

# **Third Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting**

## **Minutes of the Meeting**

**(United Nations, New York, 26-27 June 2008)**

### **Agenda item 1 - Opening of the meeting**

1. The Meeting was opened by Mr. Ivo Havinga, on behalf of Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). It was chaired by Mr. Walter Radermacher, Chair of the UNCEEA and President of the Federal Statistical Office, Germany.

2. In his opening remarks the Chair addressed the relationship between measuring climate change and official statistics. In particular, he raised two questions. He raised two questions. The first question was whether there is a real need to mainstream the measurement of climate change in official statistics. The answer to this question is that there is a clear need for information that allows to develop strategies towards a sustainable society. The second question was whether there is a need for a system approach to climate change statistics or would a sequence of different themes suffice. The answer to the second question is that there is a need to organize the information through the accounts which constitute the backbone of the information system and present it in the form of indicators (too much aggregation in the form of indices is not in the realm of official statistics because of the underlying assumptions necessary for their computation).

### **Adoption of the agenda**

3. To accommodate the request of some UNCEEA members, the order of several agenda items was changed as reflected in these minutes.

### **Agenda item 2 - Governance and mandate of the Committee (*for decision*)**

4. The Committee agreed to broaden its mandate to cover not only environmental-economic accounting but also environment statistics including statistics on climate change.

5. The Committee requested to clarify the text in the paper UNCEEA/3/5 explaining the process that led to the request to broaden its mandate. It identified the Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics (Oslo, 14-16 April 2008) as well as the discussion on environment statistics at the meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (Geneva, 12-13 February 2008) as contributing to the proposal for changing the mandate of the UNCEEA.

6. The Committee requested the Secretariat to refine the text on the work programme. In particular, it recommended that statistics on climate change and spatial frames are explicitly mentioned as part of the work programme of the UNCEEA.

7. With the broadening of the mandate, the Committee affirmed the importance of a focused work programme and reiterated that in the short and medium term the revision of the SEEA remains the highest priority for the UNCEEA.

8. The Committee agreed to change its name to United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Environment Statistics. It however did not consider necessary to change its acronym – UNCEEA – which was considered to be an established name for this committee.

9. The broadening of the mandate and the proposal of the creation of an Advisory Group on Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting has implications on the various groups working under its auspices. The Committee discussed the role of those groups. In particular, it recommended that the terms of references of the Inter Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (ISWGES) should be reconsidered. It requested the group prepare a paper on the future of the ISWGES for discussion at the next UNCEEA meeting.

10. The Committee agreed with the proposal to establish an Advisory Group on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Environment Statistics consisting of experts in environmental-economic accounting and environment statistics named to be members by the Bureau of the UNCEEA taking into consideration regional representation. The Advisory Group would be a standing body of the UNCEEA advising it on technical matters discussed by the various city groups and other technical expert groups. In the medium and short term, the Advisory Group would give high priority to issues on the research agenda for the revision of the SEEA. To reduce burden on travel and resources, it is recommended that for the moment, the Advisory Group be composed of a subset of members of the London Group and meet back-to-back to London Group meetings. The composition of the Advisory Group should be reviewed in due course to ensure expertise beyond environmental-economic accounting depending on the topics being addressed by the various groups. The Advisory Group will be chaired by one of the members of the Bureau on a rotating basis.

11. The London Group on Environmental Accounting will continue to exist and will be the city group which will address the majority of the issues on the research agenda for the revision of the SEEA. It will submit its recommendations to the Advisory Group, which in turn will submit its recommendations to the UNCEEA.

**Agenda item 14 - Coordination of environment statistics – outline of paper for the Conference of European Statisticians (*for information*)**

12. The UNCEEA took note of the paper UNCEEA/3/21.

**Agenda item 7 - Revision of the SEEA**

**a. Project Management Framework for the revision of the SEEA (*for decision*)**

13. The UNCEEA agreed with the project management framework as presented in the paper UNCEEA/3/11. It requested the Secretariat to update the paper taking into consideration the broader mandate and governance discussed under agenda item 2 and to make editorial changes on the basis of the comments received by the UNCEEA members in writing by the end of July.

