

Markscheme

May 2026

Environmental systems and societies

Higher level

Paper 1

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Subject details: Environmental systems and societies HLP1 Markscheme

Mark allocation

Candidates are required to answer:

- **ALL** questions
- The maximum total = **[70]**.

1. Environmental systems and societies uses marking points and markbands to determine the achievement of candidates

When using marking points:

- i. A markscheme often has more marking points than the total allows. This is intentional
 - ii. Each marking point has a separate line and the end is shown by means of a semi-colon (;)
 - iii. Where a mark is awarded, a tick/check (✓) **must** be placed in the text at the **precise point** where it becomes clear that the candidate deserves the mark. **One tick to be shown for each mark awarded**
 - iv. The order of marking points does not have to be as in the markscheme, unless stated otherwise.
2. An alternative answer or wording is indicated in the markscheme by a slash (/). Either wording can be accepted.
 3. Words in brackets () in the markscheme are not necessary to gain the mark.
 4. Words that are underlined are essential for the mark.
 5. If the candidate's answer has the same "meaning" or can be clearly interpreted as being of equivalent significance, detail and validity as that in the markscheme then award the mark. Where this point is considered to be particularly relevant in a question it is emphasized by **OWTTE** (or words to that effect).
 6. Remember that many candidates are writing in a second language. Effective communication is more important than grammatical accuracy.
 7. Occasionally, a part of a question may require an answer that is required for subsequent marking points. If an error is made in the first marking point then it should be penalized. However, if the incorrect answer is used correctly in subsequent marking points then **follow through** marks should be awarded. When marking, indicate this by adding **ECF** (error carried forward) on the script.
 8. Do **not** penalize candidates for errors in units or significant figures, **unless** it is specifically referred to in the markscheme.

1. (a) With reference to **Figure 1(d)**, identify the warmest month in the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park. [1]

July

- (b) With reference to **Figure 1(d)**, identify the 20-year mean rainfall for July. [1]

19 mm accept 18–20 mm.

Note to examiner: Do not credit if units are omitted

2. Using **Figure 1(e)** and **Figure 1(f)**, identify **two** factors which make the Corbières-Fenouillèdes region important for conservation. [2]

- a. (High levels of) endemic species found here;
- b. Unique and diverse range of habitats;
- c. High levels of plant biodiversity;
- d. (several) large, undisturbed areas with low human impact;
- e. Fragile ecology/ecosystems;
- f. Six conservation areas are already protected by French law SACs (special areas of conservation);
- g. A variety of ecological services (e.g., carbon sequestration);
- h. Traditional farming/agricultural practices are important for social and cultural value;
- i. (several) languages found;
- j. opportunities for education/ecotourism as a popular tourist destination.

Allow an example of a species being protected/conserved. E.g. orchids

Note to examiner: Accept only the first two answers given.

3. (a) Using **Figure 1(g)**, state **two** environmental impacts of wine production in the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park. [2]

- a. Release of CO₂ to the atmosphere from vehicles/transport;
- b. Release of CO₂ from electricity production;
- c. Use of water during bottling;
- d. Use of water for pesticides;
- e. Use of pesticides on natural ecosystem;

Note to examiner: Accept any other reasonable suggestion.

Do not accept use of water irrigation .

Do not accept just 'carbon dioxide emissions.'

Do not accept 'for eutrophication' since fertilizer is not mentioned in Figure 1g.

Accept only the first two answers given.

- (b) Suggest **one** method by which carbon footprints and **one** method by which water footprints could be lowered during wine production.

[2]

Carbon footprint	Electric tractors to reduce fossil fuel use; Less fertilizer use through green manure to improve soil structure; Switch to sources of renewable energy for electricity supply; Practice no-till land/subsistence farming management; Use lighter weight packaging/alternative packaging; Decrease use of agricultural vehicles; Use subsistence farming methods/traditional hand harvesting of grapes;
Water footprint	Terracing to reduce run off; drip irrigation to reduce run off/evaporation; plant on north facing slopes to reduce evaporation; use wind break to prevent evaporation; Use recycled/grey water systems; Plant drought resistant varieties of grapes; Use less water for pesticides;

Note to examiner: 1 mark max per footprint. Do not accept single word answer.

