



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

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OPENING STATEMENT

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Dear Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations particularly because it is the first time that UNSD hosts the meeting of the London Group on Environmental Accounting in New York. The role and contribution of the London Group to the advancement of methodologies in environmental-economic accounting is well-known in the statistical community. This occasion provides me opportunity to express my appreciation to you personally. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Statistics Canada and especially of Rob Smith, who has been the Secretary of the London Group for the past decade and has provided a great deal of support to the smooth functioning of the Group. I would also like to thank the Coordinating Committee for organizing this meeting and especially Martin Lemire of Statistics Canada and Ole Gravgard of Statistics Denmark.

The London Group has been instrumental in the preparation and publication of the SEEA which represents a major step forward towards the standardization of concepts, definitions and classifications in environmental-economic accounting. Its release marked an important milestone of the international statistics community to develop comparable environmental statistics integrated with national accounts statistics for a comprehensive analysis of the interaction of the economy and the environment. Without any doubt, the agreed measurement of the natural wealth and the services rendered by the environment has further contributed to the full recognition of the environment as a major factor in the development.

More recently the London Group has contributed to the preparation of the handbook *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources*, commonly referred to as SEEAW, which was presented three weeks ago at a User-producer Conference on Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management in Voorburg. I am pleased to inform you that the handbook was very well received and was endorsed by the users as THE hydrological-economic statistics and indicator information system in support of Integrated Water Resource.

In addition to having contributed to the advancement of methodology in environmental-economic accounting, the London Group has been able to raise *awareness* on the importance of the SEEA framework in organizing environmental and economic information in a common system. We have come a long way since 1993 when the SEEA was first issued as an interim report but we still have long way to go and big challenges to meet. Thanks to the work of the London Group, the international community recognizes the importance of mainstreaming environmental-economic accounting and elevating the SEEA to the level of an international standard. We are entering in a new era in which the SEEA will become part of official statistics in 5 years time. We are embarking into a major and challenging initiative of the international statistical community in which the London Group has a major role to play.

The international environment has changed as a result of this new challenge. Many of you know that the United Nations Statistical Commission has created the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA) with the objectives of (a) mainstreaming environmental-economic accounting and related statistics; (b) elevating the SEEA to an international statistical standard and (c) advancing the implementation of the SEEA in countries. The UNCEEA consists of high-level experts from national statistical offices and international organizations chaired by Walter Radermacher, Vice-President of the German Statistical Office. He is known to many of you because of his expertise, interest and involvement in environmental-economic accounting. Under his capable leadership, the UNCEEA will, among other responsibilities, steer the process of the SEEA update, with your cooperation.

The UNCEEA has requested the London Group to consider accepting as part of your work program a considerable part of the research agenda which is currently being developed (also with your contribution and assistance). This meeting will be instrumental in having a preliminary consultation on the research agenda and an agreement on how to move it forward. I would like to stress the complementarity of the work programmes of the UNCEEA and the London Group and the importance for both groups to work together in.

The change of the international environment and the high priority that the international community puts in the update of the SEEA, call for the continued involvement of the London group. Other city groups had been asked to review their modus operandi to meet new challenges in their respective areas. I am confident that the London Group will meet the challenge and will continue to play a major role in the development of methodologies and raising awareness of environmental-economic accounting.

In closing, I would like to wish you success in the deliberations during the next three days and I am looking forward to the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you.