14. Although different views were expressed with regard to the coherence and feasibility of the timeline for the revision of the SEEA, the UNCEEA agreed with the proposal in the paper UNCEEA/3/11, namely with submitting Volume 1 of the revised SEEA and corresponding parts of Volume 3 to the Statistical Commission in 2012 and Volume 2 and corresponding parts of Volume 3 in 2013.

15. The UNCEEA noted that the proposed time schedule is dependent on raising the necessary funds to launch the project with the hiring of an editor and possibly of a project

manager. In the context of the proposed time schedule, it stressed the urgency to raise the necessary funds for the success of the project.

#### **Agenda item 6 - Land and ecosystem accounting – progress report (*for discussion*)**

16. The UNCEEA congratulated the European Environment Agency (EEA) with the progress made in the development and applications of land and ecosystem accounting. It took note of the various initiatives that are currently taking place in Europe and more broadly at the international level.

17. The UNCEEA considered premature to decide on the proposal of the EEA to take over the work on Volume 2 of the revised SEEA. Some of topics pertaining to land and ecosystem accounting, for example classifications of land cover/land use should be addressed as part of the standard in Volume 1, while other issues, for example valuation of ecosystem services pertain to Volume 2. The UNCEEA expressed concerns with regard to the feasibility of the proposal and requested that a review of the feasibility of land and ecosystem accounting in particular for developing countries be undertaken. The UNCEEA requested a sub-group of its members consisting of Brazil, Canada, Eurostat and the Chair of the London Group to prepare a paper presenting the way forward on land and ecosystem accounting for discussion at the next London Group meeting.

#### **Agenda item 3 - Knowledge-based platform, example of an interactive tool (*for information*)**

18. The UNCEEA took note with interest of the presentation by Statistics Sweden on its website on environmental-economic accounting. In particular, it considered its interactive simulation tool very useful for dissemination allowing to combine information from different databases. Environmental economists in various government agencies as well as several users from academia consider this tool very useful for analysis. Statistics Sweden is working with Eurostat on using the model for energy and emission accounts. UNSD expressed a clear interest with the assistance of Statistics Sweden to explore the possibility of using such a tool on the UNCEEA website to enhance its knowledge-based platform.

#### **Agenda item 7 - Revision of the SEEA**

##### **b. Funding of the project on the revision of the SEEA**

##### **i. Information brochure (*for discussion*) ii. Concept note (*for discussion*)**

19. The UNCEEA welcomed the draft Brochure and Concept Note. It expressed the need to improve on the presentation and refine the text. In particular, it recommended presenting the usefulness of the SEEA for analysis highlighting the fact that it is a unique framework to address policy questions concerning the interrelationship between the economy and environment. The brochure should not raise high expectations on the calculation of environmentally-adjusted aggregates, although it should mention that such aggregates can be calculated. Mainstreaming environment statistics and elevating the SEEA to an international statistical standard should not be presented at the outset. The UNCEEA members should send their comments on the Brochure to the Secretariat by the end of July. A revised version of the brochure will be printed and used for fundraising as well as for distribution during the meeting with the users' community which will take place in conjunction with the London Group meeting in Brussels in September 2008.

20. The UNCEEA reiterated the responsibility of its members to actively contribute to raise the funds for the SEEA revision process. In particular, it requested the Chair and the Secretariat

to send out a letter to the UNCEEA members requesting contribution in cash and in kind at the same time, it urged the UNCEEA members to actively find out how much their office could contribute. The UNCEEA also requested the Chair to follow-up with face-to-face meetings with the major contributors.

#### **Agenda item 4 - Climate Change (*for discussion*)**

21. The UNCEEA took note of the conclusions of the Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics (Oslo, 14-16 April 2008). As a follow-up to the Conference, the UNCEEA agreed with the proposal in the paper UNCEEA/3/7 that a work programme on statistics on climate change should be developed under the auspices of the UNCEEA. It requested the Bureau and the organizers of the Conference to develop the work programme based on the discussions held at the special session of the third UNCEEA meeting on climate change (New York, 25 June 2008) and then submit it to the UNCEEA for endorsement.

