



# European Topic Centre Review Process - leading to designation of new Topic Centres in 2021

ETC Review Committee: 14 – 16 <sup>th</sup> April Meeting report
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Meeting chair: Pierre Prum, alternate MB member from Luxembourg.

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## Document History

Version	Date	Governance document references	Remarks
1 <sup>st</sup> draft	30 <sup>th</sup> April		Initial draft
2 <sup>nd</sup> draft	15 <sup>th</sup> May		Revised draft for meeting
3 <sup>rd</sup> draft	26 <sup>th</sup> May		Consensus version
V1	28 <sup>th</sup> May		Final version



## Summary and conclusions

1 This report outlines the views of the ETC Review Committee on the proposed ETC landscape from 2022. The summary and conclusions are structured around questions set out by EEA along with a table setting out the overall approach for ETCs in the period 2021 – 2025. EEA will make use of the overall approach to guide the ETC design process. The Review Committee plans to develop a set of recommendations in early summer to further guide the ETC designation process.

### ***Does the background document set out the right priorities for the focus of ETC support and the right policy domains?***

The Review Committee drew rapid conclusions that the overall structure of ETCs should be aligned with the new EEA Strategy and with environment and climate policies (European Green Deal (EGD), 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme (EAP), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)). There was also a consensus that ETCs should ensure continuity of the activities related to current reporting obligations while organising to respond needs of new policy initiatives. For this, a new integrated and systemic approach, multi-disciplinary expertise, more foresight, coordination and interlinkages between the ETCs will be needed. This evolution should be reflected in the composition of the ETCs and their partnerships with relevant organisations.

The overall structure and topics of ETC should be aligned with the areas of work in the EEA/Eionet Strategy. The strategic objectives, which are more crosscutting should be reflected in the objectives of each ETC.

The Review Committee noted the need to clarify the positioning of EGD key elements (on mobility, energy, food, built environment) within the ETC landscape. The Committee made suggestions to where these topics could fit in the scope of ETCs but did not reach an overall conclusion. One option could be to integrate these elements within each of the ETCs on environmental themes. Alternatively, this capacity could be placed within the scope of transverse ETC(s). Or it could be a mixture of the two. There is a need to ensure that the reasoning around elements of EGD not clearly in focus for ETCs are also clearly communicated.

The Review Committee welcomed the background document as a good basis for the review and work of the Committee. The Background document did not fully capture transformative aspects foreseen in EEA and ETC work (e.g. Demand side (information) and socio-economic aspects, were lacking). It was also felt by some members that future ETCs will need general competency in digitization, social sciences, household consumption knowledge, and systemic analysis. Furthermore, the paper does not fully explore the impacts arising from the ambition to enhance policy responsiveness, which might require foresight, horizon screening, scenarios and in certain areas, with related EEA competencies, also modelling literacy within ETCs or EEA.

The Review Committee made the following reflections in relation to aspects of overall scope, which should be considered in the design of ETCS by EEA:



- The ambition set out in the EGD for a transition (leaving no one behind) has important impact on information needs. There is a need to look at urban areas and social aspects and distribution of vulnerabilities across regions and society.
- Topics such as circular economy and LULUCF have also an important *extra* European perspective: EU trade policy and resource use significantly affect land and resources in other places globally. This global dimension needs to be reflected in the (geographic) scope of ETCs.
- ETC approaches need to cover production cycle and technological innovation as well as social innovation and consumption perspectives.
- ETCs should be able to respond to the need for monitoring the EGD and 8<sup>th</sup> EAP (ia. CEAP, Zero Pollution Action Plan) that will be further developed beyond 2021.
- The added value of the EEA outline for a single ETC on biodiversity oriented to long-term needs is clear, however there would be benefit from further discussion around how to handle shorter term needs; scope extents, (in particular the inclusion of marine and water within the ETC) as well as the relation to agricultural policies.

