

EEA and EEA Scientific Committee

Approach and an engagement plan for 2021–2024 term

26 May 2021

Introduction and context

The endorsement of a multi-annual engagement plan between the EEA and the EEA Scientific Committee (SC) draws on the discussions at the 78th SC meeting 10-11 February 2021, which was followed by a consultation on a final proposal, for approval at the 79th SC meeting 26-27 May 2021.

The engagement plan is aligned with the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 and the sequential EEA Single Programming Documents (SPD) that implement the Strategy. The time period of four years is chosen to cover the terms of most SC members (both those that have recently joined the SC and those that have started their second term), the changing EU policy cycle in 2024, the finalisation of the drafting of the SOER 2025 in late 2024 and the expected mid-term review of the EEA-Eionet strategy around the same time.

As with previous years' engagement efforts, it will be a **rolling plan** that prioritises the needs for EEA to bring new knowledge insights to the table in line with the new strategy. The plan will also allow both for flexibility and smooth adaptability, and for changes in response to changing internal and external factors and developments such as EU policy developments in the light of Covid-19 and the arrival of a new EEA Executive Director from mid-2023.

Objectives for the multi-annual engagement plan

The overarching purpose of this multi-annual plan is to **serve as a strategic basis and direction** for the work of the EEA with SC, thus contributing to strengthening the role of the EEA (and Eionet) as knowledge broker at the science-policy interface. In the coming years, as per the Strategy to 2030, EEA and Eionet will have a central role as the trustworthy European environment and climate knowledge provider in response to the transformative framework established by the 2019-2024 European Green Deal's inclusive and systemic policy setting and objectives, and their reflection in the 8th Environmental Action Programme foreseen to run until 2030, alongside UN-Agenda 2030 and SDGs.

A key process and output towards achieving EEA-Eionet's vision – delivering trusted and actionable knowledge in line with Europe's policy ambitions – is the series of European environment state and outlook reports (SOER) published by the EEA every five years since 1995, as mandated by its governing regulation. SOER is an integrated assessment process that has developed from an initial focus of primarily reporting on environment and climate trends to becoming an increasingly holistic approach centred around systems, systemic challenges, and transitions to sustainability.

Towards the next edition of SOER in 2025, EEA and Eionet aim at further knowledge integration, in line with the integrated character of the European Green Deal policy priorities. The development of the knowledge base for SOER 2025 will have to be finalised by mid-2024 at the latest and will take place in a more crowded knowledge landscape as the European Commission embarks on its own monitoring initiatives under the Green Deal, the 8EAP and the Strategic Foresight Initiative.

The development of the knowledge base underpinning SOER 2025 will happen through knowledge developments and associated key outputs (reports, briefings, stakeholder processes, etc.) within the

five thematic areas of work as defined in the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-30, as well as through a few key cross-cutting knowledge investments currently under development which will run across these five work areas. This multi-annual engagement plan seeks to **identify strategic opportunities for the SC to either support existing activities in the five work areas or contribute new knowledge inputs through its own efforts in cooperation with EEA.**

In line with this, the plan should provide a platform for the Scientific Committee to explore possibilities for producing its own outputs and results over the period. EEA's revised framework for communication articulates a modern and online-based suite of products and dissemination services. On that basis, opportunities will arise for the Scientific Committee to plan either articulated contributions to selected EEA products or develop its own direct output value-chain with EEA (e.g., seminar proceedings, notes, briefings, scientific articles, social media activities).

Engagement plan dimensions

The proposed multi-annual plan comprises three major dimensions of work for the SC:

1. Formal obligations of the SC.
2. Individual thematic engagements of SC members.
3. Roles and activities of the SC as a whole.

The **formal obligations** of the SC are described in the EEA regulation and as such they are not specific to this proposed multi-annual plan 2021-24 but apply to the SC at any time. They comprise advice to the EEA's Management Board (MB) and the Executive Director (ED) through two formal opinions. Firstly, the SC is mandated to give an annual opinion on the sequential EEA Single Programming Documents (SPD) and the Annual Work Plan. Secondly, an SC opinion is required on EEA annual recruitment of scientific staff, and thirdly the Scientific Committee is obliged to provide formal advice on any scientific matter that the MB or the ED might request.

Individual thematic engagements of SC members relate to interactions of SC members with EEA staff, European Topic Centres (ETCs), MB and Eionet. Such interactions can be driven by the specific motivations and interests of SC members to get engaged but also by support needs as expressed by EEA staff. The level of engagement and interaction can vary depending on the topic and process. It can cover, inter alia, advice on methodologies and approaches, providing networking and linking to scientific networks or relevant EU-funded projects (e.g., Horizon Europe), exchanges on latest scientific evidence, involvement in EEA project activities (workshops etc.) in an advisory capacity, review of draft EEA products, involvement in capacity building exercises such as through the EEAcademy, or involvement in scoping exercises that could inform new activities with the EEA.

