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Beyond simple features: Do complex feature types need complex service descriptions?

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Nearly all successful deployments of web services which are accessible by diverse individuals and organisations have used relatively simple services which consume simple data types - well known MIME types, or simple features (in the OGC sense). The excitement over mashups has shown what can be done when services are transparent, and the data types are digestible. However, there is a long tail of activities for which the abilities of web services to open up interoperabilty is being hindered by the difficulty in both service and data description. Regrettably, amongst the plethora of web service description languages available, there seems to be no stand out solution. Here we use our experiences trying to build environmental data grids to motivate the necessity for moving beyond the current state of the art, introducing the requirement for both more sophisticated and more easily understandable data and service descriptions.