22. The work programme should take into consideration synergies with the on-going revision of the SEEA. It should cover not only mitigation but also adaptation, which is very relevant for developing countries. Furthermore, it was recommended to investigate the inclusion of simplified techniques that can be applied in the developing countries situations.

23. The UNCEEA encouraged its members to establish cooperation with the agencies responsible for reporting to the UNFCCC and it requested the Chair and Secretariat to establish cooperation with the IPCC in order to move forward the statistical work on climate change.

24. The UNCEEA recognized the urgency and importance for the statistical community to become engaged in the development of methodologies and reporting of emission inventories. The UNECE proposed that a task force be established under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), subject to the approval of the CES Bureau, to coordinate the work on emission inventories. The proposal was made taking into account the fact that most countries with experience in reporting of emission inventories are member of the UNECE. The Bureau of the UNCEEA will consider this offer together with the programme of work on climate change.

#### **Agenda item 5 - Energy statistics and accounting**

##### **a. SEEA-Energy: Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*)**

25. The UNCEEA agreed with the scope and coverage of the SEEA-E, the draft annotated outline as well as the time line. It stressed the importance of including renewable and nuclear energy as part of the standard tables. It considered SEEA-E as a very useful input in the SEEA revision process, as standard tables and text could literally be taken from the SEEA-E and used in the SEEA. The London Group will have to decide on what tables to include in the SEEA.

26. Some UNCEEA members argued that the process of writing standards for specific topics (e.g. SEEA-Water, SEEA-Energy, SEEA-MFA) could take up resources that would have otherwise been used for the revision of the SEEA. Others on the other hand argued that the drafting of those standards contributed substantially to the advancement of the list of issues in research agenda for the revision of the SEEA.

27. Some UNCEEA members questioned the usefulness of having a chapter on energy-related emissions as these comprise only a part of the total emissions as reported in emission inventories. It was agreed to continue the work as planned that is to develop bridge-tables for combustion-related emissions and to reconsider at a later stage whether to include it in the SEEA-E.

28. The UNCEEA reiterated the need for close coordination between the work on the SEEA-E and the work being undertaken by the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics on the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics and by InterEnerStat on the harmonization of definitions of energy products and flows.

**b. International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES): Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*)**

29. The UNCEEA agreed with the scope and coverage as well as the draft annotated outline of IRES. It expressed concerns on the timeline which is ambitious and noted that possible delays may occur. The UNCEEA urged the Oslo Group to reach an agreement on terms, definitions and classifications on basic energy statistics and expressed concerns when informed that this may not be obtained.

**Agenda item 10 - Report of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics (*for information*)**

30. The UNCEEA took note of the report of the Oslo Group and welcomed the presentation by the Chair of the Oslo Group describing the main issues regarding concepts and use of terminology.

**Agenda item 8 - Linking agriculture statistics to environment statistics (*for discussion*)**

31. The UNCEEA was informed of the current situation of agriculture statistics at the international level. It welcomed the international efforts to revitalize agriculture statistics including the establishment of a network of agriculture statisticians. The UNCEEA considered important to follow and contribute to the work on agriculture statistics given its obvious links to the environment. Several UNCEEA members offered to become engaged in the activities of the agriculture statistics group.

32. The UNCEEA agreed that agriculture statistics should be on the agenda of its next meeting.

**Agenda item 16 - Election of Chair and Bureau of UNCEEA**

33. Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics was elected as the new chair by acclamation. The UNCEEA thanked Walter Radermacher, who has chaired the UNCEEA for its first three year, for his leadership and achievement.