Accept only the first answer in each box.

Do not accept carbon capture/carbon storage/legislation to reduce wine production.

Do not accept just 'cleaner energy sources.'

Accept other acceptable answers with specified outcomes

4. (a) With reference to **Figure 2(c)**, describe how anoxic conditions in summer can develop in the river Agly due to low water levels and lack of rain in the winter. [3]
- (Regular input of) input of organic matter/leaf fall;
 - Decomposition consumes oxygen, leading to reduced oxygen in water body;
 - Leading to additional deaths of other organisms;
 - Lower water levels cause increase concentrations algae/toxins;
 - Which can create algal blooms/eutrophication;
 - Algal blooms can block light, preventing other aquatic plants from doing photosynthesis and further reducing O₂ in water;
 - Reduced flow velocity causes the river to warm up faster/more easily...;
 -warmer water holds less dissolved oxygen;
 - If the river flow is extremely low, stratification in deeper pools can prevent the mixing of oxygenated surface water with deeper water layers, leading to severe bottom anoxia that harms aquatic life;

Note to examiner: Accept answers in an annotated diagram

- (b) With reference to **Figure 2(a)**, **Figure 2(b)** and **Figure 2(c)**, outline **three** ways in which water quality could be measured in Lac sur l'Agly. [3]
- Measure turbidity/suspended solids using a Secchi disk/turbidity tube
 - Measure oxygen/dissolved oxygen using probes;
 - Measure pH using probes/pH strips
 - Measure nitrates/phosphate using probes/chemical tests
 - Identify indicator species using keys/apps.
 - Quantify impact on living organisms using biotic indices;
 - Measure Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) using the Winkler titration/incubation/probe method;
 - Detect heavy metals using chemical spectrometry.
 - Measure water temperature using a thermometer/temperature probe;
 - Detect algal blooms/bacteria presence using growth media/microscopy/cell counts;

Note to examiner: Response must contain the variable being measured and how (technique) to gain the mark.
Accept only the 1st three answers outlined.

- (c) With reference to **Figure 2(c)**, explain how continued drought and low water levels in the river Agly may affect its recreational value. [3]
- Increased algal bloom discourages water activities;
 - Odour from decomposing algae will discourage visitors;
 - Possible toxic algae creates health risk;
 - Increased turbidity reduces aesthetic and recreational value for tourism;
 - Fewer fish will reduce angling opportunities;
 - Low water levels reduce water oriented activities e.g. swimming/canoeing;
 - Low water levels reduce aesthetic and recreational value for tourism;
 - Low water levels may make swimming safer;

- (d) Identify **one** advantage and **one** disadvantage of the construction of the dam on the river Agly. [2]

Advantage: [Max 1]

- a. Can increase freshwater supply / ensure water supplies are constant with less rain in winter;
- b. can be used to generate electricity/for hydroelectric power;
- c. water reservoir can provide recreational opportunities (i.e. boating, kayaking, fishing, etc.);
- d. can prevent floods (in the winter);

Disadvantage: [Max 1]

- a. Dam may prevent or alter fish migrations;
- b. Loss of habitat can result from dam construction/flooding to create reservoir;
- c. May cause a buildup of organic matter causing methane emissions/algal blooms/ eutrophication;
- d. Loss of downstream nutrient flow can decrease fertility downstream;

Note to examiner: Do not accept hydroelectric dams reduce GHG emissions compared to burning fossil fuels.

Do not accept high cost of dam construction.

Accept only the first answer for an advantage and a disadvantage.

