

APRIL 2013
EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

FINAL REPORT



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List of abbreviations

AMP	Annual Management Plan
AR	Annual Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BBR	Biodiversity Baseline Report
COM	Commission
DG ENV	DG Environment
EAP	Environmental Action Programme
EC	European Community
EEA	European Environment Agency
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
Eionet	The European Environment Information and Observation Network
EP	European Parliament
EPA-networks	Environmental Protection Agency Network
ESTAT	Eurostat
ET	Evaluation Team
ETC	European Topic Centre
EU	European Union
EU-12	The 12 'new' EU Member States
EU-27	The 27 EU Member States
Eurostat	European Statistical Service
ExeDir	Executive Director
GMES	Global Monitoring for Environment and Security
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MB	Management Board
MEPs	Members of Parliament
MS	Member States
NFP	National Focal Point
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	National Reference Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SC	Scientific Committee
SCE	Steering Committee
SEBI	Streamlining European Biodiversity Indicators
SEIS	The Shared Environmental Information System
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Realistic, Time-bound
SOER	State of the Environment Report
UN	United Nations
WISE	Water Information System of Europe

Executive summary

The evaluation of the European Environmental Agency (EEA) was commissioned in July 2012. The work by the external Evaluation team has been overseen by a Steering Committee, composed of members of the Management Board.

Purpose	The specific purpose of the evaluation was to (i) provide evidence-based knowledge feeding into the preparations for the EEA strategy 2014-2018; (ii) increase efficiency of the result-based management; (iii) point to possible improvements in the effectiveness of the EEA; and (iv) secure relevance and usefulness of EEA outputs and products.
Scope	The evaluation was a broad organisational assessment looking at all aspects of the functioning of the EEA providing an overall, holistic analysis of the EEA, but thus not studying all areas of operation in depth. The evaluation covered the period 2008-2012 with an emphasis on the period 2009-2012 reflecting the implementation period for the current EEA strategy. The evaluation took place in the frame of the EEA founding regulation and the objectives and tasks specified for the Agency. In parallel to the implementation of this evaluation, a review of the functioning of the Environmental Topic Centres (ETCs) was implemented. For this reason, the evaluation has only to a limited extent looked specifically at the ETCs.
Approach	The evaluation assessed the EEA according to two evaluation criteria; effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness covers the external perspective of the EEA and assesses the needs and satisfaction with EEA outputs, as well as the EEA's overall impact on the European environment and the European added value of the EEA. Efficiency covers the internal perspective focusing on EEA operations and most notably on cooperative relations within the Eionet network structure.
Methodology	The evaluation was guided by ten evaluation questions. For each evaluation question a set of judgement criteria and indicators were formulated in the inception phase. During the course of the evaluation, data and information were collected, using desk studies, three e-surveys, 74 semi-structured interviews with 81 key

informants, four case studies and two thematic workshops. Information from these various data sources have provided a sound basis for triangulation of findings.

Overall conclusion

In summary, the evaluation finds that the EEA and Eionet are well established and well functioning structures, delivering comprehensive and reliable outputs which, to a large extent, satisfy stakeholders' needs. The qualitative assessment inherent in this evaluation indicates that the EEA continues to be the most effective and efficient solution to providing credible information on the state of the European environment.

Conclusions: Effectiveness

According to users, the products and outputs from the EEA are of high quality. Data are robust and reliable, thanks to the effectiveness of the Eionet partnership and professional staff and management of the EEA. The EEA products represent important inputs to the policy making process, first and foremost at EU level, but also, to some extent, in EEA Member Countries.

The EEA has contributed positively to implementation of EU environmental legislation by providing information sharing, case studies, and sharing of experience and best practises among Member States. Indirectly, the EEA has had a positive effect on the European environment, but this effect is not quantifiable.

The EEA represents state-of-the-art methodologies, especially for defining and compiling data on environmental indicators and environmental assessments. The Agency has supported methodological development in a number of EEA Member Countries. Moreover, the Agency has generated European added value by utilising potentials for economies of scale at the European level thus complementing work carried out at national level.

The needs and requirement of the EEA's key stakeholders (Member Countries, the Commission and the European Parliament) are in many cases shared, but they are not identical. The Agency has to navigate this course and to optimise the degree to which it can fulfil the needs of each individual stakeholder by divining the appropriate balance of activities. The evaluation shows that the EEA has managed to maintain a good balance in meeting stakeholders' needs and there is a well-functioning dialogue with the main stakeholders. There are some areas, which call for attention in the planning of future activities.

The Commission expressed concerns that the EEA is not always sufficiently responsive to its needs, and that the Agency should place more emphasis on speedier progress in respect to improving the data base /reporting and providing for interoperability of data systems and integrated analysis across different data sets and environmental themes. At the same time, the needs of the Commission, in respect to the data centres, are not very clearly articulated and there is no implementation plan guiding the process for SEIS (although an implementation outlook has very recently been put forward by the Commission). This calls for renewed dialogue with the Commission in order to clarify their needs and

expectations and to facilitate a discussion in the Management Board in order to properly reflect needs into the future EEA strategy.

The data from respondents representing the European Parliament, and in particular its Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, indicates that the needs are being met and that existing coordination mechanisms are well-functioning and adequate.

Member Countries feel that the EEA is, increasingly, focusing its attention on EU level matters and, in particular, the needs of the Commission. There is a sense, among Eionet partners, of being taken for granted and an underlying feeling that it is important to maintain a focus on activities and outputs of the EEA, which represent a value for Member Countries. Member Countries would in particular like to see an increased focus on regional assessments (focusing on eco-regions as well as territorial regions within the EU/Member Country territory). This points to a need to further strengthen the dialogue with Member Countries and the NFPs.

The Commission would like to see the EEA becoming more involved in implementation of legislation within the Member States. The evaluation finds that it is important to maintain an independent and neutral role if the Agency to preserve its legitimacy and objectivity. This underlines the importance of finding the way forward, in common process, together with the Member States.

Conclusions:
Efficiency

The EEA has developed and implemented well functioning management systems. The process established to develop the Annual Management Plan has ensured consensus on strategic level among key stakeholders and the result is praised by all involved parties. The evaluation has, however, documented that the planning system is vague on setting of objectives and targets for the work in the different programmes and consequently it is difficult for entities in the governance structure to clearly see priorities and resource allocations within the EEA.

The findings do clearly indicate that the EEA is considered to provide value for money. The EEA has, as an organisation, an appropriate size and budget to undertake its tasks and it is able also to take on new challenges.

As a network, the EEA and Eionet (including NFPs, NRCs and ETCs) are considered stable and working under well coordinated and agreed principles. But the evaluation has identified a number of early warning signs or fatigue in the structure. This relates in particular to the role and use of the NFPs, where there seems to be scope for optimising the value added to the EEA. In relation to the ETCs it is a particular challenge to 'cascade' the work programming from the overall AMP to the individual implementation plan for the ETC and also ensuring flexibility to accommodate new issues during the year, while at the same time factoring in other procurement processes by the EEA and the Commission. However, interviewees in the EEA and the Commission generally consider these processes to work fairly smoothly.

In respect to governance, the evaluation has found that internal working relations within the EEA and its Management Board and Bureau are generally well-functioning. Given the large size of the Management Board combined with its vital role there is a need consider how the decision making processes can best be facilitated. The working relations with the Scientific Committee are not entirely satisfactory. The evaluation has found that there is a lack of direction in what the Scientific Committee can, and should, be used for. More effort is needed to identify those areas where the Scientific Committee can meaningfully contribute.

