

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

24 January 2018, via WebEx

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (Chair), Lisa Wardlaw-Kelly (Australia Bureau of Statistics), Carolyn Cahill (Statistics Canada), Gerhard Eding (Statistics Netherlands), Peter van de Ven (OECD), Joe de Beer (Statistics South Africa), Juan-Pablo Castaneda (World Bank), Ivo Havinga, Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Marko Javorsek, Sokol Vako (United Nations Statistics Division)
- **Regrets:** Anton Steurer (Eurostat), Francesco Tubiello (FAO), Arturo Blancas, Raul Figueroa Diaz (INEGI), Romeo Recide (Philippines Statistics Authority)

## AREA A – COORDINATION (led by Andre Loranger, Statistics Canada)

1. Statistics Canada introduced the progress made by the Working Group on Coordination, which had its first meeting in November. During this meeting, the group largely approved the Terms of Reference and provisionally determined three priorities for the 2018 calendar year. The priorities include setting up a super calendar on the SEEA website; creating a quality assurance process for training materials and posting them to the website and working to establish a SEEA presence in relevant reporting initiatives. Statistics Canada is currently working on a preliminary programme of work for 2018, which was sent to UNSD for comment and will be circulated to the members of the group for discussion at its next meeting in February.
2. The Bureau agreed, in principal, to the three draft priorities. It also recommended that the Working Group identify meetings and events where the SEEA can be promoted to be featured in the super calendar.
3. The Area A and Area E Working Groups agreed to harness synergies in developing and promoting the supercalendar, website and newsletter.

## AREA B1 – METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR NORMATIVE STANDARDS AND OTHER RESEARCH SEEA CF (led by Sjoerd Schenau, Statistics Netherlands)

4. Statistics Netherlands reviewed its plans for the upcoming year. The Group noted that progress has been somewhat slow in the past year, due to the limited availability of experts and resource constraints. Nevertheless, some progress has been made and the Technical Committee at its next meeting will discuss some of the issues on the research agenda, also discussed at the London Group on Environmental Accounting.
5. To jumpstart progress, Statistics Netherlands has prepared a paper to be discussed at the Technical Committee which includes various proposals including the possibility to have physical meetings or use “virtual sprints”, which consist of setting aside one week where participants meet by WebEx half a day and spend the other half of the day

working on solving the issues. This approach has worked in other situations and could be appropriate for the Technical Committee to reach resolutions quickly.

## **AREA B2 – METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR NORMATIVE STANDARDS AND OTHER RESEARCH SEEA EEA (led by Anton Steurer, Eurostat)**

6. UNSD, on behalf of Eurostat, introduced the work of the SEEA EEA Technical Committee. In the past months, the Technical Committee has met regularly, with its main work being the finalization of the technical recommendations, which were issued last December.
7. In addition, the revision process for ecosystem accounting has been launched. The plans for the revision process are being finalized, but four work streams (spatial units, ecosystem condition, ecosystem services, valuation) are planned. Each workstream will consist of a small group of members, with a lead author and contributing experts.
8. In terms of funding, UNSD has received funds from ONS (15000 pounds) and Defra has promised funds (15000 pounds). This ensures that the Eurostat funding (100000 Euros) can be unlocked for the first year. UNSD and Eurostat are currently sorting out some administrative issues to release the funds as soon as possible. The recruitment of the editor to steer the work and to support the organization of the Workshop on Valuation being organized together with the Nature Conservation Agency of Germany, UNSD and UNEP in April 2018.
9. The Bureau recognized that additional funds must be raised for the next two years. The Australian Bureau of Statistics noted that they have been discussing with their environment ministry the possibility of providing some funding. If they can provide funding, it will most likely be in the next financial year (after July 2018).
10. UNSD informed the Bureau of the plan to send out a letter to the broader ecosystem accounting community to inform them of and request expression of interest to contribute to the revision process. The letter will be accompanied with the issues on the research agenda. The Bureau noted that this would encourage engagement and support, both from a technical and financial point of view.

## **AREA C – DEVELOPMENT OF GLOBAL DATABASES FOR SEEA (led by Peter van de Ven, OECD)**

11. OECD reviewed the progress made on global SEEA DSDs. The DSDs were presented to the SDMX MES ownership group, and the ownership group approved the work done. The DSDs will be passed to the technical group for cross-checking. The SEEA DSD guidelines should be completed in February and the testing with countries should start in March. The Group believes that they will be able to finalize the global SEEA DSDs and facilitate SDMX exchange this year.
12. OECD presented progress made on estimating air emission accounts. The objective is to present the methodology to the UNCEEA in June for approval. It noted that the priority for this estimation remains for OECD countries first and possibly partner countries at a later stage. The tool developed is available to all countries and agencies. Further

discussion is needed among the agencies to decide how to proceed with the development of a global database.

