

Note of the Informal preparatory meeting for *Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments*

European Environment Agency

16-17 February 2010

Objective

The meeting was convened by the EEA to exchange ideas and discuss future activities leading up to the preparation of the "Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments" (EEAoA) report and especially the setting up of the Steering Group on Environmental Assessments (SGEA).

Attendance

The meeting was attended by Anatoliy Dernovoy (Executive Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Kazakhstan, Co-Chair of SGEA); Bulat Yessekin (Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Kazakhstan); Talaibek Makeev (Director of the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia); Mikhail Kokine (Secretary to the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, UNECE).

The EEA participation included: Jacqueline McGlade (Executive Director, EEA, Co-Chair of SGEA); Gordon McInnes (Deputy Director, EEA); David Stanners (Head of International Cooperation, EEA); Adriana Gheorghe (Cooperation EU Neighbours and Central Asia, EEA); Mike Asquith (Communications, EEA); Thomas Henrichs (Biodiversity and ecosystems, EEA); Paolo Meozzi (Knowledge development support services, EEA); Svetlana Maenchen (International cooperation, EEA); Petra Fagerholm (Executive Director's office, EEA).

Fritz Schlingemann (Special Advisor to EEA) joined the discussions on the second day of the meeting.

Discussion points

Anatoliy Dernovoy stressed the importance of EEA's expertise in conducting assessments, and its choice of methodologies.

Jacqueline McGlade reiterated the need of encouraging national experts in the EEAoA process to describe their national situation with environmental assessments and reporting to the international community, and to show how local knowledge and national expertise link up across regions.

Mikhail Kokine referred to CEP's decision on the expected outcomes of the EEAoA report: to provide a critical review of existing environmental assessments that are of relevance to the region and the two selected topics for the Astana Conference, to identify gaps and emerging issues, and to prepare proposals on how to build a framework for continuous pan-European assessments, including the extension of EIONET to non-EIONET countries.

The Steering Group composition

The nominations received from countries for the SGEA were reviewed. Taking into account the need to achieve optimal balance in the composition of the SGEA to sustain the work, special attention was paid to the representation of all subregions

and the inclusion of international organisations and other key players. From this a list of 21 members emerged, consisting of:

- Co-chairs: EEA and Kazakhstan (2);
- Countries: Czech Republic, Georgia, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, USA and Uzbekistan (10);
- EU rotating Presidency: Spain (1);
- European Commission: DG Environment (1);
- Intergovernmental bodies: UNECE/WGEMA Chair and Chair of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment under the UNECE water convention (2);
- International and regional bodies: UNEP, OECD, UNDP, CAREC (4);
- Civil society: Eco-Forum (1).

This proposal will be communicated to the extended Bureau of UNECE/CEP for consideration and decision at its meeting on 16-17 March 2010 in Geneva.

AoA approach and methodology

Discussions on technical issues focused on the template proposed by the EEA to serve as a tool for the groups of experts to analyse the relevant assessments and to compile the relevant data on which the EEAAoA will be based. The template should cover, among other issues, the scope and thematic coverage of existing assessments, data and quality control, indicators and assessment tools, institutional arrangements for assessments and their communication. It was agreed that in this way the EEAAoA would be able to provide inputs to the discussion of the two themes of the Astana Conference (water and related ecosystems and the green economy).

Role of countries

The country nominations of national focal points (NFP) and thematic experts for the EEAAoA were appreciated. The Co-Chairs agreed that the role and engagement of the countries in the EEAAoA process was of paramount importance. This should therefore be taken strongly into account when designing the main steps of the process including clarifying the role of NFPs as country contacts for providing and channelling inputs and feedback during the process.

Clarification of the major steps in the AoA process

During the meeting, the Co-Chairs clarified the first main steps in the process. As an initial step, a call for evidence needs to be issued by the Steering Group to the countries and other relevant bodies. Based on the results of this call, an inventory of relevant reports and assessments will need to be compiled and the relevancy of the assessments will need to be evaluated against agreed criteria. Groups of experts, including those nominated by countries will then need to examine the relevant reports against an agreed template. These results will then be used by the experts to identify good assessment practices, gaps in the assessment base and emerging issues, and to prepare recommendations for improvement.

Additional aspects

It was also agreed to investigate the possibility of including in the EEAAoA process contributions from countries on their own monitoring and reporting activities, highlighting the two conference themes and other specific issues important for each country. Guidelines for Part C of EEA's 2010 State and Outlook Report used to gather such material can be an input to this novel work, which is expected to be welcomed by countries.

The EEA also demonstrated the use of the Eye-on-Earth platform (<http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/explore-interactive-maps/eye-on-earth>) which has the potential to underpin, sustain and support the EEAOA process, giving wide access to the evidence gathered, showcase the findings and prompt feedback.

Steering Group priorities

The urgent task for the Steering Group is to decide on the scope, focus and outline of the EEAOA report and give clarification about how the EEAOA can be used to underpin the two conference themes. Feedback from CEP Bureau on the above will be helpful to better prepare the first SGEA meeting to be held on 25-26 March in Geneva. A project outline should be submitted to the SGEA to discuss at the March meeting, including criteria to select the reports to be assessed and to steer the process. This includes a decision on the topics to be analysed in the EEAOA report: water, air, ecosystems, waste etc.

Resource needs and donor contributions

The pledge by Switzerland of Sfr 70,000.- to UNECE for EEAOA expert groups was appreciated¹. The Co-Chairs voiced the need to raise urgently additional funds to match the needs specified in the letter by the Minister of Environment Protection.

Action points

The following action points were agreed:

1. Contact to be made with SGEA nominees to encourage, clarify and confirm their availability to serve pending decision by the Extended Bureau;
2. Report to the Extended Bureau the results of this meeting and propose the list of SGEA members;
3. Draft an agenda for the SGEA to be discussed in a telephone conference between the Co-Chairs and prepare relevant background material for the SGEA meeting;
4. Continue regular discussions between the Co-Chairs and consultations with the UNECE secretariat.

¹ At the time of preparing the present note the Republic of Moldova had pledged Euro 3,000.- to support EEAOA expert groups.