The Review Committee recognised the necessity, in principle, for an ETC on sustainability and systems analysis. The Review Committee held diverse opinions on the scope and working arrangements that should be in place for this ETC. The EEA proposed an outline scope for the ETC which the Review Committee found a logical starting point:

- Providing information across systems and themes in support of SOER and EGD processes;
- Foresight;
- Transition and solution-oriented knowledge (including sustainable finance and innovation);
- Sustainable capacity building with countries.

The Review Committee felt that work was needed on further defining the scope to make it precise and to ensure effective collaboration with other ETCs, where competency on systems and transitions would also be needed.

***How should the set-up of the ETCs enable and encourage cross-cutting cooperation between all the ETCs, particularly considering the foreseen 6th area of ETC support on data integration?***

The future ETC approach outlines that there will be more need for cross cutting work for all ETCs. Two ETCs are suggested by the EEA to have transverse expertise (*on sustainability and data integration*).

The Review Committee noted that the ETC on data integration should have a strong focus on facilitating and servicing technical and organizational means across EEA and all ETCs, in relation to Copernicus, land (use) and soil, as well as on digitization strategy. The Review Committee stressed that cooperation needs to be embedded in the overall approach not an isolated task in ETCs and supporting real user needs through the direct involvement in



the ETC of non-technical users from government and society. This has implications for both the composition and the mode of working in all ETCs.

Systematic and specified cooperation with the more transverse ETCs will be needed. A clear competence definition for ETCs will be needed and a mechanism for them to be serviceable to other ETCs. The Review Committee felt that there is also a need for the “recipient” ETCs to have the capability and capacity to absorb knowledge

The Review Committee noted that this challenge is also relevant for some key elements of EGD (food, built env. Energy, transport); in relation to the *just transition*; and work with countries which will cut across ETCs. There is a need to ensure mechanisms to plan and share resources for integrative work are in place.

***How should the EEA/Eionet ambition to be more responsive to country needs (either in capacity building or innovation) be reflected in the design of new ETCs?***

The Review Committee considered the ways in which the EEA and Eionet could better respond to country needs and the impact on design of ETCs. From the approach perspective it was noted that tasks allocated to ETCs by EEA may have greater visibility and traction with countries than if undertaken centrally from EEA. Defining needs in countries is not straight forwards, however a good starting point could be to connect to situations where countries have challenges with implementation. An example could be to support capacity building towards countries where they are at risk of missing targets.

Countries have significant expertise engaged in Eionet and national agencies may be able to contribute such as by working on a specific challenge or sharing best practice.

The Review Committee noted that the contribution that ETCs make, such as through reports, is not always clear. Improved communication and visibility around ETC work will help with understanding, added value and also for countries to develop relevant capacities. Countries are interested in examples of best practice, as well as in use of technology and streamlining. So, ensuring this kind of best practice within ETCs and its visibility would result in greater uptake of work by ETC partners and in countries.

The Review Committee also suggested exploring mechanisms to increase relevancy of ETC work programmes for countries.

***What is the role of ETCs in remaining connected and linking to latest developments in science (and beyond)?***

The Review Committee stated that whilst the connection to science and research was key, it was important that ETCs retained their operational focus on "knowledge for action" and delivered policy relevant products that should be usable in communication. The Review committee focussed its comments on two aspects:

- EEA needs to clarify approaches to how it identifies and fills gaps in data, knowledge or methods to meet needs and what is the role of ETCs in these processes.



- ETCs need to be designed with processes built-in from the start to ensure they are aware of the state of art, and what other actors are doing in their respective domains.