5. (a) With reference to **Figure 2(f)**, state in which month the ground aquifer at Le Barcarès had the highest level of water scarcity. [1]

August (2023) (the lowest crisis aquifer level);

Allow August 2024;

- (b) With reference to **Figure 2(c)** and **Figure 2(f)**, outline **two** reasons why the region of the ground aquifer at Le Barcarès may experience water stress, but its population may not be experiencing water scarcity. [3]

- a. Water stress takes both water availability and water quality into account;
- b. Whereas water scarcity only water availability into account;
- c. Limited recharge may increase salinity/turbidity of aquifer, worsening water stress;
- d. Continued drought may lead to eutrophication/algal blooms in Lac sur l'Agly creating a toxic water supply, worsening water stress;
- e. The area may use more water from lakes and reservoirs than from the aquifer/ water may be transported to the area from elsewhere, reducing water scarcity;
- f. Lac sur l'Agly provides an alternative summer source, reducing summer water scarcity;

Note to examiner: Answer must address both scarcity and stress. Max 2 if only scarcity or stress is addressed in the answer.

Accept first two answers for reasons and 1 mark max for outline of what water security and/or stress is.

- (c) Evaluate the sustainability of water resources in the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park and its nearby urban area.

[6]

Positive: [4 max]

- a. Regional water management initiative in place;
- b. Area relies on a variety of water resources – aquifers, lakes, river;
- c. Lac sur l'Agly built to manage winter flooding / supply drinking water in summer;
- d. No artificial irrigation of vineyards is allowed;
- e. Wastewater management systems installed to reduce the impact of wastewater on nearby rivers and lakes;
- f. Residents/tourists educated on water use by information campaign;

Negative: [4 max]

- g. Increased summer population/summer pressure occurs when water levels are lowest;
- h. Ongoing drought in the region;
- i. Which leads to algal blooms/eutrophication in rivers and lakes;
- j. Limited recharge of aquifers;
- k. Area depends on aquifers for 90 % of the water use;
- l. Large use of water in wine production;
- m. Amenity value/aesthetic appeal of water resources negatively affected by drought/algal blooms/eutrophication;
- n. Villages without local wastewater management require wastewaters to be taken by tankers to distant wastewater treatment plants;

Conclusion [1 max]

e.g. Overall, the sustainability of water resources in the Corbières-Fenouillèdes region is currently fragile. While there are key positive management strategies in place—such as the regional water initiative, —this is insufficient to overcome the severe ecological and supply challenges posed by the region's 90% reliance on aquifers, which are not recharging sufficiently due to the ongoing drought;

Max 5 if no conclusion is given

6. (a) (i) With reference to **Figure 3(a)**, identify the year in which the rural population fell below 15 000 000 for the first time. [1]
- 1961;

Note to examiner: Allow 1962 as well due to hard to read graph;

- (ii) Using **Figure 3(a)**, state the size of France's urban population in the year you identified in part (a)(i). [1]
- 29 000 000/ 29 million;
Allow 30,000,000/ 30 million as well;

Note to examiner: No units required

- (b) Using **Figure 3(a)**, calculate the depopulation rate from rural France between 1960 and 1970. [1]

$15\text{M}-9\text{M})/15\text{M}) \times 1000 = 400 \text{ per } 1000. \text{ (as a percentage} = 40\text{)};$
Allow $8\text{M } 15-8/15 \times 1000 = 466.67/467 \text{ per } 1000 \text{ (46.7\%)}$
Allow $10\text{M } 15-10/15 \times 1000 = 333.33/333 \text{ per } 1000 \text{ (33.3\%)}$

Note to examiner: Do not allow negative answers, e.g. -40%

- (c) If the current rate of Rural depopulation continues estimate the probably size of the rural population in France in 2030 to the nearest 50 000 [1]
- 1 000 000 so (950 000 - 1 050 000);

- (d) With reference to **Figure 3(b)**, describe how the rate of adult employment in agriculture in rural France has changed since 1960. [3]
- Steady decrease in people working in agricultural jobs between 1968/1960 and 2008/2013 / Decrease from 47.4 % in 1968 to 15.6% in 2013;
 - Most rapid decrease in agricultural jobs occurred between 1968 (47.4%) and 1975 (36.6%);
 - Decrease slowed between 1975 (36.6%) and 1982 (33.9%);
 - Decrease occurs rapidly again until 2008 (15.9 %);
 - Small decrease between 2008 (15.9%) and 2013 (15.6 %);
 - Overall decrease in agricultural jobs between 1968 and 2013 is 31.8%/32% which is an average decline of $0.7\% \text{ yr}^{-1}$;

Note to examiner: Allow 1 mark for saying the general trend is a decrease with no % figures attached;

Question asks about 1960/graph and table data uses 1968 instead, so credit student responses that refer to either 1960/1968 with reference to 1968 data

7. With reference to **Figure 3(c)** and **Figure 3(d)**, explain how agricultural production increased between 1961 and 1980, even as the number of people employed in agriculture decreased.

