



16 November 2011

OPINION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EEA ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2012

As stipulated in Article 8(5) of the EEA Regulation, the Scientific Committee is consulted on the EEA Annual Work Programme before the Executive Director submits it for approval by the Management Board.

The Scientific Committee has been closely involved in the consultation process on the Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2012 undertaken in recent months and has also been presented with a revised version of this AWP, including the consolidated comments received from different stakeholders during the consultation period.

The Scientific Committee agrees on the main points of this opinion presented hereafter that will be forwarded to the EEA Management Board in advance of its meeting on 23 November 2011, when the EEA AWP 2012 shall be adopted.

The Scientific Committee of the European Environment Agency offers the following remarks:

The AWP 2012 is an ambitious and well-structured work programme, in line with the objectives of the current EEA and its Strategy for the period 2009-2013.

Major priorities, which build on those of 2011, are clearly stated at the outset, i.e.

- Resource efficiency, the green economy and ecosystem accounting;
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- Implementation of new ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to support environmental observation, monitoring, reporting and assessment and
- Supporting environmental reporting and the implementation of SEIS within the European Neighbourhood (east and south) and Russia and *inter alia* the Mediterranean and Arctic; with a special focus on Water.

However while the document is clear in terms of procedure and organization, it is less clear how it relates to its stated major ambitions, how such ambitions can be accomplished (methods, data, etc.), as well as what constitutes relevant performance benchmarks for later ex post evaluation. Scientists familiar with the subject matter could assess the feasibility of such an approach, the expected outcome, and offer advice. Grouping information in the way outlined above would facilitate the review.

The AWP provides a detailed overview of the activities envisioned for 2012, the type of work involved or the respective major target audiences, the networks involved, and indicative budget figures. The new presentation in the form of tables identifies well the role of the Agency in the Group of Four –as leader, contributor, or supporter—, the main products, as well as the links to policy.

The provision of budget figures is useful, but it is neither clear whether they are consolidated figures, including salaries and the ETC funding, nor is it easy to assess whether the resources are sufficient to the ambitious tasks at hand. We recommend to provide total resource allocations per specific effort.

Although the synthetic nature of the document is welcome, its readability would be facilitated by a general introduction which would place the AWP in the perspective of the MAWP 2009-2013, with an indication of those activities that may have had to be increased due to new priorities or emerging issues; those that may lag behind or where inflections have been made; or an indication of those that will have to be continued or postponed to the next MAWP.

One of the inevitable drawbacks of the necessary synthetic approach is that it is difficult to provide a scientific assessment of the work proposed, since there is no room for details on the methods or data sets to be used, or statements whether the data available are sufficient in number, or coverage or quality to reach the objectives listed.

One would like to see explicit attention for treatment of uncertainties and weighing of evidence in EEA-products, since some work has been planned for this and next year.

The implementation of new ICT is most welcome if it facilitates reporting, data sharing, and serves broad classes of users, stakeholders, and a large public. However, "*the medium must not become the message*", and data quality must always be of paramount concern.

Given that several references to biodiversity indicators are made in different contexts, one could be more specific, e.g. do they refer to community composition or functional response?

One may consider that the "Direct policy support to EU legislation" proposed in the tasks on Environment and Health be developed in the context of the REACH evaluation to take place in 2012, including the REACH baseline study of EUROSTAT.

There has been recently considerable interest and controversy on bio-energy, an issue that could be explicitly followed up and we recommend to do so under the rubric of "land and land-use."

It would be of interest that the tasks on Energy include a review of EU legislation (i.e., Energy-related directives), with regard to policy coherence and consistency and simplification.

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SIGNED

Detlef Sprinz, PhD
Chairman, EEA Scientific Committee