

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

9 September 2021, teleconference

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (UNCEEA Chair and Deputy Director General Statistics Netherlands); Carolyn Cahill, Jeff Fritzsche, Mariam Iqbal, Greg Peterson (Statistics Canada); P. Bhanumati, Awadhesh Kumar Mishra (MOSPI, India); Graciela Marquez, Jose Eduardo de la Torre (INEGI); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Rachael Milicich (Statistics New Zealand); Riaan Grobler (Statistics South Africa); Nicola Shearman, Neil Wilson (United Kingdom Office of National Statistics); Arturo de la Fuente (Eurostat); Simon Felgendreher (London Group on Environmental Accounting); Roberto Astolfi, Sarah Barahona, Myriam Linster (OECD); Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Julian Chow, Bram Edens, Marko Javorsek (UNSD)
- **Regrets:** Australian Bureau of Statistics, Philippine Statistical Authority, FAO, IMF, World Bank

1. FINALIZATION OF THE SEEA ECOSYSTEM ACCOUNTING (EA)

- In accordance with the agreed next steps on the finalization of the manual (determined during the 16th Meeting of the UNCEEA), the Chair of the Committee approached the Director of the UN Statistics Division, in his capacity as Secretary of the UN Statistical Commission for guidance.
- In consultation with the Bureau of the Statistical Commission, the Secretary advised the Bureau to use the exact text of the Statistical Commission decision in the introduction to the overall publication, as well as the introductions to the relevant parts of the publication. This would be in line with common practice.
- The Bureau agreed to send any last comments on the 'green text' included in the SEEA EA final draft by Friday, 17 September 2021. The final text, along with the letter from the Secretary of the Commission, would then be distributed to the wider Committee.
- While the Bureau welcomed this decision/interpretation, it was acknowledged that it was a compromise position that would not be welcomed by all Committee members. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to have a wider discussion at the next Committee meeting on the positioning of the SEEA. In particular, it would be useful to discuss the role of the SEEA in particular vis-à-vis the SNA and other statistical frameworks.
- In terms of valuation, it was noted that there would be multiple outlets for continuing the discussion in a productive way. There will soon be a group on

valuation of non-market goods and services within the context of the update of the SNA. This group would have a broader scope covering not only the environment but also valuation of other non-market goods and services such as household services, data, etc. In addition, a group on valuation that will work on furthering valuation methods for specific ecosystem services starting from the guidelines on valuation that have been developed will be established under the Technical Committee of the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting.

2. SNA UPDATE

- The UNCEEA Secretariat has discussed with the Secretariat of the ISWGNA and the Chair of the Task Team on Wellbeing and Sustainability as well as the chair of the subgroup on Environmental-Economic Accounting on how to formalize collaboration between the UNCEEA and the ISWGNA and the AEG. Certain environmental issues are coming up in the update of the SNA which have implications for the SEEA framework. Thus, it is important for the SEEA community to be involved in the decision-making process.
- To ensure collaboration between the two groups, the Chair of the SEEA CF Technical Committee participates in the group on environmental economic accounting and the Chairs of the Task Team on Well Being and Sustainability and the group on environmental economic accounting are invited to participate in the meetings of the SEEA Technical Committee.
- The Secretariat and Chair of Area B1 will prepare a one-pager in collaboration with the leads of the Chairs of the Task Team and the subgroup which outlines the involvement of the UNCEEA and formalizes the decision-making process.

3. GLOBAL SET OF CLIMATE CHANGE STATISTICS & INDICATORS

- Bureau members voiced concerns over the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators. In particular, the indicators proposed as part of the UNSD process are different from those proposed by the UNECE. It was considered completely counterproductive to have two different lists, one for developed and the other for developing countries.
- Additional concerns included a lack of completeness and adequate detail of the indicator set and metadata; the large numbers of indicators; lack of representation of the SEEA in the metadata and indicators chosen, particularly in terms of ecosystems; unnecessary burden and confusion for statistical offices over reporting obligations; and the absence of a process for improving the list of indicators.
- It was noted that the indicator list was a mixed list which deviated from existing sets, such as the SEEA-based UNECE list of climate change indicators. This deviation was partly in response to concerns of developing countries over existing data

- availability. It was suggested that an alternative would be to have a core set of indicators which was achievable for all countries as part of a larger, more complete set of indicators which included appropriate representation of the SEEA
- While it may be difficult for the indicator set to achieve full coherence with the SEEA, the Chair will talk to the Director of UNSD to understand how some of Bureau's concerns can be addressed. In addition, the Bureau agreed that better communication at the international level, between initiatives, was key. The Chair of Area A on Coordination and Communication will reach out to the Chair of the Expert Group on Environmental Statistics, which oversees the development of the indicator set. It was agreed that having some joint members between the Committee, and the Expert Group would be useful, including for example inviting the Chair of the Environment Statistics Expert Group to Area A meetings.

