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**Opening Statement**  
Peter Harper, Chair of UNCEEA

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6th Meeting of UNCEEA  
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**Peter Harper, Chair of UNCEEA**

Good morning and welcome everyone to this sixth meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. This sixth meeting of the Committee comes at a critical stage for the development of SEEA and we have a range of issues to discuss and a full agenda. The decisions that we take during this meeting will have significant implications for the future of environmental-economic accounting. I encourage everyone to participate in the discussions as it is important we have a collective view of the way forward.

Before I say a few words on the agenda, I would first like to take this opportunity to thank the SEEA Editor, Carl Obst, and the members of the Editorial Board for their excellent work. They are working under considerable pressure and tight deadlines and are putting extra efforts to ensure a quality and timely output. Countries and international agencies are all actively engaged in the SEEA through reviewing and commenting outcome papers and now draft chapters, seeking consensus with the broader community of experts beyond the statistical offices. The process leading to the revised SEEA is in itself a very valuable exercise to ensure the buy-in and eventually the implementation of the SEEA. I am pleased of the progress made and commitment of countries and I am confident that with your support and assistance we will be able to meet the deadline of February 2012 for submitting the SEEA central framework to the UN Statistical Commission for adoption as an international standard.

There are many initiatives at the global level that see the relevance of greening the economy and refining how we measure and assess the path towards sustainable development. Just to name a few, looking ahead towards Rio+20, OECD's Green Growth strategy and UNEP's Green Economy are particularly noteworthy given the potential political impacts at the global level. Other initiatives, including the European Commission's Beyond GDP, and recent developments in international policy under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, among other international agreements, have put a renewed importance and urgency on the need for the standardization of methods and definitions for environmental accounts and statistics. Therefore, the adoption of the revised SEEA will be very timely. I want to stress once again the importance of active engagement from this group. The adoption of the SEEA by the Statistical Commission will represent an important achievement of this Committee and it is important that we all take a collective ownership in this process to help keep this work on track.

In addition to the central framework, that has been the priority of the work of this Committee, I am pleased to note that work has advanced also in taking forward a concrete proposals for Part II of the SEEA on experimental accounts for ecosystems and Part III on extensions and applications of the SEEA. The demand on the statistical community to develop a measurement framework for ecosystems is very pressing.

The World Bank project –Wealth Accounts and Valuation of Ecosystem Services – known as WAVES is very much looking at the work of this Committee on the development of the conceptual framework so that they can start the implementation work in countries. The European Commission is also looking at ecosystem accounts as one of

the modules to be included the directive on environmental accounting, which is entering into force in different phases. The Convention of Biodiversity is also looking at ecosystem accounts as the measurement framework to support its recently adopted strategy which envisages the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the national accounts. This approach is also being taken up by countries. Australia is experimenting with ecosystem accounts with ABS reaching out to the scientific and policy community.

As official statistician, we cannot ignore these demands, It is actually noteworthy that the statistical community is being consulted at the early stage of the process – which has not been the case in other instances. We have the opportunity to shape up the work in this emerging area of statistics which will become increasingly important in the near future and will remain prominent in the national and international agenda for many years to come. We cannot miss this opportunity and should engage with the scientific and ecological economics communities to develop the conceptual framework for ecosystem accounts. Between now and 2013 when we are expected to deliver part II of the SEEA to the Statistical Commission we will probably be able to develop a general approach to ecosystem accounts which would need to be validated with country experiences and detailed and further revised over time. Nevertheless, it is important to set the ground for this emerging area of statistics.

The work on ecosystem accounts is an extension of the recent initiatives on geospatial information in the context of official statistics. Within the UN system ECOSOC is as we speak discussing the proposal by the UN Statistical Commission to establish a UN Committee on the Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM)

which will be supported by UNSD and report to ECOSOC. The linkages between statistics and geographic information and the application of GIS technologies is the main focus of its work. At the European level, the Geographic Information System of the European Commission (GISCO), led by Eurostat promotes geo-referencing of statistics and collaboration between national statistical institutes and mapping agencies and Eurostat co-leads the INSPIRE initiative on the introduction of a European Spatial Data Infrastructure. Initiatives like these have clear relevance to the SEEA, in particular to ecosystem accounts. I encourage you to engage with these groups.