[4]

- a. Green Revolution/Third Agricultural revolution in the 1950's/1960's dramatically changed farming practices / generated rapid technological advancement;
- b. breeding of high-yielding crop plants / intensive livestock systems;
- c. generated higher production/yields per area of land;
- d. increased/improved irrigation systems;
- e. reduced the limiting factor of water availability;
- f. increased use of soil conservation/methods;
- g. ..to reduce soil degradation;
- h. increased use of inorganic/synthetic fertilizer;
- i. ..reduced the limiting factor of soil nutrients/increased crop yields/production/output;
- j. application of pesticides/ use of antibiotics;
- k. reduces yield loss;
- l. Increased use of machines such as the use of tractors/automated harvesting equipment;
- p. ..allows greater volume of work / more efficient work on larger land areas with fewer people;

Note to examiner: Do not allow fertiliser decrease as this occurred after 1980.

8. (a) With reference to **Figure 3(e)** and **Figure 3(f)**, identify the abiotic factors and the biotic process which limits the number of plant species in the closed-canopy climax forests of the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park.

[2]

Abiotic factor	Light/competition for light
Biotic process	Photosynthesis (accept primary productivity)

- (b) With reference to **Figure 3(e)**, describe how you would compare the plant biodiversity of the pasture grassland on gentle slopes with the garrigue scrub on medium slopes. [4]
- Define the sampling areas in each community ...using tape measures at 90° to each create a grid with assigned coordinates at regular intervals (e.g. every 1m);
 - Using a quadrat of suitable size measure the abundance of each species within the quadrat;
 - Place quadrats within sampling area using coordinates selected through random number generation/systematic placement;
 - Use a line transect along slope/environmental gradient;
 - Ensure use of sufficient number of quadrats to provide a reliable/representative sample of the community;
 - Calculate the mean abundance of each species per quadrat;
 - ...which can be used to calculate the mean abundance of each species per m²/ha;
 - Calculate Simpson's Diversity Index for each community;
 - ...in order to compare the two communities / the higher the index the greater the diversity of the community;

Note to examiner: accept any other reasonable data collection method for fieldwork and vegetation.

An alternative interpretation that we can accept is:

- Comparing the plant biodiversity of pasture grassland on gentle slopes with garrigue scrub on medium slopes involves analyzing species richness and structural diversity;*
- Pasture grasslands, typically maintained by grazing, and yearly cutting (for hay)*
- often host a high density of species, including various grasses, low spiney shrubs, and wildflowers/Pasture grassland includes a mix of wild flowers and many endemic rare orchids;*
-which are adapted to open, light-rich environments;*
- In contrast, the garrigue scrub on medium slopes is characterized by drought-resistant woody shrubs and oak; In contrast garrigue scrub on medium slopes is maintained by grazing alone and is characterized by drought-resistant woody shrubs with defenses against grazing;*
- including endemic species;*
- While the pasture might show higher seasonal species richness of plants, the garrigue often exhibits greater structural complexity and constant species richness throughout the year; and a higher proportion of endemic shrubs and trees;*
- The biodiversity in the pasture is heavily influenced by grazing intensity;*
-whereas the garrigue's diversity is shaped by soil depth, slope aspect, and historical fire frequency;*

9. (a) With reference to **Figure 3(f)** and **Figure 3(g)**, identify the directional process of change from pasture grassland to closed-canopy climax forest when domestic animals are removed from the ecosystem. [1]

Secondary succession

- (b) With reference to **Figure 3(f)**, **Figure 3(g)** and **Figure 3(h)**, explain how human activity has contributed to the formation of the pasture grassland community as a plagioclimax in the upper valley of the river Agly.