*Outline approach on number and topics of ETCs*

EEA work area	ETC topic	Core domains/tasks	Open questions and supporting competencies
<b>Biodiversity and ecosystems</b>	ETC on biodiversity and ecosystems	Biodiversity and Ecosystem-based management for land, marine and freshwater (ecological status), nature's contribution to people, natural capital accounting	The relation to agriculture is not yet clear. The scope could also include food production and soil. Further discussion is also needed on the inclusion of water and marine in the scope.
<b>Climate change mitigation and adaptation</b>	ETC(s) on climate change (Members of the Review Committee held opinions both in favour of 1 or 2 ETCs covering climate change),	Climate change, mitigation, adaptation,	Possibly including energy. Diverse opinions on 1 or 2 ETCs to cover climate change topic. Placement of land use and transport
<b>Human health and the environment</b>	ETC on health & pollution	Air quality and emissions, chemicals	transport, water quality
<b>Resource use and circular economy</b>	ETC on circular economy	material flows, waste, sustainable production and consumption and digitization perspectives	Shared competency with other ETCs on water quantity; possibly including built environment
<b>Sustainability, trends prospects and responses</b>	ETC on sustainability and systems analysis	Information across systems and themes in support of SOER and EGD processes; Foresight; Solution oriented knowledge (including	Shared competency on systems thinking and transformative aspects with all ETCs.



EEA work area	ETC topic	Core domains/tasks	Open questions and supporting competencies
		sustainable finance and innovation);	
<b>transverse</b>	ETC on data integration	spatio temporal data integration, facilitating and servicing technical and organizational means (Copernicus / EO +land (use) data integration and digitization)	Further clarification needed on placing wider aspects of land, soil, new technology, data intelligence, and wider impact of digitization strategy

## 2 Introduction

The purpose of the European Topic Centres Review process is to prepare for calls for future European Topic Centres (ETCs) that support the implementation of the ambitions agreed in the EEA Eionet strategy to 2030.

EEA Management Board decision on the ETC Review process in December 2019 sets out the mandate and overall process

The mandate of the Review Committee is to assess the current ETC landscape and its adequacy:

- in terms of policies and priorities
- in light of the EEA evaluation
- in the context of the new EEA/Eionet strategy, including emerging needs;

To bring forward before the June 2020 meeting of the Management Board **an overall approach** to ETCs from 2021 to 2025;

To bring forward at the September meeting of the Management Board Bureau a report documenting its findings, **recommendations** as well as **outline of tasks and priorities** to be specified in the Terms of Reference for future ETC support.

The Review Committee is composed of:

- 2 Management Board members or alternate members (one being the Review Committee Chair);
- 2 Scientific Committee members;
- 2 European Commission representatives (DGs ENV and CLIMA);
- 2 Eionet National Focal Point (NFP) experts;



- EEA Head of Programme / ETC leads at EEA as needed.

The Review Committee members are:

- Fred Steward, Member of the EEA Scientific Committee,
- Jan Nill, European Commission (DG CLIMA) representative,
- Joachim H. Spangenberg, Member of the EEA Scientific Committee,
- Josiane Masson, European Commission (DG ENV) representative,
- Johannes Mayer, Eionet National Focal Point (NFP) expert from Austria,
- Klaus Jacob, alternate MB member designated by the European Parliament,
- Magnhild Sletten, Eionet National Focal Point (NFP) expert from Norway,
- Pierre Prum, alternate MB member from Luxembourg – Chair.

This document reports on the remote meeting of the Review Committee which took place over three sessions with between April 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> as well as a consensus building meeting which took place on 26<sup>th</sup> May.

To structure the work and deliberations of the Review Committee, the Chair requested an elaborated agenda to complement the background document. The Chair requested EEA to outline key questions that the Review Committee would focus on. The EEA has outlined some transverse challenges that it faces in designing ETCs to support the implementation of the strategy.

The EEA-Eionet Strategy aims to provide the evidence-based knowledge needed to achieve Europe's policy ambitions for the coming decade, as formulated in e.g. the European Green Deal proposal (EGD).

***Does the background document set out the right priorities for the focus of ETC support and the right policy domains?***

The integration of environmental policy areas under the EGD as well as the increasing integration of data sources and methods implies that work in ETCs will increasingly be cooperating with other ETCs and cross cutting in nature in their work with EEA.

***How should the set-up of the ETCs enable and encourage cross-cutting cooperation between all the ETCs, particularly considering the foreseen 6th area of ETC support on data integration?***

Strategic objective 3 implies an ambition to add value more directly to countries, supporting them with implementation of European policies.

***How should the EEA/Eionet ambition to be more responsive to country needs (either in capacity building or innovation) be reflected in the design of new ETCs?***

EEA depends on research data, results as well as advances in science.

