

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

06 September 2018, via WebEx

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (Chair, Statistics Netherlands), Lisa Wardlaw-Kelly (Australia Bureau of Statistics), Anton Steurer (Eurostat), Andre Loranger, Carolyn Cahill (Statistics Canada), Gerhard Eding (Statistics Netherlands), Myriam Linster, Pierre-Alain Pionnier, Florian Flachenecker (OECD), Raul Figueroa (INEGI), Gerhard Bouwer (Statistics South Africa), Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Marko Javorsek (United Nations Statistics Division)
- **Regrets:** Francesco Tubiello (FAO), Romeo Recide (Philippines Statistics Authority), Raffaello Cervigni (World Bank)

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

Training Materials

Statistics Canada reviewed the progress made on the quality assurance of the training materials and plans moving forward:

- Statistics Canada is currently working with UNSD to finalize the draft concept note and evaluation grid.
- To ensure that the review process is streamlined, there is a desire to keep the evaluation relatively short and more high-level while still providing adequate guidance for reviewers.

SDGs

UNSD clarified the situation on the SEEA subgroup of the Interlinkages Working Group of the IAEG-SDGs:

- Following the request of the co-chair of the IAEG-SDGs to the UNCEEA to establish a subgroup of the Interlinkages group of the IAEG SDGs to work on linking the SDGs with the SEEA, the IAEG-SDGs met via WebEx. Some members expressed some resistance to formally establish such a group. In hindsight, it would have been useful for the UNCEEA to be informed that such topic was going to be on the agenda so that a proper briefing could have been given to those in the IAEG-SDGs.
- It is unclear what the status of the group is, UNSD will consult internally on how to move forward, keeping in mind the November meeting of the IAEG-SDGs in November.

Climate Change

On behalf of FAO, UNSD reviewed the recent engagement in the IPCC revision process and steps going forward:

- In order to facilitate engagement, FAO, Eurostat, OECD and UNSD reviewed the second order draft of the revised IPCC guidelines and wrote comments, which were sent to the UNCEEA. Bureau members were encouraged to submit comments, if they had not yet done so, as the deadline for submitting comments is 9 September 2018.

- UNSD noted that they would make a presentation on the SEEA and climate change at the Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Climate Change-Related Statistics in Geneva, Switzerland, 2-4 October. The presentation will be virtual, and members agreed that it would be best if someone from the Bureau is able to attend in-person as well to gather support from countries.
- The Bureau agreed that to keep momentum going, members should keep the next UN Statistical Commission in mind. It was suggested that a position paper could be written after the Expert Forum in October, to gather support from countries in the lead-up to the next Commission.
- The Bureau thanked Francesco Tubiello for his leadership and guidance in engaging the UNCEEA with the climate change community.

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

After the last UNCEEA meeting, Statistics Netherlands has updated the research agenda, which can be found here:

https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/research_agenda_seea_cf_2018_2.pdf

Statistics Netherlands also noted that the updated research agenda will be a background document for the 24th Meeting of the London Group in Dublin, 1-4 October, as the London Group will cover some points on the research agenda (fossil fuel subsidies and classification for environmental activities).

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

Funding has been secured for an editor, thanks to funds from Eurostat, UK and Australia.

However, Bureau members were requested to let Eurostat/UNSD know if their countries have funding available, as it would allow for a broader scope in the revision process.

Eurostat noted that the outline and purpose document had been reviewed, with comments from US and Eurostat. The editor has revised the drafts accordingly and they will be reviewed again at the SEEA EEA Technical Committee meeting. After the meeting, the revised drafts will be circulated to the UNCEEA for another round of comments.

Eurostat discussed the progress of the working groups:

- After the Forum in Glen Cove, it was decided that a fifth working group and a re-arrangement of working groups 3 and 4 was needed. Working group 3 will deal with conceptual issues around the definition and classification of ecosystem services. Working group 4 will shift its focus to specific ecosystem services from a measurement perspective, covering definitions being used, biophysical measurement and valuation, while the fifth group will approach the valuation of ecosystem services from a more conceptual angle, focusing on valuation principles and integration into the accounts.

- The working groups are currently working on issues papers; UNSD explained that the groups will meet between November and December to have in-depth discussions on the issue papers. The November meeting will be for Working Groups 1 and 2 (most likely Paris) while the December meeting will be for Working Groups 3-5 (most likely New York).

UNSD introduced the proposal for a valuation webinar:

- Following the UNCEEA meeting, there is a clear need to address valuation issues within the UNCEEA community to foster continuous engagement of the statistical community and in particular the national accountants; a webinar will most likely take place in October.
- Mexico noted the timeliness of this exercise, considering that they are starting to experiment with monetary ecosystem accounts building on the physical accounts.

The Bureau discussed how to further engage with the National Accounting community:

- The Bureau agreed that the valuation webinar and Working Group meeting in December would be good opportunities to engage with the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts (AEG).
- Eurostat also informed the Bureau that the AEG will meet in November in Luxembourg, which will be a good opportunity to inform on progress on valuation.

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

The Bureau discussed the way forward on water accounts, given the focus on water accounts during and after the UNCEEA in June:

- OECD explained that there is currently a two-phase approach proposed for water accounts, as described in the roadmap, whereby the first phase focuses on statistics and revising the questionnaire for the SDGs, while the second phase focuses on consistency and applicability to the SEEA.
- The timeframe for the revision of the water questionnaire was still unclear.
- The UNCEEA recommended that the SEEA be taken into consideration in case of a revision of the questionnaire and agreed to the OECD proposal to provide an updated roadmap on developing global databases on water in June, considering that the revision of the questionnaire will likely take place in 2020.
- The roadmap on developing global databases should be updated by mid-October for consultation, so as to include it in the report to the Statistical Commission.

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

Statistics South Africa explained that the current focus of the working group is on the 2020 Global Assessment and exploring how the questionnaires for both countries and international organizations can be improved:

- Statistics South Africa noted that potential areas of interest were using the questionnaires to link accounts to policies and identify countries with sufficient environmental statistics, but no current SEEA accounts, among others.
- Statistics South Africa also noted that for the Global Assessment, the group will focus on the implementation of the SEEA by NSOs and line ministries alike.

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

The Australian Bureau of Statistics informed the Bureau of the outline for the third quarter 2018 SEEA News & Notes.

- The Bureau gave their support of the outline.
- The Bureau discussed the appropriateness of cross-posting the same material to different newsletters, namely the SEEA News and Notes and the UNSD Environment Statistics newsletter. UNSD acknowledged that there is some overlap between the two newsletters and that UNSD would address this internally.
- UNSD informed the Bureau that they have recently engaged with a communications consultant, who has proposed some ideas of how to improve the website, in particular for new users and the general public. He will also recommend ways to increase the reach of the Newsletter to subscribers of other Newsletters (e.g. WAVES) The Bureau will be consulted on these changes during the next meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS:

UNSD reminded the Bureau of the upcoming 3rd Forum on Natural Capital Accounting for Better Policy in Paris, France, 26-28 November 2018, in collaboration with WAVES, PBL and NCC.

UNSD also informed the Bureau of a recent grant to be procured with GIZ, focusing on policy applications of the SEEA.