4. TOUR DE TABLE

- Area A – Coordination and Communication
 - The group will begin to develop a programme of work based on the feedback of the last Committee meeting.
 - High priority items include mainstreaming activities and a mapping exercise for the environmental domain, similar to what was done by the Friends of the Chair group for economic statistics.
 - It was also noted that the need for better climate change data is gaining more recognition. At their last meeting, the G20 designated climate change as one of four priorities for their Data Gaps Initiative 3 (DGI3), which provides an opportunity to mainstream the SEEA.
- Area B1 – Technical Committee on the SEEA Central Framework
 - The group is currently focusing on providing input for the revisions of the CPC and ISIC classifications. The ISIC revision is currently in progress and will finish within the next few months. However, the CPC revision is just starting, which provides more opportunity for engagement. The SEEA CF TC has identified issues for discussion for both classifications and will provide input to the relevant task teams.
 - In addition to classifications, the SEEA CF TC will focus on the SNA revision and look to prioritize additional topics on its research agenda.
- Area B2 – Technical Committee on the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting
 - The current focus of the SEEA EA TC is on aiding global implementation. The TC is currently discussing how to structure its working groups to best facilitate country support and development of guidelines.
 - The next Forum of Experts on SEEA EA will take tentatively take place on the week of 6 December.

- The TC is also currently working to finalize the biophysical guidelines.
- Area C – Development of Databases
 - The activities of Area C will soon resume after the summer break. Regular meetings have been scheduled starting in September 2021 with the goal of advancing the roadmap presented and discussed at the UNCEEA meeting in June. Priority is given to the development of templates and improvement of the timeliness.
 - Many members are currently involved in the Task Force on Quarterly Air Emission Accounts, which is meeting regularly and intends to come up with a set of quarterly SEEA air emission accounts.
 - One area of work that the group intends to look at is land. OECD, FAO and UNSD all have land cover data. It was agreed that duplication of effort should be avoided, and it was suggested to explore potential overlaps between the three products.
 - UNSD is working on adding water accounts to the ARIES for SEEA Explorer, as well as creating global land cover accounts derived from ARIES using batch processing. In addition, progress is being made in making the Basque Center for Climate Change a hub of the Global Platform.
- Area D – Implementation and statistical capacity building
 - UNSD is currently creating pre-filled questionnaires for the Global Assessment ‘lite’ to be sent to countries this fall. The questions will be limited to those on current implementation.
 - The group will also propose that the area’s work programme be split into two different streams—one focusing on the Global Assessment and the other focusing on capacity building, particularly given the demand for stepping up implementation in countries. The regional commissions would have a large role to play in the capacity building workstream.
 - Statistics South Africa will step down from chairing Area D due to prior commitments. UNSD is currently working to secure a Chair from one of the UN Regional Commissions.

5. CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

- Graciela Marquez of INEGI has volunteered to lead the Committee’s subgroup on business accounting. The Committee welcomed this news and thanked Ms. Marquez for showing leadership in this area.
- Riaan Grobler is replacing Gerhardt Bouwer, who has recently taken up a new position, as the representative for Statistics South Africa.

- Sarah Barahona has joined the Committee, representing OECD alongside her colleagues. Ms. Barahona replaces Peter van de Ven, who recently retired from the OECD.
- Awadhesh Kumar Mishra has joined the Committee, representing MoSPI alongside her colleagues.

6. AOB

- On 4 September, UNSD, IUCN and Conservation International held a [side event](#) for the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) focusing on using the SEEA EA for development planning. Speakers included the UNCEEA Chair, the Chief Economist of the UN and representatives from South Africa, the Global Environment Facility, Conservation International, IUCN and the European Commission.
- UNSD co-organized another WCC [side event](#) with the Capitals Coalition, which focused on business accounting and the SEEA. The event launched recent case studies¹ carried out by UNSD as part of the NCAVES project, which looked at alignment between public and private natural capital accounting approaches. Private sector representatives showed great interest in the SEEA during the event.
- UNSD reminded Bureau members to register for the [Fifth Policy Forum on Natural Capital Accounting for Better Decision Making – Greening the Recovery](#), if they have not yet already done so. The event will take place virtually, from 15 to 16 September.
- It was noted that the London Group is looking to finalize the agenda for its upcoming 27th Meeting (27 September to 4 October). Bureau members were reminded that the deadline for presentations and official registration is 10 September 2021.

7. ACTIONS

- The Committee's programme of work will be the focus of the upcoming report for the 53rd United Nations Statistical Commission. Area leads will need to draft their sections by mid-October, to circulate to the Bureau and then the wider UNCEEA.
- The report will need to be finalized by 24 November.

¹ <https://seea.un.org/content/business-and-natural-capital-accounting-study-quarry-restoration-holcim-spain>
<https://seea.un.org/content/business-and-natural-capital-accounting-case-study-ambuja-cement-india>