The findings and conclusions of the evaluation give rise to five overall recommendations for the consideration of the EEA and its Management Board.

Recommendation 1: Continue and further strengthen dialogue with stakeholders

It is recommended that the EEA continues and strengthens the already well-functioning dialogue with key stakeholders and incorporates it into its forthcoming strategy as part of the priorities and activities to be implemented. Particular areas of attention include:

- > There is scope for seeking more effective coordination with the Commission
- > Continue the already well-established dialogue with the European Parliament and, in particular, put emphasis on facilitating the use of EEA products by the MEPs
- > There is a need to strengthen and invigorate the relation to the Member Countries and the NFPs in particular.
- > It is recommended that the EEA, together with the Member States and the Commission, design a common process which allows the EEA to support the implementation of legislation.
- > Clarifying expectations to the EEA in relation to data centres and SEIS implementation.

Recommendation 2: Further strengthen the focus on delivering outputs of high quality as this is basis for achieving impact

It is important for the EEA to focus on delivering high quality outputs. This raises important issues in relation to the future strategy:

- > There is a risk that quality may be compromised if resources are spread too thinly across too many areas. The planning of outputs needs careful balancing against available resources, especially considering that the EEA is likely to experience budget cuts, similar to all EU institutions.
- > Further development of data recognition, meta-data descriptions and quality assurance systems to match new methods of data sharing and communication.
- > Interoperability of data systems and integrated analysis across different data sets are increasingly in demand to facilitate integrated assessments provide a more holistic understanding of problems and issues. The EEA needs to be able to deliver on this in order to maintain its position. This entails a continued focus on SEIS implementation.

Recommendation 3: The Management Board of the EEA should consider how it can best exercise its strategic governance function

There is a need to ensure the active involvement of the key stakeholders in the main decision process pertaining to the EEA. It is therefore recommended that the Management Board and the EEA senior management consider how processes and procedures can be enhanced to facilitate the strategic governance function of the Management Board through e.g. focusing on strategic and focused agenda setting and reporting and/or establishment of targeted working groups.

Recommendation 4: Review and upgrade the planning system and approaches in order to provide transparency of prioritisations and greater accountability.

Simplifying the structure, specifying objectives and performance indicators and adding more information on resource allocations to priorities in the strategy and in the AMPs is recommended in order to increase transparency and the accountability of the Agency vis-à-vis its main stakeholders and to provide a clearer framework of operation for Eionet partners.

Recommendation 5: Reassess the use of the Scientific Committee with the purpose of ensuring enhanced value added to the work of the EEA.

It is recommended that the EEA senior management and the Scientific Committee make a joint assessment of current use and modalities for cooperation with a view to establishing a clear framework for the cooperation.

1 Introduction

This is the revised draft final report on the evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA). The evaluation was commissioned in July 2012 and has been overseen by a Steering Committee (SCE) composed of Members of the Management Board (MB) of the EEA. The terms of reference for the evaluation are included in Appendix A.

Purpose of the evaluation

The specific objectives of the evaluation, according to the tender specifications were to:

- > Provide evidence-based, relevant knowledge for the preparation of the EEA strategy 2014-2018;
- > Increase the efficiency of the result-oriented management of EEA priorities;
- > Indicate potential improvements which could enhance the EEA's effectiveness;
- > Secure the relevance and utility of the EEA activities and outputs.

Evaluation process

The evaluation was initiated with an inception period, during which a kick-off meeting with the SCE was held, the evaluation methodology was developed and a number of explorative interviews with selected Management Board members and key EEA staff were conducted. The inception phase concluded with an inception report and an inception meeting with the SCE¹. Data collection had already been initiated during the inception phase and was stepped up after the inception meeting.

¹The inception meeting was held on 10 September 2012. The final inception report was sent to the SCE on 4 October 2012.

A progress report was submitted to the SCE on 4 October 2012 and a progress meeting with the SCE held on 8 October 2012. During this meeting the progress of activities was discussed and the SCE provided the evaluation team with comments and guidance in respect to the methodology to be applied for the four case studies. The majority of the data collection activities were implemented during October and November 2012.

The next step in the process was the analysis of data collected and presentation of the preliminary results of the evaluation to the SCE and to the MB. The presentations took place on 11 and 12 December 2012 and were accompanied by an interim report. The comments provided by the SCE and MB provided further input to the analysis and content of the report, drafting of which continued into January 2013 and concluded with the submission of a draft evaluation report to the SCE on 25 January 2013. This report is a revision of the draft final report considering the comments provided by SCE and MB members as well as by the EEA.

Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 contains a short factual description of the EEA

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used

Chapter 4 provides the main findings in respect to the effectiveness dimension

Chapter 5 presents the main findings on the efficiency dimension

Chapter 6 contains conclusions and recommendations

2 Overview of the European Environment Agency

This section provides a short factual overview of the EEA as an organisation. It looks at organisational characteristics such as, staff, organisational structure, annual budgets and governance. The information stems from various sources, including the founding regulation, the EEA website, the EEA book of evidence² and various strategy documents.

2.1 Founding regulation

Establishment

The EEA was established in 1990, in accordance with Regulation (EEC) 1210/90 (founding regulation)³. The regulation came into force in late 1993 after the decision was made to locate the EEA in Copenhagen and the Agency became operational in 1994. The regulation also provided for the establishment of the European environment information and observation network (Eionet).

Objective

The objective of the EEA, as set out in the founding regulation, is to provide the Community and the Member States with objective, reliable and comparable information at European level enabling them to take the requisite measures to protect the environment, to assess the results of such measures and to ensure that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment, and to that end the necessary technical and scientific support

Tasks

The founding regulation specifies 15 tasks for the EEA.

² A reference description of the EEA produced for the EFQM process, which the EEA was implementing at the same time as the evaluation.

³ The regulation has been substantially amended several times and the effective regulation of today is the codified version (Regulation EC 401/2009).

Box 2-1 EEA tasks according to founding regulation⁴

- > To establish, in cooperation with the Member States, and coordinate the Network (Eionet);
- > To provide the Community and the Member States with the objective information necessary for framing and implementing sound and effective environmental policies;
- > To assist the monitoring of environmental measures through the appropriate support for reporting requirements, in accordance with the aim of the coordinating reporting;
- > To advise individual Member States on the development, establishment and expansion of their systems for the monitoring of environmental measures;
- > To record, collate and assess data on the state of the environment;
- > To help ensure that environmental data at European level are comparable;
- > To promote the incorporation of European environmental information into international environment monitoring programmes;
- > To publish a report on the state of, trends in and prospects for the environment every five years, supplemented by indicator reports focusing upon specific issues;
- > To stimulate the development and application of environmental forecasting techniques so that adequate preventive measures can be taken in good time;
- > To stimulate the development of methods of assessing the cost of damage to the environment and the costs of environmental preventive, protection and restoration policies;
- > To stimulate the exchange of information on the technologies available for preventing or reducing damage to the environment;
- > To cooperate with Community bodies and programmes and other bodies;
- > To ensure the broad dissemination of reliable and comparable environmental information to the general public and, to this end, to promote the use of new telematics technology for this purpose;
- > To support the Commission in the process of exchange of information on the development of environmental assessment methodologies and best practice;
- > To assist the Commission in the diffusion of information on the results of relevant environmental research and in a form which can best assist policy development

Governance

The founding regulation establishes the EEA as an independent agency with legal personality governed by a Management Board and with a Scientific Committee in an advisory capacity.