***What is the role of ETCs in remaining connected and linking to latest developments in science?***



## Session 1

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4. **European Green Deal, 8th EAP and the EEA / Eionet strategy**  
(Paul McAleavey – Head of Programme Coordination and Strategy)
5. **Overview of functioning of ETCs**  
(Martin Adams – Head of Programme Health and Sustainable Resource use)
6. **Climate change mitigation and adaptation**  
(Eva Jensen - Head of Programme Climate Change Energy and Transport)

For sessions 1 – 3, senior managers from EEA made presentations on each of the activity areas where ETC support is foreseen in the coming years. These inputs from EEA are outlined below. A question and answer style discussion followed each presentation.

### Setting the Scene

The five activity areas set out in the EEA strategy strongly relate to European Green Deal priorities and could form structuring principles for the work of future ETCs and the broad division of ETC support roles. No matter which framing structure is chosen, it is expected that cross-cutting cooperation will be reinforced and an important element of all ETC work for the coming years.

Despite the uncertainty about the timing of the EGD and the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP, EEA is relatively confident that the draft EEA/Eionet strategy is robust and is aligned with these policy frameworks.

In the past the MDIAK chain was considered to be the core EEA business model. The new strategy sees MDIAK as a value adding chain within a wider set of business models. This change reflects an appreciation by EEA and stakeholders that EEA can frequently add value in individual components, for example, only managing data or by providing expert assessment on data or information provided directly to EEA. This change in emphasis means that ETCs in different topic areas may work in more focused ways, or even exclusively on certain parts of the chain.

At the same time, data integration across domains will be increasingly common. Data integration is needed to answer more complex environmental issues and policy questions. For this reason, EEA foresees the need for specific ETC support on earth observation and ensuring good practice on data and data integration across topics.

The EEA/Eionet strategy is jointly owned by EEA and the Eionet network, therefore it is primarily for the 38 EEA and cooperating countries. However, the strategy clearly has a geographic dimension goes beyond EEA. One of the conclusions from the EEA evaluation was the need to modernize Eionet, and this will be a key on-going process for the coming years. ETCs need to be ready to go Jan 2022, so will reflect some early steps of the modernization process.

The Management Board has confirmed that the overall contractual model for ETCs as a multi-annual framework partnership agreement between EEA and organisations in member and cooperating countries should continue.





At an outline level, EEA structured the agenda to align future topic areas for ETC work with the five activity areas set out in the EEA/Eionet strategy and this is the overall structure foreseen for ETCs with additional support around data integration. This broad-brush view on the potential future ETC landscape does not address several significant strategic challenges in relation to the future approach to ETCs that need to be more clearly elaborated and the way forwards decided upon.

### **Climate Change mitigation and adaptation**

Climate change policy objectives for the next 10 years already frame support needs for ETCs for the next five years. Existing arrangements are two ETCs, one very focussed on monitoring and reporting and the other focussed more on indicators and impacts of climate change.

Looking forwards, challenges that need to be responded to are e.g.:

- Decarbonisation e.g. of energy and transport sectors and related indicators, and continuous improvement on data and digitalisation
- Increased demands and support needed on emissions and sinks for land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) and the agricultural sector.
- A more integrated approach needed for land, biodiversity, ecosystems and agriculture
- Increasing analysis of urban areas and social aspects leading to distribution of vulnerabilities across regions and society;
- tracking progress towards targets, through data and indicators, including on adaptation objectives.
- Evaluation of adaptation and mitigation policies, national best practices

Assessing the links between mitigation and climate changing resilient exploitation of renewable energy

## **4**

### **Session 2**

7. **Human health and the environment**  
(Martin Adams – Head of Programme Health and Sustainable Resource use)
8. **Resource use and circular economy**  
(Martin Adams – Head of Programme Health and Sustainable Resource use)
9. **Sustainability, trends, prospects and responses**  
(Jock Martin - Head of Programme Integrated Assessments for Sustainability)

### **Human health and the environment**

The focus on human health gives priority to both health impacts delivered through cleaner environment as well as delivering on official dataflows supporting the significant body of legislation dealing with pressures (emissions), where ETC work is critical. Effort is put into examining the effect of social inequalities, unequal geographic exposure, on impacts. This reflects two priorities of EGD on zero pollution and chemicals.

