

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

2 April, via WebEx

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (Chair, Statistics Netherlands), Amanda Clarke (Australia Bureau of Statistics), Anton Steurer (Eurostat), Carolyn Cahill (Statistics Canada), Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands), Pierre-Alain Pionnier, Florian Flachenecker (OECD), Sven Kaumanns, Georg Junglewitz (Destatis), Viveka Palm, Nancy Steinbach (Statistics Sweden), Gerhard Bouwer (Statistics South Africa), Juan-Pablo Castaneda, Sonu Jain (World Bank), Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan (United Nations Statistics Division)
- **Regrets:** Francesco Tubiello (FAO), Philippines Statistics Authority, INEGI

## REVIEW OF THE FIFTIETH SESSION OF THE UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

- The work of the UNCEEA received strong support during the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) 21 countries and organizations made an intervention during the UNSC which focused on capacity building, global databases, SDGs and the SEEA and SEEA and tourism, among other issues.
- The UNSC also reaffirmed the importance of the SEEA in the review of the 2020 of the SDG indicators.
- The UNCEEA also hosted a side-event on ecosystem accounting. Opening speakers included Assistant Secretary General and Chief Economist of the United Nations, Elliott Harris, and Mariana Kotzeva, Director-General of Eurostat, both of whom were very supportive of the work programme.

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

### Training Materials

- Statistics Canada is currently piloting the evaluation grid for training materials and hope to complete this by the end of April.

### Focus of Area A

- The UNSC report mentions the importance of coordinating efforts to mainstream the SEEA in a variety of different policy initiatives, including SDGs, climate change and biodiversity. In this context, the issue of how to narrow the focus of Area A was raised.
- It was agreed that Area A should work to engage in initiatives in an opportunistic manner and prioritize areas where the UNCEEA may have the biggest impact—for example, SDGs, biodiversity, climate change, sustainable tourism and circular economy.
- The potential for overlap between Area A and E was discussed and it was agreed that Area A would focus more on overseeing initiatives and identifying entry points and opportunities, whereas Area E could focus on more regular work on communications and policy applications, including developing narratives based on case studies that can be used as opportunities arise and the compilation of the SEEA News & Notes.

## SDGs

Joint members of the IAEG-SDGs and UNCEEA provided an update on the IAEG-SDGs meeting in Beirut:

- The 2020 SDG comprehensive review was discussed (presentation [here](#)). Under the review, all Tier III indicators will be examined in terms of potential replacement, deletion, refinement or adjustment if the current indicators do not map well to the target or if the methodological development of a Tier III indicator has stalled. This provides a wide range of entry point for the UNCEEA. However, timing is very tight, with proposals being finalized in June/July and global consultation to be held in August.
- In addition, the Interlinkages Group of the IAEG-SDGs will be drafting a chapter on the SEEA for its next report. This effort will be led by Canada and Germany.

UNSD also informed the Bureau that it has been working with the CBD and UNEP-WCMC to incorporate the number of countries implementing the SEEA into SDG indicator 15.9.1. This indicator, which looks at mainstreaming biodiversity into policy and national accounting, would include two parts—one on whether or not countries have a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and the other part on whether or not a country has implemented the SEEA (via the Global Assessment).

### Actions:

- UNSD to provide some previous materials drafted on the SEEA & SDGs to Germany, to provide a starting point for the drafting of the chapter of the Interlinkages report on the SEEA.
- Eurostat will additionally provide feedback it has received from member states to Germany for possible SEEA-based indicators.
- It was agreed that at the UNCEEA meeting in June, concrete proposals on SEEA-based indicators should be made available, so that these can be proposed to the IAEG-SDGs.
- UNSD to send proposed metadata for 15.9.1 to UNCEEA Bureau for review.

## Biodiversity

On behalf of the UNCEEA, UNSD drafted a document for submission to the Secretariat of the CBD, in response to an open call for comment on how to advance the post-2020 Biodiversity Agenda. UNSD reminded the Bureau of the deadline for submitting comments.