Management Board

The Management Board (MB) is composed of one representative of each of the 32 EEA member countries, two representatives of the Commission and two representatives designated by the European Parliament. The Management Board adopts the multi-annual programme, the annual work programme and annual reports of the Agency's activities. The Bureau of the MB is composed of the Chairperson, up to five vice-chairpersons, one Commission representative and a member designated by the European Parliament. The Management Board can delegate executive decisions to the Bureau.

Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee (SC) consist of members specifically qualified in the field of the environment. The task of the Committee is to assist the Management Board and the Executive Director by giving its opinion on the multi-annual and annual work programmes, and on the recruitment of the Agency's scientific staff, as well as advising on any scientific matter concerning the Agency's activities.

⁴ The tasks are described briefly in this list. The full wording can be found in the Regulation EC 401/2009, art. 2.

Executive Director The Executive Director is the legal representative of the Agency, and is responsible to the Management Board for the proper implementation of work programmes and for the day-to-day administration of the Agency.

2.2 Mission and strategy

Mission statement The EEA mission statement⁵ is

'The EEA aims to support sustainable development and to help achieve significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment, through the provision of timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information to policy-making agents and the public'

Strategy In accordance with the requirements of the founding regulation, the EEA has adopted a multiannual work programme (referred to as EEA Strategy) as the main tool for implementing the requirements of the founding regulation and mission statement. The present EEA Strategy constitutes the fourth multi-annual work programme and covers the period 2009-2013⁶. The strategy is built on three main activities:

- > Continuing to support the information needs set down in EU and international environmental legislation and especially the EU 6th Environment Action Programme;
- > Providing more timely assessments on how and why the environment is changing and whether environmental policies, including the 6th Environment Action Programme, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and those in related areas have been effective;
- > Improving the coordination and dissemination of environmental data and knowledge across Europe

The core objective of the EEA, for the period 2009-2013, is to produce European, pan-European and regional integrated environmental data and indicator sets, assessments and thematic analyses in order to provide a sound decision basis for environmental policies in the EU and Member countries and for cooperation with candidate and potential candidate countries and those countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In addition to the core objective, the strategy operates with eight overarching strategic objectives. This is complemented by general and specific objectives under

⁵ EFQM Book of evidence

⁶ The two documents were brought together in a single publication using both titles for this period. For the coming period 2014-2018, the two are seen as distinct documents, at least in the current development process.

the four thematic areas⁷: Environmental themes, cross-cutting themes, integrated environmental assessment, information services and communication.

2.3 Organisation and staff

Organisational structure

In 2009, the EEA was reorganised in order to reflect the new strategy in the organisational set-up. The present organisation of the Agency still follows the main lines, which were drawn in 2009, but a few minor adjustments have been made during the evaluation period. The Agency is organised in a pure matrix structure with eight programmes each headed by a programme manager and each comprising three to five groups headed by a group manager.

- > Three operational programmes: 1) air and climate change, 2) integrated environmental assessments and 3) natural systems and vulnerability
- > Two operational support programmes: 1) operational services and 2) SEIS support
- > Three service programmes: 1) Administrative services, 2) Communication and 3) Governance and Networks

The senior management team (SMT) consists of the Executive Director and the programme managers.

Posts and staff

The table below shows the development in number of posts according to the Agency's establishment plan and the actual number of staff in period 2008-2012. The table illustrates that the total number of staff has been increasing during the period.

Permanent and temporary posts

After an increase in the period 2008-2010, the number of permanent and temporary posts declined slightly from 2010 to 2012. The increase in permanent and temporary posts in 2009 and 2010 came at the request of the EEA and was approved by the budgetary authorities according to standard procedures.

The increase in the number of permanent and temporary posts - and actual staff - during the period is, according to the Agency, founded in additional work load, in particular stemming from increased demands and new work areas for the Commission⁸.

⁷ These objectives and their inter-linkage are explored in further detail in chapter 5

⁸ This is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 2-1 Posts established and filled

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Posts established					
Permanent posts	8	9	9	4	4
Temporary posts	115	124	129	130	132
Contract staff posts	30	45	58	63	71
Seconded national experts	21	28	22	24	27
Grand total	174	206	218	221	234
Posts filled					
Permanent posts and temporary posts	116	121	125	132	132
Contract staff	30	36	55	58	68
Seconded national experts	21	20	21	24	24
Grand total	167	177	201	214	224

Sources: Information on establishment plan is drawn from statements of revenue and expenditure of the respective financial years, i.e. figures concern financial year. Information on number of staff is drawn from annual reports and thus describes the situation by 31st December of the year. Figures on posts filled 2012 provided by the EEA.

The Agency's proposal to increase posts in 2009 was phrased as follows:

“The proposal to increase the Establishment Plan by 10 staff in 2009 (from 123 in 2008) is to reinforce capacities in the areas of ecosystem assessment (2 staff), sustainable consumption & production (2 staff), development of a Shared Environmental Information System (1 staff) as well as establish capacities to develop new areas of work in climate change adaptation (2 staff) and disaster prevention & management (2 staff). One additional administrative support staff will be needed to provide administrative assistance to the increased numbers of staff recruited in the period 2007-2009.”⁹

Contract posts

In 2010, 12 new contract posts were created for the ENPI¹⁰ and GISC¹¹ projects. In 2011 and 2012, a total of 5 new contract posts were created for the GIO¹² project. The increase in contract posts during the period 2010-2012 was thus to a large

⁹ Preliminary draft Budget submission (February 2008)

¹⁰ SEIS Neighborhood project financed through EuropeAid

¹¹ GMES in-situ coordination financed through FP7 funds

¹² geoland2 - Supporting the Monitoring, Protection and Sustainable Management of our Environment. Financed through FP7 funds.

extent explained by external funding for specific activities. In addition, the number of seconded national experts also increased (from 22 in 2010 to 27 in 2012).

In terms of posts filled, the table illustrates a certain delay in filling the established posts. Additional posts approved in one year are typically only filled late in the same year or in the next year. This is due to the fact that the establishment plan is only approved during the year and that recruitment procedures are rather lengthy.

Work contracted out In addition to the EEA's own staff and seconded experts, the Agency also contracts out a considerable amount of work. In particular, work is contracted out to European Topic Centres (ETCs - see below) through framework agreements. In addition, consultants and specialists are used for a range of tasks, including reception and security services, AV productions and report editing.

Budget The EEA's budget in the period is shown in the table below. Chapter 5 includes additional information on budget allocations within different activity areas. The EEA budget may be divided in two parts:

1. A core budget financed from EU subventions, EFTA subsidy and new EEA Member Countries contributions, which is used to execute the strategy and work programme, and

2. A budget for specific projects, where revenue is channelled specifically for the implementation of these projects. These include the projects for which contract staff has been hired specifically as mentioned above, which explains the larger budget figures in the years 2010 and 2011¹³.

Table 2-2 EEA Budget (EUR), 2008-2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Core budget (revenue)	36.7	39.8	40.6	41.2	42.1
Project budget (revenue)	0.4	0.1	10.0	21.0	0.0
Total Budget (million EUR)*	37.1	39.9	50.6	62.2	42.1

Source: Annual reports and agency financial statements. * Revenue equals expenditure and only one figure is shown. Actual figures for 2008-2010 and estimated figures for 2011-2012

¹³ These are typically multiannual financed project where the entire revenue is included at once (commitment appropriation) although the cash (payment appropriations) are spread over several years. The table shows the revenue.