Key challenges are how to ensure:



- Balanced ETC role in expanding health and environmental knowledge whilst implementing reporting and dataflows.
- critical mass of support on chemicals – expert capacity currently located in several ETCs.
- greater expertise on new data sources, including how to support demand side of Copernicus.
- ETC support on sectoral pressures.
- A one health perspective / approach.

The right ETC capacities for training support in countries.

### **Resource use and circular economy**

In contrast to ETC support on human health topic, legislative frameworks have different approaches or a relatively new, so the work of ETCs not so focussed supporting reporting and data processing. The focus is on providing progress assessments toward achieving a circular economy (monitoring and targets), understanding the environmental and climate impacts of key-product value chains, implementation of EU law on waste, and progress in transforming Europe's industry to a low carbon, low emission and increasingly circular model.

Support on policy implementation for early warning system is very important initiative for improving waste management in Europe in the coming years. Many countries are at risk of missing targets, so there is a need to link to capacity-building support from ETCs towards countries most in risk to miss targets, especially in waste.

### **Sustainability, trends, prospects and responses**

Achieving sustainable development globally will require a much greater focus on systemic challenges in 2020s. EGD is the European approach to addressing sustainability challenges from a systemic perspective. Both 8th EAP and EGD will have monitoring requirements to support their implementation, as such, the demand for knowledge on sustainability, both for monitoring progress and designing solutions will grow.

SOER2020 makes the well-received case that persistent challenges rooted in the past are coupled and amplified by emerging and systemic issues, associated with uncertainty, ambiguity and conflicts of interests. The policy approaches to addressing these challenges is acknowledged to need to reflect a fair, societal-wide transformation. The experience of preparing for SOER 2020 demonstrated that whilst there was expertise in individual domains, there was insufficient capacity across ETCs to substantively address systemic issues, in particular the societal dimension. With this experience, we need to design ETC support in view of SOER 2025 needs, which will already be in preparation in 2022 and 2023. Creating the right capacity and relationship to other ETCs is also very important.



## Session 3

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| 10. | <b>Biodiversity and ecosystems</b><br>(Ronan Uhel – Head of Programme Natural Capital and Ecosystems) |
| 11. | <b>Data integration</b><br>(Chris Steenmans – Head of Programme Data and Information Services)        |
| 12. | <b>Drawing conclusions</b>  |

### **Biodiversity and ecosystems**

ETC support for biodiversity can be structured in three main areas: the development of a comprehensive framework for ecological monitoring, the development of information services on ecosystem restoration and human activities impacting them and the support to the enhancement of mainstreaming biodiversity into all relevant economic sectors and policies.

A huge re-orientation and mainstreaming of ecosystem perspective throughout sectoral policies is underway. Support to implementing an ecosystem-based management, will also need expertise on land and sea use in a spatially explicit manner.

A comprehensive monitoring framework on ecosystem status would be based on, the one hand on the monitoring and reporting under the existing legislation (e.g. HBD, WFD, UWWTD, BWD, MSFD), and whilst progressively also using integrated data and ecosystem-based approaches.

### **Data integration**

A key capacity for EEA going forwards is expert resources on data integration and data intelligence. To-date ETC/ULS has provided key land-use data and information from Copernicus services, and expertise on the spatial dimension. Looking forwards, EEA needs to build on this capacity ensure expertise to support Copernicus land service; on ensuring coherent and best practice approaches for uptake of digitalization technologies across EEA and Eionet. ETC needs across Resource efficiency, human health, climate change and biodiversity outline the need for expertise in digitalization. The role of an ETC on data integration is to ensure that EEA has a coherent approach, including in supporting national Eionet co-ordination through optimising transparency and integration regarding information, services, tasks, roles and reporting processes.