The SEEA is increasingly receiving the recognition as the central framework for environment-economy information. But we still need to show the case for the SEEA to the broader community beyond this Committee, both statistical and beyond. In this context, Part III on extensions and applications of the SEEA represent an important component of the framework. Addressed to analysts and data producers, it will help to demonstrate the need to go the step further from the collection of basic data to the integration in the accounting framework. We all know why it is important to organize the information in the accounting framework. It is important that the benefits of this exercise are clearly communicated. This is critical to the successful implementation of SEEA. The increasing demand for indicators, as evidenced by the new indicator initiatives, as well as for integrated data for modelling the relationship on the environment-economy present an opportunity for the SEEA to be promoted as the underlying conceptual framework for the derivation of indicators. The UNCEEAA has a role to play to ensure that the upcoming indicator initiatives use definitions consistent with those of the SEEA.

This will ensure that the data underlying the indicators come from official statistics and therefore meet the highest quality standards. We should make every effort to ensure coherence and convergence of these initiatives. We owe it to the countries as in due course they will be asked to compile these indicators and may be required to establish new ad-hoc data collection to respond to these demands. There is a risk that scarce resources be used in ad-hoc initiatives rather than leading to the development of the national statistical system. I encourage the UNCEEA to engage with these initiatives.

With the adoption of the central framework of SEEA expected in 2012, it is important that this Committee begin to focus its attention on implementation, particularly in identifying a core set of standard tables and accounts for countries to compile. UNSD, for its part, intends to continue its work on the implementation of water and energy statistics and accounts. With the recent completion of International Recommendations for Energy Statistics, the plan is to have an integrated program for capacity building in energy statistics and accounts as has been our strategy for water. But the work on implementation of SEEA more broadly will depend heavily on the collaborative efforts of all UNCEEA members. I am pleased that the Committee is discussing at this meeting ideas and tools for implementation, particularly in countries where there is not much experience in environmental accounting.

We all know that the work of the UNCEEA is supported and complemented by the work of city groups such as the London Group on Environmental Accounting, the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics and other groups working in the field of environmental-

economic accounting and supporting statistics. Regular communication and sharing of information is a key role of the UNCEEA to ensure synergy of programme of work.

We as members of the UNCEEA have a collective responsibility to ensure the successful completion of the SEEA, its acceptance in the national statistical system and by the users and its regular implementation in countries. Your contribution to the revision process in terms of reviewing and commenting current drafts is greatly acknowledged. However, that is not enough. Ensuring the acceptance of the SEEA requires that we, as ambassadors of the UNCEEA, try to identify where the uncertainties and risk lie and collectively try to address them. The wide consultation process on the draft chapters and on the complete document presents and opportunity to actively reach out to others in your countries and regions to help us broker solutions and reach firm agreements on the methodologies at the global level. This is the last UNCEEA meeting before the central framework will go to the Statistical Commission I therefore urge us to discuss possible areas where consensus may require special attention and develop a strategy on how to address the issues that will inevitably arise. I personally am ready to help in any way I can.

Without your commitment to the project we would not have been able to be where we are now, with the goal to submit Part I the central framework to the next Statistical Commission within reach. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your support for this project. This is a high profile project for the statistical community and in order to ensure its successful completion, financial resources in addition to the ones we have already secured will need to be raised to cover the salary of the editor and his travel.

I am looking at you for your continued support in obtaining the necessary additional resources.

Before I close, it is with sadness that I report the death of a former colleague, Estralla Domingo, who passed away a few days ago on 11 June. Estralla was an active member of this Committee and also of the Bureau. Estralla was a former Assistant Secretary of the National Statistical Coordination Board of the Philippines. She will be missed, and our thoughts and prayers are with her family and colleagues.

I would like to thank the staff of the UNSD for all their hard work, not just for organising this meeting but for the significant assistance they have provided in the development of SEEA. In particular, I'd like to thank Alessandra Alfieri for her tremendous, indefatigable, efforts.

In closing I would like to wish all of us success in our deliberations and I look forward to the favourable outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you.