2.4 Eionet

As mentioned above, the EEA contracts out a significant part of its work to ETCs. This happens in the framework of the European environment information and observation network (Eionet).

Eionet is a partnership network between the EEA member countries and cooperating countries (32 member countries and 7 cooperating countries), established by the EEA founding regulation. The EEA is responsible for developing the network and coordinating its activities. The network consists of the EEA, six European Topic Centres (ETCs) and a network of around 1000 experts from more than 350 national institutions and other bodies dealing with environmental information. These national institutions are anchored by National Focal Points (NFPs) and National Reference Centres (NRCs).

ETCs	ETCs are centres of thematic expertise contracted by the EEA to carry out specific tasks. The ETCs, working together with Eionet countries, facilitate the provision of data and information from the countries and deliver reports and other services to the EEA and Eionet. There is currently six ETCs: 1) Air pollution and climate change mitigation; 2) Climate change impacts and adaptation; 3) Inland, coastal and marine; 4) Biological diversity; 5) Spatial information and analysis; and 6) Sustainable consumption and production and waste.
NFPs	The National Focal Point (NFP) is the organisation nominated and funded by an EEA Member or collaborating country to be the primary link and contact between the country and EEA, other Eionet members, and other relevant actors. The NFPs coordinate the national contribution to the implementation of the EEA Strategy and its Work Program and support relevant activities in the country. Their organisation and working methods differ from country to country. This partly reflects the diverse nature of the national structures established for the environmental administration and the related national information systems and networks. The NFPs may be environmental Ministries, Agencies or other institutions.
NRCs	National Reference Centres are the main data providers within specific topic areas. These institutions are nominated by the Member Countries for their expertise within the specific areas for the purpose of technical coordination and cooperation with the Agency. They work with the ETCs either directly or through the NFPs.

3 Evaluation methodology

This chapter provides an overview on the methodology used for the evaluation. The methodology was established on the basis of the terms of reference during the inception phase with input from the SCE and support from the EEA. The detailed methodology was documented in the inception report and presented and approved in connection with the inception meeting. During the data collection and analysis phase, some minor revisions were made to the methodology in order to reflect lessons learned.

3.1 Evaluation criteria and questions

Effectiveness and efficiency

The tender specifications distinguish between the external/effectiveness and internal/efficiency perspectives of the evaluation. These two dimensions have formed the guidelines for the evaluation¹⁴.

The **external perspective** concerned the users of EEA outputs and their needs in relation to the EEA's outputs, as well as the impact of the EEA. The external perspective was considered under a broad understanding of **effectiveness**. External actors, under this perspective, include the EEA Member countries, Commission services, the European Parliament, the research community, global partners/international organisations, NGOs and civil society.

The **internal perspective** focused on the EEA's operations and on assessing whether or not the Agency functioned efficiently and attained its objectives. The internal perspective included internal activities and processes within the framework of the EEA and Eionet. The internal perspective used a broad understanding of the

¹⁴ In the context of this evaluation, the application of these concepts differs from how they are most often defined in evaluations and how they are defined in EU's Evaluation Guidelines (COM (2004) *Evaluating EU Activities - A practical guide for the Commission services*, DG Budget).

concept **efficiency**. The EEA (including the Management Board, the Bureau and the Scientific Committee) and the Eionet partners were seen as internal actors, although the focus of the internal evaluation was the EEA, and the analysis distinguished between these two separate regimes.

The evaluation addresses the following questions. The sub-questions, judgement criteria and indicators supplementing the questions are presented in appendix B.

Table 3-1 Evaluation questions

Evaluation criterion	EQ No.	Evaluation question
Effectiveness	1.1	Did the EEA activities match the needs and requirements of the main stakeholders?
	1.2	Did the EEA respond adequately to new challenges
	1.3	Is the EEA's work consistently of high quality?
	1.4	What impact does the EEA's work have or is likely to have in the future?
	1.5	To what extent does the EEA provide European Added Value?
Efficiency	2.1	Did the EEA deliver?
	2.2	Did the EEA represent value for money?
	2.3	Are there any potentials for optimization of the EEA?
	2.4	Do the Agency's governance and network structures facilitate the Agency in achieving its mission?
	2.5	Is the Agency fit for likely future environmental challenges that could fall into its purview?

Scope of the evaluation

As reflected in the questions and in the terms of reference and methodology, this is a broad organisational evaluation looking at all aspects of the functioning of the EEA. The intention was to provide an overall, holistic assessment of the EEA on both the external and internal dimension. It was not within the scope of the evaluation to provide a detailed analysis of all areas of operation of the EEA.

The evaluation covers the period 2008-2012 with an emphasis on the period 2009-2012 reflecting the implementation period for the current strategy.

The evaluation took place in the frame of the EEA founding regulation and sought to establish the extent to which the EEA is fulfilling its mandate, but it did not include an assessment of the relevance of the mandate and tasks as specified in the founding regulation.

In parallel to the implementation of this evaluation, a review of the functioning of the ETCs (led by a working group under the Management Board) was implemented. For this reason, the evaluation has only to a limited extent looked

specifically at the ETCs. The main findings from the ETC review have been shared with the evaluation team and taken into account in the evaluation where relevant.

3.2 Data collection methods

The evaluation used a combination of methods in order to allow for the triangulation of data and validation of findings, cf. overview table below. Each method is briefly described below.

Table 3-2 *Methods and their use*

Method	Effectiveness	Efficiency
Desk study	√	√
Stakeholder survey	√	
User survey	√	
Governance survey		√
Semi-structured interviews	√	√
Case studies	√	
Workshops	√	√

Desk studies

Desk studies were used to assess all evaluation questions and, in particular, those relating to efficiency. The desk studies assessed the documents listed in Appendix C. They followed the general framework guidelines set out in the evaluation matrices (appendix B).

E-Surveys

The evaluation made use of three e-surveys. Detailed information on the surveys' response rates and survey questions are available in Appendix D.

Stakeholder survey - the stakeholder survey contained questions related to effectiveness and was sent to known recipients among the EEA's stakeholders. The main recipients were:

- > The Commission (DG Environment and DG Clima);
- > The Member Countries (EPA network members, Directors of thematic units, MB members, NFPs, NRCs);
- > Members of the European Parliament;
- > The research community (including SC members);
- > NGOs and business community

User survey - the user survey also contained questions relating to effectiveness but was publicly available online.

Governance survey - the governance survey contained questions related to efficiency and was sent to actors involved in the governance of the EEA and in the Eionet (MB members, SC members, NFPs, NRCs and ETCs).

Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of conducting interviews was to gather qualitative data from key EEA stakeholders and users of EEA outputs. Representatives from all main stakeholders were interviewed, including the Member Countries (MB members and NFPs), the Commission, the European Parliament, international organisations, the research community (members of the SC and others) and NGOs. EEA management and staff members were also interviewed. A total of 74 interviews were conducted comprising 81 interview persons.

Interviewees were selected either because of their importance to the EEA or because they were in possession of knowledge on certain issues that needed to be addressed in the evaluation or because their experiences in dealing with the EEA. In the case of the Management Board, country size, geography and EU-membership was taken into account when selecting interviewees. In addition to the general structured interviews, a number of focused interviews were also carried out and used in connection with the case studies. Appendix F provides an overview of persons interviewed. Appendix E contains the standard questions used for developing interview guides¹⁵.

Workshops

Two workshops were held to address governance, management and communication aspects in relation to the AMP process and the NFP/Eionet set-up.

