

MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE UN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTING

23 March 2021, teleconference

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (UNCEEA Chair and Deputy Director General Statistics Netherlands); Amanda Clark (Australian Bureau of Statistics); Carolyn Cahill, Jeff Fritzsche, (Statistics Canada); P. Bhanumati (MOSPI, India); Federico Gonzalez, Graciela Marquez (INEGI); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Rachael Milicich (Statistics New Zealand); Gerhardt Bouwer (Statistics South Africa); Neil Wilson (ONS, UK); Anton Steurer (Eurostat); Jim Tebrake (IMF); Sven Kaumanns (Chair, London Group on Environmental Accounting); Myriam Linster, Peter Van de Ven (OECD); Catherine Van Rompaey (World Bank); Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Bram Edens, Marko Javorsek (UNSD)
- **Regrets:** Philippines Statistical Authority, FAO

1. REFLECTION OF UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

- The Chair provided a quick summary of the events during the UN Statistical Commission, focusing on the meetings that took place to reach a compromise solution regarding the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA).
- The UNCEEA Chair and SEEA EA Technical Committee Area Lead thanked Bureau members for their written statements, support and participation in the deliberations which led to the adoption of the SEEA EA.

2. TOUR DE TABLE

- Area leads provided an update on recent and upcoming activities, with an eye towards the June Committee meeting and the preparation of a programme of work for 2021-25.
- Area A – Coordination and Communication
 - Biodiversity, climate change, sustainable finance and the circular economy are current focuses. Another focus is to create links with the work of the new network of economic statisticians (previously the Friends of the Chair group).
 - A previous priority of the working group was the collection and dissemination of SEEA-related training materials. However, this work was more complex than initially assumed and the majority of the training available comes from reputable sources, so the group is re-evaluating this initiative.

- On biodiversity, the COP-15 is tentatively scheduled for October 2021 in person. There is currently a proposal to create a formal group on indicators, which would include the scientific community, parties and the statistical community, represented by the UNCEEA. The group would be an informal group of the COP, and although there seems to be widespread support, it needs to be first approved at the COP meeting. In the meantime, there is a plan for a webinar involving both NSOs and CBD focal points to encourage closer collaboration between NSOs and the national CBD focal points in preparation for the various meetings leading to the COP.
- Area B1 – Technical Committee on the SEEA Central Framework
 - The Bureau agreed that this year’s meeting would be an appropriate time to discuss the revision of the SEEA CF. It was suggested that Area B1 provide a concrete proposal for a revision.
 - It was noted that the group should continue engagement with the ISWGNA Subgroup on Wellbeing and Sustainability; the subgroup will develop guidance notes for consultation over the next year.
 - The Bureau discussed the possibility of merging the SEEA CF and SEEA EA. It was agreed that the Committee should focus first on the issues that need update in the SEEA CF and that merging the two manuals should be considered at a later stage.
 - It was noted that the research agenda of the SEEA CF and SEEA EA should be integrated into the London Group call for proposals, which will be sent out later this spring.
- Area B2 – Technical Committee on the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting
 - One of the current priorities is finalizing the document to arrive at a white cover version by June. Other priorities include finalizing guidelines created under the E.U.-funded Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) project on biophysical modeling, valuation and scenario modelling; and updating (and expanding) the e-Learning.
 - The Bureau agreed on the need for an implementation strategy for the SEEA EA; a first draft of the strategy would be drafted by UNSD and be reviewed by Area B2 and the Bureau before being presented to the Committee in June and to the UN Statistical Commission in 2022.
 - The Bureau agreed to keep the Technical Committee in its current form (expanded due to the revision), as it has been functioning very well.
 - In terms of upcoming events, the launch of the ARIES explorer will be held soon, and the Forum of Experts will be held in early fall.
 - UNSD has been holding talks with the European Commission on the possibility of a successor project to the current NCAVES project. Eurostat has

provided a grant to UNSD as a stopgap until a successor project is guaranteed.

- Area C – Development of Databases
 - Current priorities include the creation of data collection templates and the establishment of a dissemination platform on the UN SEEA site. The Area Lead will soon call a meeting of Area C to make progress on the data collection templates. UNSD is making progress with disseminating energy and air emission accounts through the ARIES platform. It is anticipated that there will be results in a few months.
 - The IMF will release a climate change indicators dashboard early next month. The dashboard uses SEEA data as an input and is mainly geared towards Fund economists so they can integrate climate change into their surveillance work. However, the dashboard will be public and can serve a wider audience.
 - OECD and Eurostat are beginning a pilot to see if simple water accounts can be compiled from the Eurostat water questionnaire. A progress report will be shared with the Committee in June, with results expected in approximately one year.
- Area D – Implementation and statistical capacity building
 - Needs and priorities include administering the Global Assessment on an annual basis to provide data for SDG indicator 15.9.1; improving how the results are presented; and increased engagement with SEEA Focal Points.
 - It was noted that Area D should actively liaise with Area B2 in the development of the SEEA EA implementation strategy, particularly in terms of the involvement of UN Regional Commissions.

3. UPCOMING EVENTS

- The adoption of the SEEA EA received a large amount of press, including two UN press releases, an interview and noon briefing with the UN Chief Economist, tweets by the UN Secretary General, etc. The UN DESA communications team was critical in this endeavor and will be helping UNSD to draw up a communication strategy for the SEEA EA.
- To capitalize on the momentum, UNSD plans to hold a high-level event to further publicize the SEEA EA to different audiences. No date has been finalized, but it will be this spring.
- The ARIES launch event is planned for 22 April. The finalization of the explorer is going smoothly, and it is hoped that the UN Global Platform can host the explorer.

- UNSD will host a business accounting brainstorm event next month to arrive at a more concrete programme of work for the subgroup on business accounting which the Committee agreed to create during the July 2020 UNCEEA meeting. The Chair of the Group is still to be identified. Participants will include Bureau members as well as representatives from the business community.
- It was agreed to send a 'save the date' to the Committee for its 16th Meeting for 15-17 June 2021.