13. UNSD presented current plans for the energy accounts database. To finalize the methodology for estimating energy accounts, UNSD has obtained the IEA energy balances dataset. The tool, which is a simplification of the Eurostat PEFA builder, will be tested in 10-15 pilot countries test to develop energy accounts starting from the IEA Energy Balances. Once the methodology is agreed to, UNSD will compile the global database, publishing estimations only after country agreement. The methodology and the results of the testing in countries will be presented to the UNCEEA.

#### **AREA D – IMPLEMENTATION AND STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING (led by Joe de Beer, Statistics South Africa)**

14. Statistics South Africa reviewed the main findings of the Global Assessment report and raised some issues that were encountered during the Assessment, such as low participation rates, completion of the Assessment by line ministries (as opposed to NSOs) and confidentiality issues. The Bureau was also informed that the report will not include analysis of ecosystem accounts. Only around 15 responses were received for ecosystem accounts, most likely because many activities on ecosystem accounts are being done outside the statistical offices. Work done in the context of the drafting of Annex I of the Technical Recommendations in support of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting has indicated that around 40 countries currently have ecosystem accounts.
15. Due to the low response on ecosystem accounts for the Global Assessment, the Bureau agreed that the Global Assessment report should focus on Central Framework accounts. The Bureau recommended a separate analysis on ecosystem accounts, which would require collecting information outside of the Global Assessment.
16. Statistics South Africa also informed the Bureau that they have sent out a capacity building matrix to international organizations and countries. The matrix asks for partners' plans for implementation of the SEEA in 2018 by country and will serve as a background document to the UN Statistical Commission. In addition, the matrix will be a valuable input to a planned gap analysis. The gap analysis will use the matrix and Global Assessment to outline countries' needs. The hope for the gap analysis is to align the need for support by countries with the provision of assistance by international organizations. It was noted that because some of the countries asked to remain anonymous, the gap analysis could not include names of specific countries.

#### **AREA E – A PRACTICAL STRATEGY FOR THE APPLICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTING TO EMERGING POLICY ISSUES (led by Lisa Wardlaw-Kelly, Australian Bureau of Statistics)**

17. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reviewed the progress made in putting together the first issue of the SEEA newsletter. A call for submissions was put out to the UNCEEA for the first newsletter and many high-quality submissions were obtained. However, in

recognition of the need for a balance in content on developing and developed countries, as well as Central Framework and Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, ABS and UNSD plan to develop a proposal for content before soliciting submissions from specific persons for subsequent issues of the newsletter.

18. The Bureau largely endorsed the outline and design for the first issue of the SEEA newsletter. A few suggestions were put forth, including putting policy-relevant articles first, making use of pictures and graphics and having a descriptive and catchy subtitle for the newsletter (tentatively named "SEEA News and Notes") to attract communities beyond the statistical community.
19. It was mentioned that the newsletter has a similar scope as the WAVES Newsletter. The Bureau considered important that the two newsletters cross-reference one another and complement each other. The communication team of WAVES will also be consulted in this regard. Further it was noted that the SEEA newsletter should be used as a vehicle to disseminate any methodological changes to the standard in-between revisions.
20. In order to promote the newsletter, OECD mentioned that the newsletter could potentially be promoted using the OECD statistics newsletter community. This proposal was welcomed by the Bureau, and all members were urged to promote the first issue of the newsletter upon its release.
21. The Bureau agreed with ABS' proposal of a twitter session for the upcoming UNCEEA meeting, and members agreed to look into their institutions' communication strategies to contribute to the discussion in June.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS:**

22. The Bureau reported that the Area Lead of the SDG Group E.2 has left INEGI. INEGI would like to continue leading Area E.2 once a replacement has been secured for Rolando Ocampo. However, this will take some months. The Area Leads agreed to take initiative to promote the SEEA for the SDGs in their own areas until a new area lead for E.2 has been secured.
23. Climate change was proposed as a new area of the UNCEEA in recognition of its growing importance and close links to environmental-economic accounting. The Bureau concluded until an area lead is identified, the work related to coordination and promotion and methodology be split in the existing work areas of the Committee.
24. The Bureau supported the concept note for the UN Statistical Commission side event for the SEEA, which will consist of a general introduction and launch of the EEA revision by the Bureau Chair and a panel discussion highlighting accomplishments of countries that have recently developed national plans for the SEEA and compiled pilot accounts. The panel discussion should be a moderated conversation led by the Chair.
25. UNSD will send out a "save the date" to UNCEEA members for the June meeting, scheduled for 11-12 June 2018. In addition, the dates for the ecosystem accounting forum have been scheduled for 13-15 June 2018.
26. To facilitate attendance of the Bureau meetings, UNSD will plan and send out Bureau meeting invitations for the rest of the year.

27. ISI and IAOS were mentioned as two events in which a session on the SEEA implementation could be featured. Deadline for submission of an invited session for ISI was the end of March 2018 and for IAOS end of February 2018. It was recommended that Group A makes a list of possible events where the SEEA can be promoted.