Table 3-3 AMP and NFP workshops

Workshop	Theme	Participants
AMP	The steps and phases in the AMP development process Strengths and weaknesses of the AMP process as a tool to reflect needs and priorities of stakeholders Strengths and weaknesses with respect to the use of time and resources	Representatives of the MB (Commission, Member Countries and European Parliament), EEA staff
NFP	Communication between the EEA and the NFPs NFPs/Member States possibilities for influencing EEA priority setting Coordination of the Eionet Efficiency of work flows and data flows in the Eionet	All NFPs

¹⁵ These were used as a basis for devising specific interview guides for different groups of interviewees

As such, the work shops provided much additional information on efficiency, and to some extent, also on effectiveness. The scope and organisation of the two workshops is described in Appendix H.

Case studies

Four case studies were conducted as part of the evaluation. The case studies focused on specific outputs delivered by the EEA, as well as the use of these outputs by the stakeholder and user groups. The purpose of the case studies was to provide a detailed understanding of the results and impacts of a few selected EEA outputs (ref evaluation question 1.4). The case studies were selected in a dialogue with the SCE according to agreed criteria (see appendix G) and the following four cases were selected:

- 1) Biodiversity - EU2010 Biodiversity baseline / Assessing Biodiversity in Europe the 2010 report
- 2) Water - Waterbase/WISE
- 3) Climate - The trends and projections report
- 4) Resource efficiency - *a more thematic study not focusing on a particular output*

Each case study was based on data from desk studies (analysing different types of written materials from various policy stages, e.g. European and national policy documents and the extent to which they mention/mirror the EEA product), user survey (questions related specifically to the case study products) and interviews conducted with relevant users (the Commission, national agencies, members of the research community, NGOs and international organisations). Relevant staff members from the EEA were also consulted. The scoping of the case studies is described in more detail in the case study notes included in Appendix G.

3.3 Strengths and limitations of the evaluation

This evaluation has certain limitations which should be acknowledged by the reader if this report is to be used correctly.

Given criteria and questions to be addressed

Firstly, an evaluation is not a scientific product. Scientific objectives and evaluation objectives differ. Evaluation is a management tool whose prime objective is to assess the merits of an intervention¹⁶, in accordance with certain evaluation criteria, while a scientific objective monitors the "generalisable" truth about a given phenomenon. One important limitation of an evaluation is therefore that it needs to respect the evaluation criteria (in this case effectiveness and efficiency) and answer to the evaluation questions connected to each criterion as proposed by the commissioner of the evaluation.

¹⁶ EU-Commission's definition of evaluation: "*judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and needs they aim to satisfy*". COM (2004) *Evaluating EU Activities - A practical guide for the Commission services*, DG Budget.

Time and budget constraints

Secondly, another aspect is the time factor. An evaluation needs to balance resource use with the validity and reliability of its findings. This limitation is most apparent in the assessment of EEA's impacts on the European environment, where the multitudes of EEA outputs, stakeholders and users make it impossible within a reasonable timeframe and an evaluation budget to come close to a completely unambiguous conclusion about impact.

User satisfaction approach

The evaluation has, to a large extent, made use of a 'user satisfaction' approach whereby, the Agency's performance was evaluated based on the degree of satisfaction reported by the stakeholders and users. This was combined with objective criteria, where data on such criteria were accessible (see Appendix B for overview of judgement criteria). When applying this type of approach, it is important to obtain input from all relevant stakeholder groups and to use different methods to collect data in order to be able to cross-check and thus validate findings.

The reliability of the evaluation is founded in the broad approach to data collection. The strength of the evaluation is, in this respect, that it reached a great number of stakeholders and that key stakeholders in the Commission and Member Countries were well-represented in both surveys and interviews. A limitation is that members of the European Parliament were not well represented. Only very few Members of Parliament participated in the user survey¹⁷. Three out of four planned interviews with MEPs of the Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety were conducted, and, in addition, one of the members of the Management Board designated by the Parliament was interviewed. This provided some basis for establishing the views of the MEPs of the Committee¹⁸.

Other stakeholders from NGOs and research community were also represented to a lesser degree. It is difficult to assess the degree to which the stakeholders are represented as they are not well-defined as individual groups¹⁹. Still, the survey, with a total of 1,403 respondents, and interviews, covering 81 interview persons, together have ensured broad stakeholder involvement and good qualitative data.

Benchmarks

One of the limitations in respect to the user satisfaction approach is that the assessment criteria had only to a limited extent been used before and they did not correspond directly to a set of agreed and applied performance criteria for the EEA. Hence, when assessing levels of satisfaction, it was not possible to judge these

¹⁷ Due to the small number, the responses are not regarded as representative of the members of Parliament as a group. Consequently, it has not been judged relevant to present in this report, the responses of the MEPs as a single group.

¹⁸ The Parliament, being a political institution does not constitute a uniform group, and therefore, the report refers to views of MEPs rather than views of the Parliament or of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

¹⁹ See Appendix D for a discussion of surveys and the representation of stakeholder groups

against agreed benchmarks and, also, there was no baseline to compare against (in a few cases it was possible to compare against the evaluation of the EEA carried out in 2008).

Case studies

Case studies were carried out on specific EEA products so that general findings from the surveys could be triangulated with the specific findings from the case studies. However, the case studies are not to be seen as representative. They were used to obtain a more detailed understanding of specific issues which were identified through analysis of survey and interview data.

Budgetary control process

In parallel to the implementation of this evaluation, the EEA was subject to the scrutiny of the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee in relation to the discharge on the accounts of the Agency for the financial year 2010. This may have affected the responses from stakeholders and users in surveys and interviews, however, the impression of the evaluation team is that this has not been the case. Interview persons have generally drawn on their general experience in working with the Agency reflecting on the performance during the evaluation period (2008-2012). It has been beyond the scope of the evaluation to consider the proceedings of the Committee.

Validity

The overall validity of the evaluation methodology rests on inter-subjective data analysis and communication with the SCE and the EEA during the process. The evaluation team has consulted the SCE, and the EEA, for comments on the overall methodology and survey questions and test-surveys were sent to the SCE. The evaluation also looked at the previous five-year evaluation for methodological inspiration.

Five evaluation questions - five section

4 Findings on effectiveness

In this chapter, the data and main findings concerning the five evaluation questions relating to effectiveness and the external dimension are presented. The chapter is structured according to the evaluation questions and thus contains the following five sections:

- 4.1 Match between EEA activities and needs of the main stakeholders
- 4.2 The adequacy of the EEA's response to new challenges
- 4.3 The quality of the EEA's work
- 4.4 The impact of the EEA's work
- 4.5 European added value

In each section the sub-questions and judgement criteria defined for assessing the evaluation are used as the main structuring elements (see Appendix B for an overview of evaluation questions and judgement criteria).

Stakeholders

As mentioned in chapter 3 on methodology, the assessment of effectiveness in this evaluation concerns the external dimension and, hence, how the EEA interacts with its stakeholders. In this connection, the evaluation distinguishes between key stakeholders and other stakeholders. Key stakeholders include:

- > **The Commission** (notably DG Environment and DG Clima) who, following the founding regulation, shall use EEA information in its task of ensuring the implementation of Community legislation in environment. The EEA has the task of providing the Commission with the information it needs to be able to carry out successfully its task of identifying, preparing and evaluating measures and legislation in the field of the environment.

- > The **Member States**²⁰ who, following the founding regulation, shall cooperate with the EEA and contribute to the work of the Eionet. The EEA has the task of providing the Community and the Member States with the objective information necessary for framing and implementing sound and effective environmental policies.
- > The **European Parliament** who as Community body is also encompassed by the above mentioned obligation of the EEA in relation to provision of information.

