

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE BUREAU
UN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS
ON ENVIRONMENTAL-ECONOMIC ACCOUNTING
(Oslo, 14 and 16 April 2008)

Participants

Walter Radermacher (Chair, UNCEEA), Peter Harper (Australian Bureau of Statistics); Robert Smith on behalf of Karen Wilson (Statistics Canada); Olav Ljones (Chair, Oslo Group on Energy Statistics); Peter van de Ven on behalf of Mark de Haan (Chair, London Group on Environment Statistics) (Statistics Netherlands); Pieter Everaers (Eurostat); Paul Cheung and Alessandra Alfieri (UNSD).

Estrella Domingo (National Statistical Coordination Board, Philippines) and Rashad Cassim (Statistics South Africa) were absent.

Agenda

1. Strengthening the role of the London Group on Environmental Accounting
2. Outreach meeting in conjunction with the next London Group meeting (Brussels, 29 September to 3 October)
3. Time schedule for the SEEA and appointment of Project Manager and Editor
4. Funding
5. Valuation of degradation - how to go forward?
6. Letter from Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP
7. Implications of the conclusions of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians for the UNCEEA
8. Other
 - (a) The UNCEEA and the Climate Change Conference
 - (b) Agricultural statistics and its links to environment statistics

Agenda item 1 – Strengthening the role of the London Group on Environmental Accounting

The Bureau discussed different options for strengthening the London Group on Environmental Accounting, including sending a letter to the heads of national statistical offices participating in the London Group requesting their active participation as well as a more active engagement of the national accountants in their offices in the revision process of the SEEA.

A formalized group, similar to the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts, whose members will be selected on the basis of their expertise rather than institutional representation was considered the way forward while ensuring a balance of expertise (environmental-economic accounts, environment statistics and national accounts) and regional representation. The Group would have the role of advising the UNCEEA on technical issues, including addressing the issues on the research agenda for the revision of the SEEA.

A proposal for the governance of the new group will be prepared by the Chair and Secretariat for discussion at the Third meeting of the UNCEEA in New York (26-27 June 2008).

Agenda item 2 – Outreach meeting in conjunction with the next London Group meeting

Eurostat is organizing a meeting of the London Group members with the users' community consisting of the European parliamentarians, academia, etc. The meeting should raise awareness of the usefulness of the SEEA in policy making and could be used as an opportunity to raise funds. To this end, donors should also be invited to attend.

Agenda item 3 – Time schedule for the SEEA revision project and appointment of Editor and Project Manager

A proposal on the time schedule for the revision process of the SEEA will be prepared by the Chair of the London Group in cooperation with the Secretariat for discussion at the Third meeting of the UNCEEA in New York (26-27 June 2008). The Bureau noted the urgency of completing Volume 1 of the SEEA and requested to carefully look into the feasibility of completing it by 2011. However, the time schedule of the SEEA revision is tightly linked with the funding needed to recruit the Editor and the Project Manager. The Bureau expressed concerns about the potential delays in recruiting the Editor and Project Manager.

The Bureau agreed that, contingent on the funding, the target date for the hiring of the Editor and possibly of the Project Manager should be 1 January 2009, which could be considered the official "kick-off date of the Project" with the new staffing. The idea of a kick-off date was more to motivate the fund raising and agree on a target date by which funding for the first year salaries of the Editor and Project Manager would be in place. The Chair, the Secretariat and the Bureau members would make all the efforts to raise the necessary funds.

The terms of reference for the Editor and Project Manager should be agreed upon during the next meeting of the UNCEEA.

Agenda item 4 – Funding

The Bureau recognized the urgency of finding funds for the project and urged to develop a strategy for raising funds. As a first step, the Chair and Secretariat would approach possible donors via face-to-face meetings and explain the usefulness of the project. Bureau members should also play a role in trying to raise funds starting from their own organization. As a second step, a letter would be sent to national statistical offices requesting their financial contribution.

The Bureau also considered useful preparing a brochure presenting the usefulness of environmental-economic accounting and the terms of reference of the project.

Agenda item 5 – Valuation

There was no time to discuss this agenda item. The Chair requested the Secretariat to undertake written consultation on how to move forward.

Agenda item 6 – Letter from Achim Steiner, Executive Director UNEP

The Bureau discussed Achim Steiner's reply to the Chair's letter and considered it a strong signal from UNEP to contribute to the revision of the SEEA. Rather than sending a reply, the Bureau considered more appropriate an informal meeting between the Chair, the Secretariat and Mr. Steiner to further elaborate the terms of UNEP's contribution.

Agenda item 7 – Implications of the conclusions of the meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians for the UNCEEA

The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians at its last meeting in February 2008 recognized the UNCEEA as the only body providing coordination to environment statistics. It requested the UNCEEA through its Chair and Pieter Everears (Eurostat) to prepare a paper with a proposal on how to proceed in environment statistics, taking into account the interests of different groups active in the area.

The Chair and Eurostat will prepare a draft annotated outline of the paper for discussion at the next UNCEEA meeting.

Agenda item 8 –Other

(a) The UNCEEA and the Climate Change Conference

The Bureau concurred that the discussions at the Conference were leading towards considering the SEEA as a useful framework for climate change which should be seriously considered. Given the umbrella function of the UNCEEA in environmental-economic accounting and related statistics, the Bureau did not consider appropriate establishing another group coordinating and overseeing the statistical work on climate change. Rather, it proposed, depending on the outcome of the Conference, to broaden its mandate to cover not only environmental-economic accounting but also environment statistics, indicators and spatial frameworks in so far as they are part of official statistics. It was also suggested to rename the UNCEEA to reflect the broader mandate beyond environmental accounting. The UNCEEA would thus liaise with International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the Chair having the role of representing the statistical community.

The Conference concluded that the UNCEEA was the appropriate body to oversee the work on statistics for climate change. New terms of reference reflecting the broader mandate of the UNCEEA will be prepared by the Secretariat and discussed at the next meeting of the UNCEEA (26-27 June 2008).

Given the implications of the Conference on the activities of the UNCEEA, the Bureau welcomed the proposal of the Chair to have a ½ day plenary meeting in New York to discuss a plan of action for climate change statistics on 25 June 2008.

(b) Agricultural statistics and its links to environment statistics

There was no time to discuss this agenda item. It will be added to the agenda of the next Bureau meeting.

Time schedule and tasks

| Tasks | Countries/ organizations | Deadline |
|---|---|----------------|
| 1. Agenda for the UNCEEA meeting | Chair and Secretariat | End April 2008 |
| 2. Governance of the strengthened London Group on Environmental Accounting | Chair UNCEEA and Secretariat | May 2008 |
| 3. Time schedule SEEA revision project | Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the London Group | May 2008 |
| 4. Face-to-face meetings with potential donors | Chair and Secretariat | When feasible |
| 5. Fund raising | Bureau | When feasible |
| 6. Brochure on usefulness of environmental-economic accounting | Secretariat | June 2008 |
| 7. Informal meeting with Achim Steiner | Chair and Secretariat | When feasible |
| 8. Annotated outline of paper for the Conference of European statisticians | Chair and Eurostat | June 2008 |
| 9. TOR of the Committee of Experts to cover broader mandate | Chair and Secretariat | May 2008 |
| 10. Organization of ½ day meeting on the implications of the Climate Change Conference on the UNCEEA (25 June 2008) | Bureau | May 2008 |