

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

12 September, teleconference

Meeting minutes

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

1. FRIENDS OF THE CHAIR GROUP SURVEY

- Participants shared their views on the survey sent by Friends of the Chair Group on the Future of Economic Statistics. The challenge for UNCEEA members to answer the questions that were also received by the various institutions through other groups that they belong to was noted.
- For Q1 of the questionnaire, the UNCEEA felt that the issues identified accurately reflected the priorities for economic statistics.
- The UNCEEA discussed Q3 at length. The SEEA is at the intersection within economic and environmental statistics and as such it needs to interact with economics as well as other areas of statistics. While members did not feel that a new overarching governance structure was needed, they agreed that better coordination with the national accounts community was needed to ensure that initiatives were aligned between the SNA and the SEEA. It was suggested that regular communication between the chair of the AEG and the chair of the UNCEEA could help.
- Participants also noted the importance of having UNCEEA representation in the SNA revision through participation in the Well-being and Sustainability Subgroup of the Task Force on the SNA Research Agenda and through a more structured mechanism. The need for cross-fertilization between those working on the SEEA and those working on the SNA at the national level, in a number of areas, including in the dissemination of the SNA and SEEA products was also raised.
- As for Q4, the need for innovation and testing and experimentation in environmental-economic accounting and in particular on ecosystem accounting was expressed. However, concerns were raised with regard to diminishing budgets as well as institutional and legal constraints on the NSOs participation in innovation.

Actions:

- Bureau members to send written comments or input to UNSD.
- Considering the deadline of 30 October, UNSD to draft a response to be shared with the Bureau and possibly to be reassessed after the meeting of the London Group (7-10 October) and then with the UNCEEA.

- The Chair of the UNCEEA will consult with the Chair of the London Group to ensure coordinated responses from the two groups.

2. SEEA EXPERIMENTAL ECOSYSTEM ACCOUNTING

a. Forum and Technical Expert Meeting

- Overall, the Forum and Technical Expert Meeting were a success, helping drive forward progress of the SEEA EEA revision
- Eurostat thanked UNSD and all the revision Working Groups (WGs) leads for their hard work

b. Editorial Board

- The extended SEEA EEA Technical Committee (SEEA EEA TC plus WG leads, plus OECD) will serve as the editorial board. OECD is now onboard as a co-publishing agency.
- The Editorial Board had its first meeting in June on the margins of the Forum of Experts and since August will hold regular monthly meetings to review and discuss the draft chapters.
- By early 2020, the editorial board will have reviewed all chapters. First global consultation, on individual chapters (though not necessarily in order), will also begin in early 2020 and the second global consultation, on the whole document, will be undertaken in late 2020 before the submission to the UN Statistical Commission for approval in March 2021.
- Participants agreed on the contents of the letter asking editorial board members' organizations for their release.
- **Action:** UNSD to send letters to editorial board members' organizations

c. Working Group papers

- Two WG5 papers, on valuation and accounting treatment, are currently out for broad consultation (deadline for comments being 13 September 2019). WG3 on ecosystem services and WG5 are currently working on additional papers that will go out for broad consultation soon.
- Papers for WG1 on ecosystem extent and WG2 on ecosystem condition have already gone through broad consultation and chapters on the two topics have been drafted. These WGs are now planning to organize country testing in selected countries, including some of the countries participating in the INCA and MAIA Projects, some of the partner countries in the Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) project, and other interested countries (e.g. Canada).

d. IPBES Value Assessment

- IPBES has released a value assessment draft report which looks at different values for ecosystems and biodiversity; the UNCEEA is encouraged to comment on the value assessment report in particular with the objective of alignment, where possible, with the SEEA.

- A meeting between selected members of the IPBES value assessment group and the UNCEEA community to discuss common recommendations for overlapping areas will take place 24 September.
 - **Action:** UNSD will draft comments and circulate them to all members of the UNCEEA, encouraging them to submit the comments.
- e. **Engagement with the AEG**
- Members supported greater exchanges between the SEEA and the national accounts communities.
 - Bureau members identified the Well-being and Sustainability Subgroup of the Task Force on the SNA Research Agenda as a key entry point for the Committee on the SNA revision and recommended close involvement in this group.
 - Participants voiced their support for the paper prepared by Peter Van de Ven (OECD) and Carl Obst on the SEEA, which was reviewed by UNSD and will be presented at the October AEG meeting.
 - **Action:**
 - i. UNSD to circulate the documents prepared for the AEG meeting to the Committee, asking members to support the paper.
 - ii. OECD to indicate that the UNCEEA Bureau welcomes the paper during the presentation of the paper at the AEG meeting.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

- ABS and UNSD provided a brief update on the narratives initiative. The case studies collected from the UNCEEA earlier in the year will provide a solid basis for crafting narratives on the value added and benefits of using the SEEA for policy. A consultant is being hired by UNSD to develop narratives that arise from the case studies collected, as well as others.
- Eurostat noted that the incoming European Commission has made a European Green Deal one of its headline priorities. In particular, zero emissions, circular economy and taxation are themes which could resonate with policy makers.
- Eurostat also noted that the European Court of Auditors has recently audited the European accounts. The findings could also be of interest to the initiative.
- **Action:** Eurostat to share results of audit, once available.

4. REVIEW OF GROUPS UNDER THE UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

- The UNCEEA (and London Group on Environmental Accounting) have recently received a letter from the Bureau of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) asking its views on interlinkages between the various groups working in the environment thematic area under the auspices of the UNSC, including potential streamlining.

- Given the impending deadline, it was agreed that the response should focus on the relationship of the UNCEEA to the London Group, for which text already exist. As for the other groups, the response could suggest taking a more careful look at the terms of reference of these groups but indicating that there are no initiatives of streamlining.
- It was agreed that Area A on Coordination could expand its plans to examine the ToRs of the groups under and closely related to the UNCEEA to include the other environmental groups under the auspices of the UNSC. Members noted that this could help further collaboration.
- **Action:** UNSD to draft a response, sharing with the Bureau and London Group, and then with the wider UNCEEA.

5. GIZ PROJECT

- UNSD provided a brief update on the GIZ project, funded by BMZ through GIZ. Three issue papers on the policy applications of the SEEA for biodiversity, climate change and macroeconomic issues are being written. The project also includes an overview paper on how the SEEA fits into initiatives such as the Beyond GDP movement, SDGs and circular economy. The papers will be circulated to the UNCEEA later this year.

6. YALE CONFERENCE

- UNSD introduced the conference “Communicating the Path to Sustainability through NCA”, to be held at Yale University in March 2020, focusing on policy applications and communication of NCA and invited the Bureau to suggest possible invitees.

7. IUCN MOTION

- UNSD introduced the motion submitted by Conservation International on the SEEA EEA. The motion will be introduced at the IUCN World Congress in 2020 for adoption, after having gone through an on-line review and voting process during the period of December 2019 to March 2020.
- The motion already has received support from South Africa and Mexico. UNSD will notify members when the voting takes place.