Other stakeholders include the research community, international organisations, NGOs, the business community as well as the general public. These stakeholders are recipients and users of EEA information and can also through various mechanisms provide inputs to the EEA (e.g. through participation in the Scientific Committee, EEA working groups, etc.).

4.1 Match between EEA activities and needs of the main stakeholders

Evaluation question 1.1: Did the EEA activities match the needs and requirements of the main stakeholders (the Member Countries, the Commission and the European Parliament)?

Question and judgement criteria

This question deals with stakeholder needs and the extent to which EEA activities corresponded to these needs. The needs, in respect to activities to be undertaken by the EEA, emanate from a diversity of stakeholders. In this evaluation question, focus is on the main stakeholders, comprising the Member Countries, the Commission and the European Parliament²¹.

The overall judgement criterion is 'a high degree of consistency between needs and actual activities undertaken'. In addition, a number of specific judgement criteria looking at balance of activities in relation to tasks of the founding regulation, stages in the policy cycle, environmental topics, etc. have been used to qualify data collection and analysis.

²⁰ Since the EEA is open to other countries and currently has the membership of five countries who are not Member States, we refer below to **Member Countries**.

²¹ It should be noted that MEP views is to be regarded as personal views as the European Parliament in itself cannot be regarded as one common stakeholder with uniform interests.

4.1.1 Consistency between EU policies/legislation and EEA strategy and AMPs

The needs of the main stakeholders, in respect to activities to be undertaken by the EEA, are to a certain extent expressed in environmental policy documents and legislation at EU level presenting priorities and setting the agenda.

Relevant policy framework

At EU level, the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) provides the overall environmental policy framework. The 6th EAP (2007-2012), in force during the evaluation period, is a comprehensive policy documents providing broad coverage of environmental themes and subjects. This is reflected in the annual management plans of DG Environment and DG Clima, which further address environmental policy issues under implementation.

The 2008 Communication from the Commission "Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)"²² plays a key role in relation to EEA activities. The Communication sets out an approach to modernise and simplify the collection, exchange and use of the data and information required for the design and implementation of environmental policy, according to which the current, mostly centralised systems for reporting are progressively replaced by systems based on access, sharing and interoperability. The crucial role of the EEA and the Eionet is mentioned in the Communication. According to the Communication, a detailed implementation plan was to be drawn up, but this has not yet materialised. In 2013, the Commission published a Staff Working Document on the Implementation Outlook for SEIS²³. Again, the crucial role of the EEA and the Eionet is evident from the paper.

Requirements specified in legislation

In addition to policy and strategic level activities, certain pieces of EU legislation require the EEA to perform specific tasks, as illustrated in section 4.2.1. The EEA does not have a documented full overview of the legal references and associated tasks.

Needs defined through technical arrangements

An additional measure which defines and delimits tasks undertaken by the EEA is the technical arrangement between DG Environment / DG Clima and the data providers - the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and European Statistical Service (EUROSTAT) and the EEA. According to a technical agreement made in 2005²⁴,

²² COM(2008) 46 final

²³ SWD(2013) 18 final

²⁴ Technical Arrangement between DG ENV, ESTAT, JRC and EEA on environmental data centres, 14 November 2005.

nine data centres were established and the EEA was made responsible for five of these centres²⁵.

EEA strategy and AMP

The desk studies comparing the content of the EEA 2009-2013 Strategy, and the EEA AMPs, to key EU policy documents show that there is a high degree of consistency, even though it is not a one to one relationship. There is specific mention of the 6th EAP in the Strategy and the need for the EEA to contribute to the implementation of the 6th EAP. The broad coverage of policy areas and themes is reflected in the EEA portfolio of activities as planned in AMPs. SEIS implementation is a key area of activity under one of six main objectives of the strategy and is clearly reflected into AMPs. The data centres under responsibility of the EEA are widely mentioned.

The AMPs or annual reports do not clearly specify the activities to be undertaken under regulatory requirements. However, the individual programmes and units in the EEA are well aware of the specific requirements in their respective areas of operation. During the workshop on the AMP process, participants (MB members from the Commission and Member States and EEA staff) concluded that a fairly large proportion of EEA activities were stable and that the regular, annual activities primarily respond to needs arising from regulatory requirements. The participants assessed that these activities probably utilise some 65% of the Agency's resources²⁶.

As the EEA annual planning and reporting documents do not contain direct references to tasks arising from individual legislative requirements, it is not possible, on the basis of annual plans/reports to assess the degree of consistency between requirements and actual activities undertaken. However, the EEA's documentation, as shown in the book of evidence for the EFQM process, shows that, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, the EEA published all planned reports in accordance with EU legislative requirements²⁷. Interviews with EEA staff show a high degree of awareness of these requirements and interviews with Commission representatives show a high degree of satisfaction with the ability of the EEA to respond to these needs. This provides a firm basis for concluding that there is a high degree of consistency.

²⁵ EEA data centres: Air, climate change, water, biodiversity and land use. JRC data centres: soil and forestry. Eurostat data centres: waste, natural resources and integrated product policy.

²⁶ Different ratios were discussed and it was considered that up to 80% of the Agency's resources are devoted to regular, recurrent activities and that 65% are arising from legal requirements.

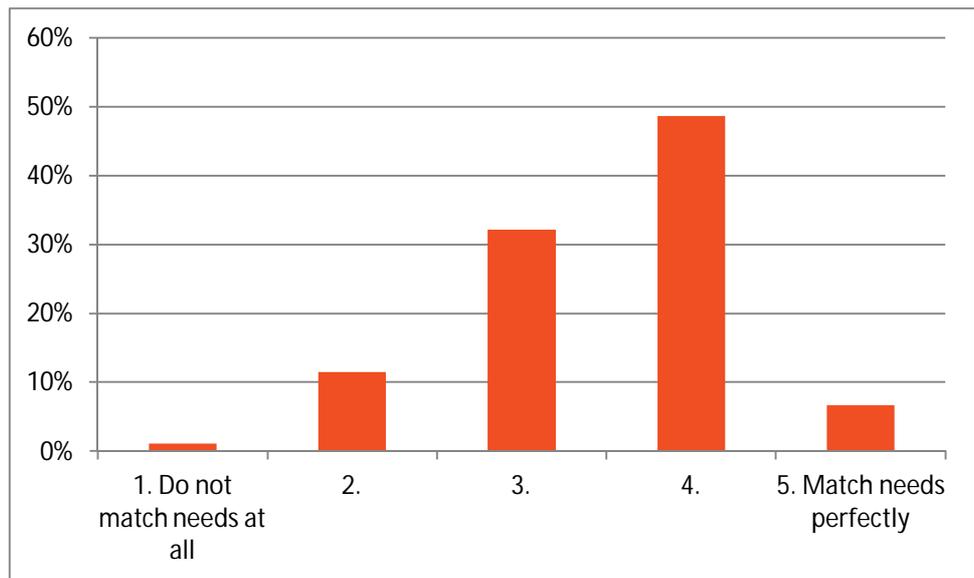
²⁷ EEA book of evidence, page 148

Stakeholder assessments

4.1.2 Main stakeholders' assessments of consistency between their needs and activities of the EEA

In the stakeholder survey conducted for this evaluation, the stakeholders were asked if the EEA addressed their need for European level environmental information. Table 4-1 below shows the response to the survey.