[3]

- a. Original forest climax ecosystem is cleared by man for grazing by goats, sheep and cattle;
- b. Continued seasonal grazing by goats and cattle maintain a garrigue scrub community by removing tree saplings;
- c. Increased grazing intensity removes more scrub and leads to the development of open grassland;
- d. The yearly removal of a hay crop helps to maintain the prairie grassland as a plagioclimax stage;
- e. Continued cycles of grazing and cutting a hay crop in the summer prevent the prairie developing towards a forest stopping the growth of shrubs and trees;

10. Through the lens of economics, suggest how rural depopulation could lead to a significant loss of biological diversity in the mountain valleys of the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park.

[6]

- a. Mountain valleys contain low intensity traditional agriculture;
- b. ... and provide limited profit compared to intensive farming systems due to lower yields;
- c. Small fields in valleys are difficult/inefficient to farm;
- d. Lower yield products are more expensive/priced higher;
- e. Hard to compete against intensive farming systems/lower priced products in the marketplace;
- f. ...can lead to farms not being profitable/going bankrupt;
- g. Farms are then abandoned;
- h. Rural depopulation reduces available workforce/ people move to cities to earn more money;
- i. Workforce too expensive for low profit farms;
- j. Biodiversity is maintained by grazing/limited use of fertilisers;
- k. Fewer farms reduce grazing which maintains grassland/pastures and scrubs;
- l. ...allowing secondary succession to commence;
- m. Former grassland/pastures and scrub areas develop towards climax forest;
- n. Climax forest has lower biodiversity than grassland/pastures;

Note to examiner: Answer must address profitability of farming system and cost of labour/limited labour with depopulation. Max 4 if no profitability, cost labour mentioned.

11. (a) With reference to **Figure 4(b)**, the Egyptian vulture is categorized as part of the detritivore food chain. Define *detritivore*.

[1]

Consumers of dead or decaying animal or plant parts.

Note to examiner: Do not accept 'eats carrion and eats live organisms' without referring back specifically to the Egyptian Vulture (contradiction = no mark). Accept statement or WTTE of 'detritivores eat carrion/dead animals whereas the Egyptian vulture also eats live organisms'.

- (b) With reference to **Figure 4(b)** and **Figure 4(c)**, outline two of the criteria used to assess the Egyptian vulture as critically endangered in its European range.

[2]

Population Size Reduction:

- a. The rate of reduction is measured either over a 10-year span or across three different generations within that species;
- b. Cause of decline must also be known;
- c. If reasons for population reduction no longer occur / can be reversed, the population needs to have been reduced by at least 90 %;
- d. If not, then the population needs to have been reduced by at least 80 %;
- e. Population size must be reduced to numbers of less than 50 mature individuals;

Reduction Across a Geographic Range:

- f. Severe habitat fragmentation or exists at just one location;
- g. Decline in extent of occurrence, area of occupancy, area/extent/quality of habitat, number of locations/subpopulations, or amount of MI;
- h. Extreme fluctuations in extent of occurrence, area of occupancy, number of locations/subpopulations;

Population Decline:

- i. Decline to less than 250 mature individuals and either::
- j. A decline of 25 % (within over 3 generations / 10 years);
- k. Over 90 % of mature individuals in a single subpopulation, or no more than 50 mature individuals in any one subpopulation;

Probability of Extinction:

- l. At least a 50 % probability of going extinct in the wild (within over 3 generations / 10 years);

Note to examiner: Identification of the criteria is not enough for a mark. The criteria must include one of the factors.

Accept only the first 2 answers.

- (c) With reference to **Figure 4(b)**, describe how increased use of pesticides on crops since 1945 can lead to poisoning of the Egyptian vulture.

[3]

Biomagnification:

- a. Crops sprayed with pesticides are eaten by small herbivores increases the toxin concentration in the tissues of the herbivores;
- b. Small carnivores and birds ingest insects sprayed/killed by pesticides and the concentration of toxin increases in the small herbivores;
- c. Larger carnivores and birds/raptors eat the small animals, increasing the toxin in the larger animals;
- d. Vultures eat the carrion of both small and large animals and the concentration of toxin increases in the vultures;

Bioaccumulation:

- e. Concentration of the toxin increases in the vultures/other animals over time until the amount in their biomass becomes lethal;

Note to examiner: For full credit answer must include concepts of biomagnification and bioaccumulation.

