated nature recovery plan for these estates over the next five-year period.

Other examples of biodiversity activities include:

At BAS Cambridge, a voluntary team, Bio@BAS, is led by ecology specialists. They have conducted species surveys, meadow maintenance (including removal of non-meadow plants by hand, as well as scything), plant management, butterfly counts, pond cleaning and restoration, and nest box installation. They also use iRecord to count and monitor species. All this work has contributed to biodiversity improvements.

At BGS Keyworth, the meadow has been recovered after the installation of heat pumps was completed. Mowing regime has been optimised to help plants thrive. 'No-mow for bees' signs have been erected to protect pollinators. Furthermore, beehives and insect hotels have been deployed to improve biodiversity.

Biodiversity signage at BAS. Credit: BAS

Bee conservation at BGS. Credit: BGS

6. Engagement with Stakeholders

We are extending our influence on sustainability efforts towards a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres, suppliers, and external partners.

Internally, we have launched the Climate for Change project and recruited champions. Several webinars have been organised to discuss our sustainability performance in 2024-25 and share best practices. The project will continue in the coming years, aiming to reach out to more people within NERC. We hope it will drive positive behavioural change and embed climate concerns into decision making.

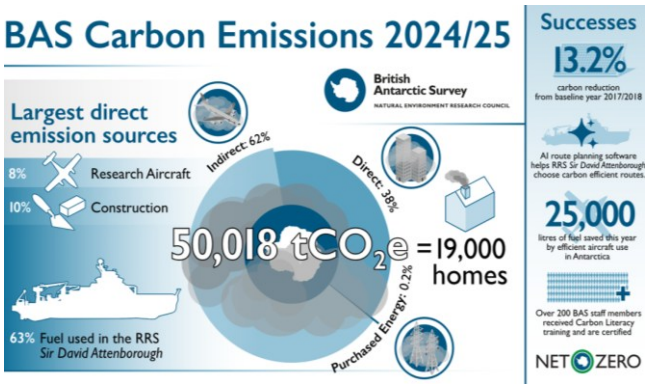
We have created focused working groups, including the Environmental Sustainability Working Group, Environmental Professionals Group, Net Zero Delivery Group, and Net Zero Aviation Group. They enable knowledge sharing, data reporting and decision making so that all stakeholders act together on environmental sustainability. NERC are also working closely with BAS and BGS to improve sustainability reporting through their publication of carbon emissions and sustainability reports.

Externally, we are closing our partnership with diverse stakeholders, including academia. We have organised workshops and webinars to support staff's learning on sustainability. We have invited external speakers from the sustainability sector to present their work and share best practices.

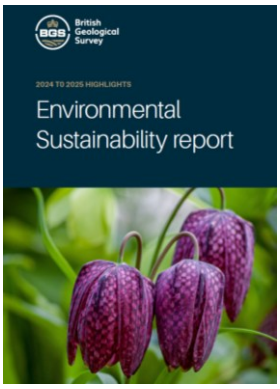
Moreover, we have commissioned a new contract to provide metering services at BAS and BGS from 2025-26 to 2028-29. This will enable us to review metering systems and enhance data reporting. Hence, we can better monitor the consumption of resources in our UK estates and reduce environmental impacts.

We are collaborating with an organisation to undertake biodiversity baseline assessments and develop nature recovery plans for eight sites. This is a crucial action to meet the requirements of GGCs and deliver our responsibility for the natural environment.

Working with external partners, we are also investigating our Scope 3 emissions and developing a Carbon Advisory Framework to estimate the carbon footprints of capital and science investments. This information will be important to enable carbon-informed decision making across our operations in future.



BAS Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25



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7. Conclusion

We are making joint efforts with internal and external stakeholders to improve our sustainability performance and fulfil our commitment to environmental responsibility. Thanks to the contribution of these diverse stakeholders in 2024-25, we have notably cut our global carbon footprint, applied renewable energy, enhanced resource efficiency, and improved biodiversity over the last year.

Like many organisations, we face financial and resource constraints. Improving our environmental sustainability performance is not always easy, but if done well, it can generate long-term benefits for the environment, organisational resilience and our science.

We will continuously collaborate with cross-sectoral stakeholders to deliver sustainability strategies. With the support of new policies, advanced technology, digital tools, and the expertise of our staff, we will endeavour to minimise environmental impact and improve sustainability performance.

Glossary

AI -	Artificial Intelligence
AIMP -	Antarctic Infrastructure Modernisation Programme
BAS -	British Antarctic Survey
BGS -	British Geological Survey
CSUP -	Consumer Single Use Plastic
FAAM -	Facility for Airborne Atmospheric Measurements
GGCs -	Greening Government Commitments
GHG -	Greenhouse Gas
HO -	Head Office
HVO -	Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil
ICT -	Information and Communications Technology
LEAF -	Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework
MGO -	Marine Gas Oil
NCAS -	National Centre for Atmospheric Science
NERC -	Natural Environment Research Council
NOC -	National Oceanography Centre
RF -	Radiative Forcing
RRS -	Royal Research Ship
SAF -	Sustainable Aviation Fuel
SDA -	Sir David Attenborough
UKCEH -	UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
UKRI -	UK Research and Innovation
ULEV -	Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle
WTT -	Well-to-Tank