Table 4-1 To what extent does the EEA information activities match your organisation's needs for European-level environmental information? (n=358)



Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012

The figure illustrates a medium to high degree of perceived consistency between stakeholders' needs and the environmental information delivered by the EEA. On a scale from 1-5 where 5 represents a perfect match and 1 represents no match at all, 56% of stakeholders rate 4 or 5 and only 12% rate 1 or 2. Most stakeholders rate either 3 or 4 indicating that, for the majority, needs are met to a medium or high extent - but it is not a perfect match.

Table 4-2 shows how the main stakeholders (Member Countries and Commission) replied to the survey question²⁸.

²⁸ The response rate from MEPs (n=3) is not sufficient to qualify their inclusion in the table.

Table 4-2 To what extent does the EEA's information activities match your organisation's needs for European-level environmental information? (n=327)²⁹

	1. Do not match needs at all	2.	3.	4.	5. Match needs perfectly	n=	Total
Member Countries, excluding NRCs	0%	12%	31%	47%	10%	58	100%
NRCs	2%	13%	33%	47%	6%	229	100%
Commission	0%	5%	23%	63%	10%	40	100%
All respondents	1%	12%	31%	49%	7%	327	100%

Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012. Notes: Respondents from Member Countries include: EPA network members, directors of thematic units, MB members, NFPs and NRCs. As NRCs constituted such a large respondent group on its own, the responses are shown as a separate category.

Table 4-2 shows that Member State stakeholders feel that their needs are met to a lesser extent than stakeholders from the Commission. When asked about the extent to which the EEA addresses the most important environmental issues, the responses from stakeholders follow a similar pattern showing a medium to high degree of consistency between activities and issues to be addressed, but not a perfect match. This is illustrated in the table below.

Table 4-3 To what extent do you consider the EEA's activities to properly address the most important environmental issues and challenges? (n=307)

	1. To a very low extent	2.	3.	4.	5. To a very high extent	n=	Total
Member States, excluding NRCs	0%	5%	30%	46%	18%	56	100%
NRCs	2%	6%	26%	50%	17%	211	100%
Commission	0%	5%	10%	60%	25%	40	100%
All respondents	1%	6%	24%	50%	18%	307	100%

Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012. Notes: Respondents from Member Countries include: EPA network members, directors of thematic units, MB members, NFPs and NRCs. As NRCs constituted such a large respondent group on its own, the responses are shown as a separate category.

On a scale from 1-5 where 5 represents a very high extent and 1 represents a very low extent, only 7% answered 1 or 2. A relatively higher share (19%) answered 5 compared to the question on match of needs (7%, ref. Table 4-1). The data again indicates that the EEA activities seem to be more attuned to the needs of the

²⁹ Responses from Members of the European Parliament are not shown as a separate group as the number of responses is low (n=3).

Commission compared to the Member States. The Commission is clearly more in agreement that EEA focuses on the most important issues compared to the Member States.

Additional, detailed survey data and data from interviews carried out confirm the survey result and provide additional insights on stakeholder viewpoints.

Interviews also show high degree of satisfaction

During interviews, most stakeholders expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the activities carried out by the EEA. The EEA is generally considered a solid and committed partner. Good, institutionalised working relationships between the EEA and key stakeholders is, in this respect, vital and stakeholders also state that the consultation process for the AMP important.

At the same time, however, opinion on the importance of all EEA activities varies among stakeholders, reflecting their roles and main interests³⁰. These variations were also seen in responses to more detailed questions regarding the balance of EEA activities in relation to tasks in the founding regulation, phases of the policy cycle, environmental topics, activities within and outside the EU and focus on content vs. focus on information systems. The main trends, apparent in the data, were confirmed during interviews and are reflected below. It should be noted that viewpoints differ between representatives of the same stakeholder³¹.

Member Countries' views³²

Eionet management, indicators and reporting systems

The Member Countries emphasise the role of the EEA in relation to managing and coordinating the Eionet and setting the standards and building capacity for indicators, monitoring and reporting systems as well as assessment methodologies. It is felt that the EEA meets their needs regarding the provision of standardised reporting systems for data on the environmental acquis.

Assessments

Member Countries are also very appreciative of the activities of the EEA in relation to regional assessments, i.e. assessments focusing on the environment in specific eco-regions (e.g. the Alps) and in territorial regions (in the EU Treaty sense i.e. urban, coastal areas). and would like to see more emphasis on this in the future. While the Member Countries appreciate the need to establish pan-European datasets and assessments, the value of these is considered modest in the national context. While it is recognised that it is valuable for benchmarking and learning,

³⁰ This should also be seen in conjunction with the way the stakeholders use the EEA products, ref. section 4.4.1.

³¹ The representation given here is hence a generalisation and does not in all cases give complete credit to the views expressed by individuals.

³² Views of Member Countries are derived in particular from the NFP workshop and also from interviews with MB members and NFPs as well as interviews with staff at national agencies. In addition, survey responses from Member Country stakeholders were also consulted.

most Member Countries still emphasise that they have more detailed data at national level and thus derive national assessment on a different basis. However, in some countries with less developed environmental information systems (especially among EU-12 and Candidate Countries) the EEA is also considered to have contributed to meet a need for better environmental data and assessments at the national level.

Communication and networking activities

Member Countries express concern that the EEA seems to be increasingly orientated towards the Commission and its needs, and less towards the Member Countries. There is a sentiment that the Eionet is being taken for granted and communication activities not sufficiently prioritised in a situation where environmental policy is under pressure due to the financial crisis.

Two key explanatory factors as to why Member Countries rate the match between EEA activities and their information needs lower than the Commission (ref. Table 4-2 and Table 4-3) emerge:

1) The Member Countries use the EEA information products to a lesser extent and place more emphasis on the EEA role as setting standards for indicators, monitoring and reporting systems. This does not necessarily indicate a need for improvement, but is rather a demonstration of the state of affairs whereby the Commission is the primary customer in terms of the EEA's pan-European datasets and assessments.

2) There is a sentiment among Member Countries that the EEA is increasingly orientated towards the Commission and that more efforts should be devoted to the Eionet, which is the basic infrastructure securing the availability of pan-European datasets and assessments. Also, Member Countries emphasise the importance of maintaining a focus on activities, which create value at national level, e.g. indicators, assessment methods and regional assessments.

Fiscal austerity

Finally, it emerges from the inputs from Member Countries to the evaluation that budgetary constraints, which the EEA is likely to face as the rest of the EU system, will necessitate a stronger prioritisation and that this would require a general review of the portfolio of activities and that elements related to communication, Eye on Earth and international activities could be areas to scrutinize and potentially adjust.

Views of the Commission

Data provision and assessments

The Commission representatives emphasise, in particular, the role of the EEA in securing robust and reliable data on the European environment and on assessing and reporting on the basis of these data. These activities are essential for the Commission (DG Environment and DG Clima) in assessing the implementation of environmental legislation and in developing and revising environmental policies. During interviews, it was not uncommon for the EEA to be referred to as 'indispensable' in relation to these processes.

The Commission argues that, at a time of resource constraint, **data acquisition and collation / analysis** should remain the primary priority (EEA designated recipient of an array of mandatory reporting data); followed by work on **indicators** (essential to charting progress towards objectives set out in EU legislation); then **specific assessments** relating to various priorities, chiefly those concerning policy development and important emerging issues.

The Commission considers that their needs in this respect are being met to an extent - but not fully. This is also used as the main argument for why other activities should receive lower priority so that more resources can be devoted to these core activities. One specific area where there is particular call for more progress is in relation to interoperability of data and information systems allowing comparisons and combined analysis of different data sets. It is generally recognised that the EEA has done a lot of work in the area - and that significant advances have been made in the last four years (and before that as well). However, the glass is only considered half-full.