Max 2 if only biomagnification or bioaccumulation mentioned.

12. (a) With reference to **Figure 4(b)** and **Figure 4(c)**, outline **two** reasons why the realized niche of the Egyptian vulture reduces competition with other vulture species found in the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park.

[2]

Habitat Requirements:

- a. Egyptian vultures require sparsely vegetated ecosystems of open hills and low mountains, whereas the other species either require woodland or higher mountains and semi desert, which reduces competition as they generally occupy different habitats;

Nesting Sites

- b. Egyptian vultures nest individually on cliffs ledges and rocky outcrops as well as ledges and tops of tall buildings, whereas other species either nest in trees or in large colonies or on rock ledges at higher altitudes, this reduces competition for space as they have different nesting requirements:

Feeding:

- c. Egyptian vultures feed on carrion but can also take live prey eggs, fish and fruit, whereas all of the other species feed exclusively on carrion, this allows the Egyptian vulture a wider feeding niche;

Note to examiner: Identification of the reason is not enough for a mark.

Reason must include;

How habitat/nesting and feed niches differ from the other vultures OR how the reason reduces competition.

Accept only the first 2 answers.

- (b) With reference to **Figure 4(b)** and **Figure 4(d)**, outline why significant falls in the populations of Egyptian vultures occurred in France in 1994 and 1997.

[2]

- a. Carrion makes up the largest part of the Egyptian vulture's diet;
b. After the outbreak of BSE in Europe in the early 1990s farmers were banned from leaving dead animals in fields to decompose;
c. ...which removed a large source of food for Egyptian vultures;
d. ...and created a tipping point for the population / density dependence with not enough food to support the population;
e. Population fell dramatically in years after the ban on leaving dead animals in fields;

Note to examiner: MPb should include a reference to BSE/disease to gain a mark. It is not enough to say farmers were banned from leaving dead animals to decompose.

13. Explain how the categorization of the Egyptian vulture as critically endangered in Europe is recognized at different levels of national and local agreements within the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park.

[4]

- a. The IUCN Red List assesses the risk of extinction to species;
 - b. The categorization of the Egyptian vulture as critically endangered in Europe is established by international bodies like the IUCN Red List or European Union directives;
 - c. The small population in Europe is listed as Critically Endangered (CE) when in the rest of the world it is categorized as endangered, this highlights the dangers of the vulture going extinct in its European range;
 - d. This triggers mandatory conservation actions at all subsequent administrative levels / adds to the international/national requirement to protect the Egyptian vulture based on regional/national needs;
 - e. The park is part of a national network of protected areas / at the national level in France, this status leads to the implementation of a National Action Plan (Plan National d'Actions - PNA) for the species;
 - f. The Egyptian Vulture is Separately protected under French law;
 - g. The Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park is a voluntary agreement aimed at protection the natural world at the regional level so as a CE species the Egyptian vulture is part of that process / the Park acts as the operational body, translating the general national goals into specific, local conservation measures;
 - h. granting the Egyptian vulture the highest legal protection as a threatened species, making it illegal to harm the bird, its nests, or its habitat;
 - i. Within the Corbières-Fenouillèdes Natural Park, this national mandate is recognized and integrated into the Park's charter and local agreements;
 - j. Implementation/construction of feeding stations / an education center / GPS monitoring with local surveillance / habitat restoration in feeding/nesting areas demonstrate a commitment to protecting the Egyptian Vulture;
 - k. Community involvement is facilitated through formal agreements with local citizens to, limit disturbances in breeding zones and working with pastoralists to manage livestock carcasses, a critical food source for the protected species;
 - l. The park's local agreements serve as the practical, on-the-ground implementation of the critically endangered status defined at the European level;
 - m. Park areas protected under EU agreements / Habitats Directive/ Birds Directive which the IUCN Red List informs;
 - n. ...providing a network of protection that that starts with the data provided by the IUCN Red List about the status of the species;
-