34. The UNCEEA endorsed as members of the Bureau the following members: Peter Harper (Chair UNCEEA and Deputy Australian Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics), Rashad Cassim (Deputy Director General, Statistics South Africa), Estrella Domingo (Deputy Secretary-General, National Statistics Coordination Board, Philippines), Pieter Everaers (Director, Eurostat), Peter van de Ven (Head of National Accounts, Statistics Netherlands), Karen Wilson (Assistant Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada), UNSD (Secretariat UNCEEA). A replacement for Walter Radermacher (ex-chair and President Federal Statistical Office Germany) will be decided at a later stage in a transparent way.

**9. Report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting (*for information*)**

**i. Draft outcome papers**

35. The UNCEEA noted with satisfaction the progress made by the London Group on Environmental Accounting especially in the area of depletion. It considered useful the approach being taken to structure the agenda of the London Group meeting in such a way that selected

experts can be invited to participate in the discussion of specific issues. This is the case, for example of engaging experts working on the manual on measuring capital, when discussing depletion and engaging experts of the Oslo Group when discussing issues related to energy accounts.

36. The UNCEEA noted that the issue of valuation has not moved forward. It agreed with the proposal of the Chair of the London Group to establish a group composed of members of the London Group, national accountants and academia. The UNCEEA however noted that the group on valuation should be given clear direction on what issues to address to keep the agenda manageable and avoid reopening old debates. It requested the Bureau to develop the terms of reference for such a group for its endorsement.

#### **Agenda item 11 - Material Flow Accounting**

##### **a. SEEA-MFA: Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*)**

37. The UNCEEA agreed with the scope and coverage as well as its annotated outline of the SEEA-MFA. It considered the SEEA-MFA as a useful input in the SEEA revision process, as standard tables and text could literally be taken from the SEEA-MFA and used in the SEEA.

38. The UNCEEA stressed the need for continued cooperation with Eurostat and the OECD to ensure that only one manual on MFA is produced in order to avoid confusion for the users. It was agreed that the SEEA-MFA replace Volume 2 of the OECD guidance documents. In this regard, the UNCEEA agreed with the OECD proposal not to formally publish volume 2 of the OECD guidance documents and only make it available in the interim until the SEEA-MFA is available.

39. The UNCEEA requested UNSD to consult with the Chair of the London Group, Eurostat and OECD on the timetable to ensure that all the outputs on MFA are fully coordinated.

##### **b. Report of the OECD Group on Material Flow Accounts (*for information*)**

40. The UNCEEA took note of the Recommendation of the Council on Resource Productivity and OECD's programme of work for the coming years.

#### **Agenda item 12 - Water statistics and accounting**

##### **a. International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS) (*for discussion*)**

41. The UNCEEA expressed satisfaction with the progress made in the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA) and it agreed with the suite of publications envisaged.

42. The UNCEEA agreed with the scope and coverage, the annotated outline and the time line of the IRWS. It agreed that population and social statistics linked to water is outside the scope of IRWS and should only be addressed marginally through the presentation of selected data items (e.g. MDGs.).

43. The UNCEEA stressed the importance of developing compilation guidelines in addition to the IRWS, which are planned to be developed in 2009.

44. The UNCEEA recognized the importance of water from a climate change perspective.

#### **Agenda item 13 - Report of the Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (*for information*)**

45. The UNCEEA was informed that the Bureau of the CES is considering establishing a new taskforce that will continue the work on the development of long-term indicators based on the capital approach. The Bureau will decide finally whether to establish this taskforce and, if so, what its mandate will be at its meeting in Washington D.C. in October. The Terms of Reference of the taskforce, if established, will be communicated to the UNCEEA as soon as they are finalized.

**Agenda item 15 - Progress report on Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental - Economic Accounting – Phase 2 (*for information*)**

46. The UNCEEA took note of the progress report.

**Agenda item 17 - Other**

47. Eurostat, the host of the 13<sup>th</sup> London Group Meeting, informed the UNCEEA that the meeting will take place in Brussels from 29 September to 3 October. One day, 1 October, will be dedicated to an outreach meeting to demonstrate usefulness of environmental-economic accounting to the user community, a good opportunity to target potential donors.

