



System of  
Environmental  
Economic  
Accounting

# **Expert group meeting – Towards a Standard International Classification on Ecosystem Services**

**20-21 June 2016**

**Two United Nations Building, DC2-1684**

**New York, United States**

## CONCEPT NOTE

### 1. BACKGROUND

The need for an international standardized classification of ecosystem services was recognized during the Forum of Experts on Ecosystem Accounting at its second meeting, held in April 2015 in New York. The classification based on agreed criteria, principles and rules would allow for a comprehensive, mutually exclusive measurement of ecosystem services ensuring comparability at different spatial and temporal scales at country or international level. The increasing demand to obtain a better understanding of the contribution of ecosystems to the economy and human well-being calls for an agreed classification system for ecosystem services to better assess the trade-offs related to the sustainable management and use of ecosystem assets for the purposes of benefitting the economy and society.

Already, several classification structures for ecosystem services have been developed and applied. The most notable ones are the Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES), the US Environmental Protection Agency's Final Ecosystem Goods and Services Classification System (FEGS-CS) and the National Ecosystem Services Classification System (NESCS). CICES was developed, among other things, in support of environmental accounting and has consequently been applied, primarily in Europe for various purposes, including assessments, mapping and accounting of ecosystem services. CICES used the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) and The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) classifications as starting points. The Final Ecosystem Goods and Services Classification System FEGS-CS, developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency, is based on a strict definition of final ecosystem services with each ecosystem service explicitly linked to an environmental type and a defined beneficiary. These static final ecosystem goods and services (FEGS) are considered stocks. In conjunction with FEGS-CS the National Ecosystem Services Classification System (NESCS) has been developed to classify the

---

flows of ecosystem services from particular environments as defined by the FECS-CS to economic uses and users. NESCS offers a modular capacity that may enable it to couple to the classification codes for any formal industrial classification system.

Starting from the classification systems used, CICES, FECS-CS and NESCS, the meeting is expected to discuss the stated principles underlying the two classification systems and develop a way forward towards an agreed multi-purpose classification of ecosystem services (or system of linked-up classifications). The meeting is organized as part of the project to develop a multi-purpose international classification on ecosystem services (or system of linked-up classifications) which is broadly guided by the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting - Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EEA) and builds on practices of existing classifications; in particular CICES, FECS-CS and NESCS.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the meeting are as follows:

- i. Elaborate and agree upon a set of principles, criteria and characteristics for a multi-purpose classification (or system of linked-up classifications) to be used, among other things for the compilation of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounts;
  - ii. Discuss the principles underlying CICES, FECS-CS and NESCS and evaluate them against a set of for the above-mentioned agreed principles, criteria and characteristics for a multi-purpose classification (or system of linked-up classifications) to be used, among other things for the compilation of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounts;
  - iii. Discuss a possible structure of the classification of ecosystem services for ecosystem accounting, (based on agreed criteria and principles) and relations with other classifications used in official statistics
- IV. Agree on the next steps towards a standardized, multi-purpose international classification (or system of linked-up classifications), including for the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting
-