The engagement needs to be pragmatic given available SC-EEA resources and competencies, to respect the SC formal roles as described in the EEA Regulation, and to prioritise areas of novel, shared interests. The latter includes strengthening knowledge for long-term sustainability transitions, building knowledge competences with EEA-Eionet through the EEAcademy, as well as addressing strategic future challenges. In that context, inviting PhD work under the EEAcademy and supervised by SC members could be an option to explore further. Overarchingly, as mentioned in the previous section, a particular focus for individual engagements should also be given towards generating input for SOER 2025.

Roles and **activities of the SC as a whole** refer to the collective dimension of the SC, aimed at carefully selecting a limited number of topics of common interest for the SC to convene around in the next 3-4 years. The formation of subgroups of several SC members to work on specific topics is also a possibility. The identification of topics of common interest needs to be informed by the strategic interests and investments by the EEA and Eionet on the one hand and the interests by the SC on the other hand.

From the EEA's side, a stronger focus on solutions-oriented knowledge in support of sustainability transitions represents a key priority beyond knowledge on systems and systemic challenges. Likewise, aspects such as long-term pathways to sustainability, socio-economic dimensions and policy analysis need to be discussed in making EEA's work resonate in the EGD context and its potential successor. Alongside, possibilities for enhancing data analytics (in an era of big data and new opportunities emerging from Copernicus) and communication aspects are also central, to harness the full potential of digitalisation and address some issues of data timeliness.

The 78th SC meeting (10-11 February 2021) provided valuable insights into interests and priorities from the SC's side. For example, there is clear interest in exploring possibilities for working on solutions and solutions-oriented knowledge from a variety of different disciplinary entry points, such as through systems analysis, behavioural science or chemical sciences; while solutions are important, the strength of the EEA-SC should remain in linking clear analysis to any solutions suggested. Likewise, there is interest to investigate issues related to policy and sustainability governance more broadly (incl. legal aspects), forward-looking sustainability issues, the potential of big data (e.g. to derive meaningful indicators) and data interoperability, cities, multiple lenses such as post-normal science, and socio-economic aspects. Strong interest has also been voiced for a focus around resilience from various perspectives (socio-ecological systems, adaptive capacities, social resilience, resilience management, etc.).

A comparison of the EEA's needs with the interests of the SC reveals a high level of overlap and convergence. This has led the EEA to preliminary identify **five cross-cutting and interconnected clusters of work** that could form the backbone of the joint work of the SC in the coming 3-4 years, with a view towards supporting knowledge needs that transverse Strategy work areas (on sustainable consumption to illustrate it, for instance) and in doing so contribute to SOER 2025 (see also Table 1). Each of the clusters could be taken up by a subgroup of SC members.

A. Enabling Europe's sustainability transition: the role of policy and governance

The European Green Deal and its underlying strategies and policy initiatives is arguably the most ambitious policy package for a true transformation of Europe towards sustainability. Yet, many governance dimensions around it need careful attention to help making it a success (e.g. the changing global governance context; multi-level governance processes; policy performance measurement / new metrics, policy mixes, legal aspects).

B. Applying foresight: The future of Europe / the EU.

With the strategic foresight agenda led by vice-president Maroš Šefčovič, foresight has moved to centre stage in the EU. The idea that a society's resilience is directly linked to its ability to anticipate implies a need for foresight approaches to support long-term policymaking. This provides big opportunities for the EEA to support EU policy in strengthening its sustainability objectives with anticipatory knowledge but also to bring a long-term perspective for the future of Europe to the table, as input towards a EGD successor post-2024.

C. Unravelling solutions knowledge: case studies for a sustainable Europe by 2050

Sustainable solutions are a key notion of the European Green Deal, in particular in relation to key societal systems as energy, mobility and food, but they are typically developed and implemented at national, regional and local levels. EEA-Eionet with its direct access to the countries has a unique opportunity to bring these to the surface and to help understanding how current knowledge, measures, social practices and experiences can inform policy actions towards implementing the high EGD ambitions.

D. The potential of digitalisation and big data to generate sustainability knowledge.

EEA's potential to be a significant actor of the "fourth paradigm" of science (data-rich/driven, added to empirical, theoretical, computational): *"Everything about science is changing because of the impact of information technology and the data deluge"* The (new) possibilities of data science (data collection – sensors, indicators, data integration – cloud, big data, and data analysis – AI, machine learning) provide an opportunity for EEA-Eionet to contribute with data integration tools and innovative data analysis routines that bridge the gap between data and integrated knowledge findings on sustainability, in support of high-level decisions.

A. Knowledge for building a resilient Europe.

The European Green Deal installed resilience as a new compass for EU policies, making it clear that Europe needs to enhance its resilience, socio-ecological at the core – which is the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair and democratic manner. EEA-Eionet knowledge can help inform the connected green and digital resilience agendas, inter-alia by identifying interdependencies with socio-economic resilience, employing a range of different approaches such as foresight and take a closer look at which economics approach is adequate for the tasks of the EEA.

Specific issues as raised during the 78th SC meeting (e.g. post-normal science, behavioural change, toxicological studies, etc.) or expressed in the initial EEA scoping paper to this proposal (e.g. analysis of key production-consumption systems, human health aspects, socio-ecological systems, etc.) could be addressed within the five overarching clusters or as cross-cutting issues running across multiple clusters, as feasible and desirable. It is the joint EEA-SC responsibility to ensure such cross-cutting issues are included in considerations across the five clusters. For all the clusters, the members of the SC would be tapping into their existing scientific networks for harvesting knowledge and intelligence, to help bridging the EEA with the broader scientific community and other scientific bodies.