48. The fourth meeting of the UNCEEA is scheduled to take place in New York from 24-26 June 2009.

## Annex I Time schedule and tasks

The table below outlines the detailed time schedule agreed at the Third Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and the tasks of countries and organizations.

|    | <b>Tasks</b>   | <b>Countries/<br/>organizations</b>                  | <b>Deadline</b>  |
|----|--|--|--|
| 1. | Revise paper on the governance and mandate (UNCEEA/3/5)  | UNSD   | September 2008   |
| 2. | Prepare a proposal on the future of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (ISWGES)           | ISWGES   | April 2009   |
| 3. | Draft a proposal on membership of the Advisory Group on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Environment Statistics | Bureau UNCEEA  | September 2008   |
| 4. | Revise and finalize paper on the project management framework (UNCEEA/3/11)  | UNSD   | September 2008   |
| 5. | Fund raising<br><br>Letter to be sent out to UNCEEA members requesting contribution in cash and in kind              | All<br><br>Chair and Secretariat                     | As soon as possible<br><br>July 2008                   |
| 6. | Paper on the way forward on land and ecosystem accounting  | EEA, Brazil, Canada, Eurostat and Chair London Group | September 2008 (for discussion at the next LG meeting) |
| 7. | Proposal on programme of work on climate change  | Bureau UNCEEA  | November 2008  |
| 8. | Develop terms of reference for a technical expert group on valuation   | Bureau UNCEEA  | November 2008  |

## Annex II ORGANIZATION OF WORK

**Thursday, 26 June 2008**

*Registration of participants (9:30-10:00)*

*Morning Session (10:00 – 1:00)*

1. Opening of the meeting
  - a. Opening statement by Paul Cheung, Director, United Nations Statistics Division
  - b. Opening remarks by Walter Radermacher, Chair UNCEEA and President Federal Statistical Office, Germany
  - c. Adoption of the agenda (UNCEEA/3/1)
2. Governance and mandate of the Committee to encompass environment statistics environmental-economic accounting and statistics on climate change (*for decision*) – Paper prepared by the Secretariat (UNCEEA/3/5)
3. Promotion of environmental-economic accounting
  - a. Knowledge-based platform, example of an interactive tool (*for information*) – Presentation by Statistics Sweden (UNCEEA/3/6)

*Afternoon Session (2:30 – 6:00)*

4. Climate Change (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/7)
5. Energy statistics and accounting
  - a. SEEA-Energy: Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/8)
  - b. International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES): Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/9)
6. Land and ecosystem accounting – progress report (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by the European Environment Agency (UNCEEA/3/10)

## Friday, 27 June 2007

### *Morning Session (10:00 – 1:00)*

7. Revision of the SEEA
  - a. Project management framework, including timeline, of the revision of the SEEA (*for decision*) – Paper prepared by the Secretariat (UNCEEA/3/11)
  - b. Funding (UNCEEA/3/12)
    - i. Information brochure (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by the Secretariat
    - ii. Concept note (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by the Secretariat
8. Linking agriculture statistics to environment statistics (*for discussion*) – Presentation by Eurostat (UNCEEA/3/13)
9. Report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting (*for information*) (UNCEEA/3/14)
  - i. Draft outcome papers (UNCEEA/3/15)
10. Report of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics (*for information*) (UNCEEA/3/16)

### *Afternoon Session (2:30 – 6:00)*

11. Material Flow Accounting
  - a. SEEA-MFA: Process leading to the publication (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/17)
  - b. Report of the OECD Group on Material Flow Accounts (*for information*) – Paper prepared by OECD (UNCEEA/3/18)
12. Water statistics and accounting
  - a. International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS) (*for discussion*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/19)
13. Report of the Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (*for information*) – Paper prepared by UNECE (UNCEEA/2/20)
14. Annotated outline of paper on coordination of environment statistics for the Conference of European Statisticians (*for information*) – Paper prepared by Chair and Eurostat (UNCEEA/3/21)
15. Progress report on Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting – Phase 2 (*for information*) – Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/3/22)
16. Election of a new chair
17. Other
18. Conclusions

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