

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

19 May 2020, teleconference

## Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (UNCEEA Chair); Amanda Clark (Australia Bureau of Statistics); Carolyn Cahill, Jeff Fritzsche, Greg Peterson, Ziad Shadid (Statistics Canada); P. Bhanumati, Shailja Sharma, Pravin Srivastava (MOSPI, India); Cesar Cabrera Cedillo, Raul Figueroa, Guillen Martin Francisco, Jose Federico Gonzales Medrano, Eugenio Arguelles Toache (INEGI, Mexico); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Gerhardt Bouwer (Statistics South Africa); Anton Steurer (Eurostat); Viveka Palm (Acting Chair, London Group on Environmental Accounting); Myriam Linster, Peter Van de Ven (OECD); Sofia Ahlroth (World Bank); Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Marko Javorsek (United Nations Statistics Division)
- **Regrets:** FAO, Philippines Statistics Authority.

## 1. SEEA EEA REVISION

- Progress towards the revised SEEA EEA has been going smoothly; chapters 3-5 on ecosystem units, extent and condition have been sent for global consultation, and chapters 8-11 on valuation will be sent for global consultation soon. All of the substantive chapters will be available prior to the UNCEEA meeting in July, and the full manual is on track to be sent for global consultation in October.
- The revision process of the SEEA EEA was discussed during the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN Statistical Commission. Some relevant takeaways included the desire to drop “Experimental” from the title and to elevate the status of the revised manual to that of an international standard. At the same time, it was acknowledged that valuation will remain a somewhat contentious subject—while most international organizations and countries are supportive of the approach/inclusion of valuation in the revised SEEA EEA, a few countries have expressed concerns.
- The Bureau agreed on the importance of elevating the status of the revised SEEA EEA and dropping “Experimental” from the title. It was pointed out that labelling statistics as “experimental” deters countries from regular compilation and implies a lack of consensus on the methodology. Thus, it is imperative for countries establishing a programme on ecosystem accounting that the “experimental” be dropped from the title.
- The Forum of Experts on the SEEA EEA will be held virtually this year, spread over several sessions over a period of 2-3 months. The first day of each session will present the progress of the chapters and the main issues addressed in the global consultation. More details on the Forum were sent out by UNSD shortly after the call.

## 2. 15<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE UNCEEA

- Overall, Bureau members were supportive of the proposed scope and modalities of the next UNCEEA meeting.
- Based on Bureau members' experiences over the last few months, the following suggestions were noted:
  - Breakout sessions should be used sparingly, as they are not always more efficient than plenary discussions and require good moderators. At the same time, it is important that discussion by all participants is encouraged, which is more easily facilitated by smaller breakout groups.
  - Preparation will be key in ensuring a productive meeting.
  - Prior circulation of short and focused papers with clear questions; short and limited presentations to introduce the questions; written comments; using the chat function of the platform; and time limits for interventions will all help manage the discussion and reach clear conclusions.
  - It was suggested to agree on a set of conclusions to be compiled at the end of each day, with a final round of consultations held at the end of the meeting.
  - It was also suggested to move Area B2 to the first day of the meeting, given that it is a high-priority area.
- **Actions:**
  - UNSD to send a Doodle poll to Bureau members confirming their availability during the week of 6 July.
  - UNSD to work with area leads to revise the concept note, organize the session and provide further guidance for participants

## 3. TOUR DE TABLE

- Area leads provided an update on their work and potential topics for discussion at the upcoming UNCEEA meeting.
- Area A: It is timely to develop a programme of work, considering the proposal of bringing together Area A and E. Potential topics for inclusion in the programme of work are: an assessment of the various groups working on environment statistics – as input in the work of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics, mainstreaming of the SEEA for climate change, SDGs and biodiversity, and circular economy.
- Area B1: Possible topics for discussion include the collaboration between the UNCEEA and ISWGNA on the SNA revision, the eventual revision of the SEEA CF, as well as the integration of the SEEA CF and SEEA EEA. However, given that most methodological work over the past year has focused on the revision, it was suggested that the area lead should further explore the most appropriate way to inform the UNCEEA. Another option would be to write a short note presenting the progress for information.

- Area B2: Main issues arising from the consultation of the substantive chapters of the revised manual will be discussed, including the process of engagement with the statistical community and beyond during the remaining six months of the revision process.
- Area C: There is progress in developing global databases for the priority accounts, however this progress has been slower than desired. The Bureau stressed the importance of developing global databases in a timely manner. The discussion during the UNCEEA meeting will include a re-evaluation of the importance of global datasets and a strategy to speed up their development. In addition, progress on global databases for the SEEA EEA may be presented.
- Area D: The Global Assessment questionnaire and establishment of SEEA focal points will be discussed in terms of the 2020 implementation strategy, developing a targeted strategy to step up implementation of the SEEA in countries, and ensuring the link to the SDG indicators (15.9.1 and 12.b.1).

#### 4. AOB

- Dasgupta review: The [Dasgupta review](#) is an independent, global review on the economics of biodiversity, being led by Sir Partha Dasgupta, which was commissioned last year by HM Treasury of the UK. This review will be analogous to the Stern Review on climate change, and the reporting team is currently soliciting comments on the interim report by 1 June 2020. As there is a clear connection to the SEEA in much of the material, the UNCEEA is encouraged to send comments. Given the impending deadline, UNSD will compile draft comments for review by the SEEA EEA Technical Committee and then the Bureau. The wider UNCEEA will also be informed.
- It was noted that the COP-15 on biodiversity has been postponed to 2021. Currently, there is a need to see how to engage the statistical community in the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity monitoring framework. It was suggested that this could be pursued under the future work programme of Area A.
- UNECE is currently working on a paper on circular economy, with Finland and the Netherlands leading the efforts. There may be room for the UNCEEA to be involved to help move forward the use of the SEEA for circular economy and elevate the report to a report to be used at the global level.
- Statistics New Zealand would like to convene a group to see how the SEEA can respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Several participants noted that a green recovery is considered a priority, and that the SEEA could play a role. The UNCEEA should discuss how to engage in this space.
- The global consultation on a set of global climate change indicators will begin soon. The role of the SEEA in climate change may also be discussed at the upcoming UNCEEA meeting.
- **Action:** UNSD to draft a response to the interim Dasgupta review report.