Table 1: Overview of clusters of work

Theme	EEA-Eionet strategy link	SC members involved	EEA Programme anker
A. Enabling Europe's sustainability transition: the role of policy and governance.	SO1, SO2, WAs 1-5	Ana Iglesias, Claire Dupont, Joachim Spangenberg, Louis Meuleman, Malgorzata Grodzińska-Jurczak, Mikael Skou Andersen, Susana Viegas	IAS (lead), CET, HSR, NCE
B. Applying foresight: The future of Europe/the EU.	SO1, SO2, SO3 WA 5	Alberto Arribas Herranz, Claire Dupont, Jana Friedrich, Joachim Spangenberg, Louis	IAS (lead), HSR

		Meuleman, Malgorzata Grodzińska-Jurczak, Robert Barouki, Susana Viegas	
C. Unravelling solutions knowledge: case studies for a sustainable Europe by 2050.	SO2 WAs 1-5	Claire Dupont, Jana Friedrich, Joachim Spangenberg, Karl Vrancken, Mikael Skou Andersen, Robert Barouki, Susana Viegas	HSR (lead), CET, NCE, IAS
D. The potential of digitalisation and big data to generate sustainability knowledge.	SO4	Alberto Arribas Herranz, Karl Vrancken	DIS (lead), COM
E. Knowledge for building a resilient Europe.	SO1, SO2 WAs 1-5	Alberto Arribas Herranz, Claire Dupont, Jana Friedrich, Joachim Spangenberg, Karl Vrancken, Malgorzata Grodzińska-Jurczak, Robert Barouki, Susana Viegas	NCE (lead), IAS, CET, HSR

SO = Strategic objective WA = Work Area

IAS = Integrated Assessments for Sustainability Programme

CET = Climate Change, Energy and Transport Programme

HSR = Health and Sustainable Resource Use Programme

NCE = Natural Capital and Ecosystems Programme

Tasks associated with engagement plan dimensions

Table 2 specifies a range of concrete tasks for each of the three work dimensions, which need to be specified further through upcoming interactions with the SC. Especially for dimensions 2 and 3 of the engagement plan, the list is not exclusive and could be extended or modified on a rolling basis.

Table 2: Overview of tasks associated with the three dimensions of the engagement plan

	Work area dimension	Potential SC task	Who	Comments
1	Providing formal opinions (EEA Regulation)	• Contribution to consultations on SPD	Individuals	
		• Input on SPD through formal SC opinion	Committee	
		• Yearly follow-up of uptake of input by EEA in particular Annual Work Programmes in rolling SPDs	Committee	New, where the aim is to motivate both sides
		• Input on EEA recruitment through formal SC opinion	Committee	
		• Input on any other formal SC opinion, as requested by the MB or the ED	Committee	
2	Individual thematic engagements	• Support to staff recruitment through participation in selection committees	Individuals	Need a broader set of SC members participating
		• Development of staff relations/competences through interactions on issues of SPD relevance and mutual interest (advice on methodologies and approaches, exchanges on latest scientific evidence, etc.)	Individuals sub-groups	
		• Participation in EEA project activities (e.g. topical workshops, conferences and EIONET workshops)	Individuals	Need more visibility in workshops and where SC members can contribute
		• Review of draft EEA products (thematic reports, briefings, SOER 2025)	Individuals sup-groups	Scientific reviews are a very strong instrument. They are usually more effective if done by few individuals
		• SC support to ETC scoping, selection, programming, and evaluation	Individuals	
		• Development of relations with ETCs as appropriate through bilateral/cluster interactions on issues of MAWP relevance and mutual interest	Individuals sub-groups	
		• Providing a bridge between EEA and research networks of SC members	Individuals	

	Work area dimension	Potential SC task	Who	Comments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the implementation of EEAcademy (e.g. lectures, connecting EEAcademy with scientific networks) 	Individuals	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervision of PhD work under the umbrella of the EEAcademy 	Individuals	Needs further exploration
3	Activities of the SC as a whole: five clusters of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint EEA/SC seminars on hot and/or emerging issues associated with the five clusters of work 	Committee, sub-groups, individuals	Seminars co-organised with the EEA
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of spin-offs products from joint EEA/SC seminars (e.g. reflection papers, scientific journal papers, etc.), as feasible 	Sub-groups, individuals	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of/highlighting cross-cutting issues 	Sub-groups, individuals	E.g. discuss consumption not only as an appendix to production systems. Partly addressed by the Social Practice Theory, but so far applications of this approach have been either abstract or more on the local or case study. Provide new insights for coherent transition policies, as addressed by a suitable Pressure-Policy-Matrix.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of/highlighting interactions across themes (synergies, conflicts, trade-offs, alternative approaches) 	Sub-groups, individuals	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing short updates 'latest knowledge in our fields', or short literature reviews as relevant on the themes 	Sub-groups, individuals	