

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

9 December 2019, teleconference

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (Chair, Statistics Netherlands), Carolyn Cahill, Jeff Fritzsche (Statistics Canada); Raul Figueroa (INEGI, Mexico); Peter Van de Ven (OECD); Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Marko Javorsek (United Nations Statistics Division)
- **Regrets:** Amanda Clark (Australia Bureau of Statistics); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Gerhardt Bouwer (Statistics South Africa); Anton Steurer (Eurostat); Vivian Ilarina (Philippines Statistics Authority); Nancy Steinbach (Chair, London Group on Environmental Accounting); FAO; World Bank.

1. UNCEEA REPORT TO THE UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

- Area leads provided a brief introduction to their sections of the report, and participants discussed the report. Overall, the group supported the report.
- UNSD highlighted a few points of interest in the report. On the revision, the report underscores that the Committee wishes to reach an agreed document for the revised SEEA-EEA, for presentation to the UNSC next year. In addition, the report contains some content on the production of guidelines for the SEEA-EEA (biophysical modelling, scenario analysis, valuation). The purpose of including this information is to spread awareness of these materials, as they are very important for increasing and supporting country implementation.
- Participants raised some questions about the status of the ocean accounting work. UNSD explained that the technical guidelines have undergone consultation with experts, but still need to be developed further. There is also concern that the guidelines portray the ocean accounts as a parallel framework to the SEEA and the SNA, whereas it would be beneficial to have ocean accounts integrated under the wider SEEA umbrella. UNSD, together with the UNCEEA Chair will have a teleconference with ESCAP and UN Environment to discuss a potential way forward.
- The Bureau expressed satisfaction with the text and noted that the recent comments by the World Bank, while appreciated, were not quite relevant for the UNSC report. In particular, having detailed time tables require a good amount of time to agree upon, and this level of detail is not necessary for the report. It was agreed that UNSD would convey this message to the World Bank.
- Participants agreed that databases are a high priority and that the Committee should examine ways to speed up progress. It was noted that this could be brought up at the UNSC.
- On Area D, UNSD highlighted that the Global Assessment will become an important data source for two SDG indicators. It may be necessary to run the Global Assessment every year (or perhaps have a lighter version of the Global Assessment every other year). Participants agreed that a meeting of Area D before the UNSC would be timely.

- On the list of discussion questions, members agreed that the list was quite long and should be shortened if possible, further noting that question h) was somewhat redundant.
- Actions:
 - UNSD to finalize the report, taking into account the suggestion to drop question h).
 - The lead of Area C and custodian agencies of the databases will discuss a potential proposal to speed up the progress on global databases. This proposal could be brought in during the discussion at the UNSC. The lead will propose a meeting sometime in January.

2. UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION SIDE EVENTS

- The Committee will have a 3-hour slot on Monday morning. UNSD will put forward a proposal to the Bureau. The current thinking is to have two panels—one focussing more on the user side and policy demands, and another one focusing more on the supply side and progress made on the revision.
- It was noted that the new head of ABS could be a panellist on the users' panel, considering his past experience in the Treasury.
- Other ideas included linking the work to sustainable finance and getting the IMF to present its programme of work.
- The second closed side event will be the Bureau meeting. It was agreed that a Bureau meeting on Monday after the morning seminar would be ideal to reflect on outcomes of the first side event, also to serve as input in the UNSC discussion of the item.
- Actions
 - UNSD to circulate proposal to Bureau along with possible times for the Bureau meeting.
 - UNSD to organize a teleconference with the IMF and the Chair of the UNCEEA on integrating the work of the IMF within the work programme of the UNCEEA, including participation in the side event and contribution to the SEEA research agenda.

3. SEEA EEA REVISION

- On behalf of the area lead, UNSD provided a brief update of the revision. The SEEA EEA Technical Committee is reviewing chapters as they become available. In addition, technical papers on ecosystem services have just gone through broad consultation and drafting of the chapters will soon commence.
- Country testing is beginning on both ecosystem extent and ecosystem condition, to test the IUCN Global Ecosystem Typology and the typology for condition indicators, respectively.
- On valuation and the framing of values, UNSD proposed that the Bureau take a position on which direction to take, in particular whether to only mention exchange values or to take a broader approach to frame how the SEEA could fit into various schools of thought. The presentation and language used to present this material will be very important to ensure buy in from the statistical community. The SEEA EEA

editor is currently drafting a document on this topic that could serve as input in the discussion in the Bureau.

- There will likely be face-to-face meetings of the extended SEEA EEA TC next year. Although webinars and electronic exchanges will take place, there is a need to meet face-to-face to decide on technical issues. The meetings will be scheduled back-to-back with other meetings. One technical meeting on valuation will be held before the Yale Conference in March 2020, and the other one will likely take place in June 2020 back-to-back to the Forum and the UNCEEA.
- Actions:
 - UNSD to circulate the valuation document in early 2020 for consultation of the Bureau.

4. YALE CONFERENCE

- UNSD provided an update on the upcoming Yale conference, [Communicating the Path to Sustainability through Natural Capital Accounting](#). UNSD is partnering with Yale, the Bennet Institute for Public Policy at Cambridge University, the Natural Capital Coalition, IMF and World Bank to bring together a wide range of high-level stakeholders, including representatives of national statistical offices; central banks and ministries of finance; line ministries; businesses; communication experts; academia; and more. The focus of the conference will be to showcase the progress of the SEEA, to get a better understanding of how it can address policy needs, and to arrive at a common narrative on how the SEEA can support sustainable development. The conference will also address how new data sources can support natural capital accounting.
- The UN Chief Economist, Mr. Elliott Harris, and the UNCEEA Chair have already agreed to attend.
- Actions:
 - UNSD to circulate a draft programme to the Bureau for review.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE UNCEEA IN THE NATURAL CAPITAL COALITION

- [The Natural Capital Coalition](#) (NCC) is an international initiative uniting the global natural capital community. It brings together international, national and business entities.
- UNSD was asked to join the NCC. However, given the broad scope of UNSD, the Director of UNSD suggested that the UNCEEA join the NCC instead.
- The Bureau supported joining the NCC, as it would provide a means to encourage initiatives to align with the SEEA and send a common message to stakeholders.
- Actions:
 - UNSD to send the request for membership to the Chair.

6. AOB

- The Chair requested to schedule dates for meetings of the Bureau in 2020.

- As part of the network of the Informal Advisory Group on the long-term approach to mainstreaming the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNSD recently received a draft document outlining the approach. This will provide important input to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and potential targets.
- Actions:
 - UNSD to provide potential dates for meeting of the Bureau in 2020.