

Are there aspects of the key concepts outlined in this interim report that are not logical, clearly explained or that you have questions about? Please explain.

On page 42, you note that “the mismanagement of the biosphere reflects institutional failure writ large – it is not simply market failure.” This language is imprecise. Your footnote further indicates that “[r]epeated failure of governments to implement their several accords shows why broader institutional failure is at play.” This logic is suspect and betrays an imagined separation between political institutions and the economic structure of a society. Several authors, in particular Susan Strange, have noted the increasing encroachment of economic power on the political sphere, and the increased influence of market interests on the function and outcomes of state politics. I would suggest that you are not witnessing the failure of institutions beyond market failure, but the failure of institutions as a result of the increasing influence of a market that is unable and unwilling to make appropriate adjustments to ensure proper management of the biosphere.

The ontological gulf contained in the constant use of ‘we’ to describe common agency, decision-making and possession vis-à-vis the environment becomes clearer in reading language such as your suggestion on page 5 that one should view Nature as an asset, just as produced and human capital are assets, and acknowledge that we are failing to manage our assets efficiently. This may be due to the fact that you acknowledge that your audience is not the wider public, but a cadre of “economic and financial decision-makers in the public and private sector” who you seem to believe will respond to the realization of the centuries-long neglect of natural capital by proceeding expeditiously to properly manage these newly discovered assets.

As you note on pg. 16 (2.7) “Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss are experienced differently by people in different roles and in different parts of the world.” However, this observation is quickly negated by a facile statement that we all share “asset management problems, every day, in every society, in a wide variety of guises....” In my view, the former bears no relation to the latter. It is telling that the entirety of humankind is recruited throughout the report to accept blame for mismanagement of ecological assets when the mismanagement is simply a subset of the inequality of economic and political power which ensures that very few persons actively participate in the management of society’s assets, environmental or otherwise.

It is perhaps in this vein that the report employs the misleading and poorly defined term “Anthropocene” which, despite acceptance by some social scientists, is not an accepted geological era or term. It would be advisable for your working group to contextualise or eliminate altogether the use of this term, despite its discursive currency. In addition, it appears that your acceptance of the logic of the term is only partial, as the report continues to present a heuristic barrier between human activity and the biosphere. For example, while the linkages and relationships among biodiversity, ecosystems, biomes and the biosphere are well laid out in pages 8-9, the coherence of this presentation is

diminished by language around “external drivers, such as human activity”. How does human activity become an external driver to a system of which humans are a part?

In your contextual section, entitled “The world in the Anthropocene” (pp.19-21), you suggest the unprecedented prosperity of human societies has come at a cost, with that bargain being increased life expectancy and living standards in exchange for demands on the biosphere which have “overshot its capacity to supply them on a sustainable basis.” This is ahistorical. The expansion of life expectancy in the post-World War period is also related to the decline of European imperial domination and exploitation of the Third World, as improved standard of living is also connected to a reduction through expansion of state activity and increased wealth taxation of the vast inequalities within the West which contributed to two World Wars in the space of three decades. In other words, reductions in human inequality did not come at the price of unsustainable demands on the biosphere. Rather, these unsustainable demands were being made by a pre-existing capitalist structure which was operated on the basis of destruction of the environment and displacement of peoples. This is the logic which was carried into the post-WWII period as economic orthodoxy, when a new logic of production and reproduction was not only available but advocated for by leaders and scholars of non-Western states. These ideas were generally ignored as ever-increasing consumption because itself an objective in the context of the Cold War, with the West opting to show the economic and financial superiority of its model of governance through the material consumptive patterns of its citizens. Recognition of these historical discontinuities is essential to providing a clear path to sustainability in the emerging future, regardless of the discomfort it may cause to your intended audience.

**Are there any important issues or concepts not adequately considered?
Please explain.**

I do agree that the current structure of market prices work against the biosphere, but there seems to be an absence of analysis of how market prices work, or what mechanisms could serve to make it work in favour of the biosphere.

There also does not appear to be enough effort to adequately tie in the observations of the report with the SDG framework.