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

To help advance the SEEA CF research agenda, the London Group included the research agenda topics on their call for abstracts, sent in January. Thus far, the abstracts have focused more on ecosystem accounting, country implementation and policy. However, Statistics Netherlands will follow up with Eurostat and Statistics Sweden, who are expected to submit abstracts on fossil fuel subsidies and environmental activity classifications, respectively.

Separately, and in preparation for the UNCEEA meeting, Statistics Netherlands, along with UNSD, will be drafting a paper on the potential need for a revision of the SEEA CF.

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

Eurostat discussed the recent progress of the revision:

- Good progress has been made, with five different working groups (spatial units, ecosystem condition, ecosystem services, measurement of specific ecosystem services and valuation) drafting papers to advance the methodology. These papers will go to the SEEA EEA TC and then a wider group of experts for review, in time for the Forum of Experts in June.
- An editorial board consisting of the SEEA EEA TC, area leads and others will be set up shortly to oversee the drafting of the document.

Eurostat also brought up the issue of how to involve the London Group in the revision. It was agreed that issues that are raised during the Forum of Experts in June could be advanced at the London Group meeting in October and then feed into the revision. In addition, it was agreed that the London Group would be a good forum to explore more experimental aspects of ecosystem accounting—for example oceans and urban accounting.

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

The Bureau [noted](#) the progress and way forward on global SEEA databases:

- Notwithstanding the agreement to review and agree on the methodology for estimating countries data, the issue of country consent prior to publishing country data was again brought up at the UNSC. While some countries clearly requested explicit consent, most did not. It was agreed that the UNCEEA would follow what is agreed upon by the statistical community for the SDGs.
- UNSD is developing a workplan for disseminating global databases on the SEEA website, starting with compiling existing data through international agencies. In the meantime, links to existing databases have been posted on the website [here](#).
- The OECD provided an update on advancing the methodology on estimated air emission accounts. In particular, OECD is working on the residence/territory principle adjustment for air transport, which will inform both estimated air emission and estimated energy accounts.

## **AREA D – IMPLEMENTATION AND STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING (led by Gerhardt Bouwer, Statistics South Africa)**

Statistics South Africa reviewed the activities of the group during 2019 Q1:

- Statistics South Africa and UNSD sent out the international coordination survey prior to the UNSC. This survey collected information from Area D members on capacity building activities in countries, which will help inform the next Global Assessment.
- The group also plans to create a database of focal points prior to the next Global Assessment. These focal points can serve as first point of contact when administering the Global Assessment, as well as for communication on data. These focal points will cover

both countries and international agencies. UNSD and Statistics South Africa are currently writing a concept note to distribute to Area D members.

- Statistics South Africa is currently working on a roadmap for the 2020 Global Assessment, to be presented in June at the UNCEEA meeting.

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

The Australian Bureau of Statistics informed the Bureau recent activities:

- ABS and UNSD will release the next newsletter in the coming weeks.
- UNSD, in collaboration with ABS, recently administered a survey to help improve navigation of the website, particularly for the general public and non-UNCEEA members.
- One takeaway from the UNSC was the need for impactful case studies on how the SEEA has been used for policy. ABS will start to collect these, with the aim to present these case studies at the June UNCEEA meeting.

#### **Actions:**

- It was noted that the World Bank WAVES programme has collected many case studies, particularly under their Natural Capital Accounting in Action policy briefs. The World Bank will send ABS some examples, so that they can work together to build from what has already been done.
- CBS has also collected an inventory of case studies, which they will send to ABS.

### **OTHER BUSINESS:**

The agenda of the June UNCEEA meeting was briefly discussed. As usual, the agenda will broadly follow the work areas of the UNCEEA. In addition, there will be a session on business accounting and how to engage with the business community in order to align approaches.