Implementation of legislation

In line with current policy developments, the Commission representatives also place importance on the role of the EEA in relation to assistance to Member States in implementation of environmental legislation. It is clear from the Commission's current proposal for the 7th EAP and the recent Communication from the Commission on implementation of legislation that a priority objective in the coming years will lie in implementation of existing legislation, rather than building new legislation. As it is stated in the Communication on implementation of legislation: *'with the exception of soil, our environment is already the subject of extensive EU environment legislation, much of it long established, so the main challenge is now one of effective implementation'*³³. The Communication places emphasis on the role of the EEA in improving knowledge on implementation, especially in relation to assuring quality of monitoring arrangements at national level and other tasks related to provision of information on implementation of EU environment measures.

It is recognised by the Commission that much of what the EEA is already doing in the field of data collection and reporting and SEIS implementation is supporting knowledge on implementation. There is a wish to see the EEA being more involved in advising Member States as well as regional/local authorities, providing examples and sharing of best practises in relation to modelling, inventories and other instruments relevant to monitoring. This has already been taken up and pilot activities are on-going in the areas of air pollution and waste, and this area of action has also been incorporated in the EEA's 2013 AMP.

Activities with lower priority

Opinions on which activities should receive less attention are not entirely consistent among the Commission respondents. The majority do not feel that know

³³ COM(2012) 95 final, p. 2

enough about the actual priorities (in terms of budget spent on the various priority areas) to offer specific suggestions. Their assessment is based on their general impression on the importance of the activities in the EEA portfolio. The activities regarded as least important, by most Commission representatives, and which should have lower priority are:

- > Reports which are not based on EEA data (unless specifically needed for a particular policy development purpose), including reports of a more research-oriented nature. Reports which have not been specifically requested by the stakeholders. A streamlining of publications is suggested.
- > International activities. It is recognised that the EEA has a role to play on the international scene and the EEA support in some areas is highly valued (e.g. for DG Clima: Provision of lead reviewers for UN Expert Review Teams, assisting in developing international monitoring, reporting and verification systems and support to accession countries in setting up robust GHG monitoring and reporting systems). However, the majority of the respondents consider that, in the overall balance of activities and in a context of scarce resources, less effort in relation to international activities (e.g. participation in international meetings and conferences) would be called for.
- > Communication activities. Again respondents acknowledge the importance of this activity, but most mention that they consider that a smaller budget should be spent on Communication³⁴.
- > Eye on Earth. It is questioned by some respondents whether it is necessary for the EEA to take the lead in developing this service. However, some representatives also emphasise that the EEA is doing a good job in relation to Eye on Earth and that this is an important part of the effort of ensuring data compatibility across different data sets and more advanced, integrated analysis of data (referring to the implementation of SEIS - the shared Environmental Information System for Europe³⁵).

In addition, the representatives of the Commission mention that the outputs of the Agency, while being of a high quality and often useful in terms of content, are not always aligned with the policy processes of the Commission. The Commission representatives are also concerned that the Agency should not take on a policy formulation role. It is reiterated that this competence lies with the Commission and the EEA is considered to have overstepped its mandate on some few occasions.

³⁴ Reference is often made to the general budget line of communication as shown in the EEA budget, resource and non-resource, ref. Annual reports

³⁵ COM 2008 (46)

Members of Parliament views

The Members of Parliament (MEPs) generally emphasise in particular the role of the Agency in providing essential information and knowledge on Europe's environment. In this regard, they emphasise the value of the Agency in relation to looking ahead and anticipating trends and risks. Also, they would like the Agency to place more emphasis on providing assessment of effects of policy choices and on estimating the price of inaction in specific policy areas.

Compared to the two other stakeholder groups, the MEPs place more emphasis on the international activities of the EEA, and, similar to Member State respondents, they would like to see a stronger focus on communication and visibility, and also welcome additional effort in relation to regional assessments.

The SOER is mentioned as a document widely used and to a large extent meeting the needs and information requirements of the MEPs, however, more easily accessible and targeted information is also in demand and information services particularly targeted at new MEPs would be welcomed. The MEPs view the EEA mainly as a policy makers' agency and consider that the Agency is challenged in having to communicate to politicians, press and the general public. They feel that MEPs in general do not make the full use of the reports and resources available from the EEA. It is emphasised that the MEPs have to deal with vast amounts of information, and therefore, targeted and easily accessible information is key.

Differences and common ground

Looking at the data presented above, it is clear that there are differences in needs between the key stakeholders, but there are also a lot of common interests and synergies. The Member Countries, the Parliament and the Commission have a common interest in ensuring that policy measures developed at EU and national level are relevant and effective and therefore require the necessary data and information to make informed decisions. This again requires the appropriate methods and systems for data collection and exchange. Both Member Countries and the Commission have an interest in developing their analytical capacities and to better understand the complex interrelations between drivers, pressures, state, impacts and responses in the environment. All three stakeholders ultimately have an interest in supporting measures to improve the European environment.

One example of the EEA operating in this field of common interests would be in the field of climate action, where the draft Monitoring Mechanism Regulation, provisionally agreed by the Council and the European Parliament, explicitly lists the tasks of the EEA in support of implementation by Member States and the Commission. Another example is the role of the EEA in the implementation of the (carbon abatement) Effort Sharing Decision, which supports both Member State and the Commission objectives.

This underlines that, while the EEA is operating in an environment of having to balance its activities against the different needs and requirements of the key

stakeholders, it is doing so on a fairly solid basis of common interests, which is a key explanatory factor as to the ability of the EEA to ensure a reasonably high degree of satisfaction of the stakeholders in respect to fulfilment of needs.

4.1.3 Mechanisms for coordination between needs of stakeholders and EEA activities

The needs of stakeholders are communicated to and discussed with the EEA through several channels:

- > Input and consultations in relation to the development of the AMP. Both formal and informal processes are in play³⁶. The formal AMP consultation processes involve all three main stakeholders (Member Countries, the Commission and the European Parliament).
- > Coordination through the regular meetings of the Management Board. This involves early discussions of EEA priorities as well as deliberations on draft AMPs. All three stakeholders are involved through their Management Board membership (the European Parliament through the designated Management Board members³⁷).
- > Urgent requests for tasks not defined in the AMP are sent from General Director level from the stakeholders to the EEA Executive Director
- > Annual coordination: There is an annual coordination meeting between senior management of DG Environment and of the EEA, as well as a similar meeting with DG CLIMA. The EEA Executive Director provides an annual presentation to the European Parliament. There is an annual meeting between EEA senior management and the Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety³⁸.
- > Information and coordination meetings at the senior management level: This includes ad-hoc meetings in the Parliament, Commission and Member Countries.

³⁶ Chapter 5 discusses the AMP planning process

³⁷ The designated Management Board members provides the liason to the Parliament and liase in particular with the Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety to ensure that issues of importance are brought up in the Committee and feed-back is provided to the EEA through the designated Board members.

³⁸ The contact person of the Committee also meets with the EEA in an additional meeting during the year.

- > Data centres: DG Environment chairs (on an ad-hoc basis) a meeting at director's level with its partners from the Environmental Data Centres (EEA, JRC, ESTAT).
- > Technical coordination: There is an on-going dialogue and information exchange at the technical working level (Commission working groups, NFP meetings and working groups, Eionet workshops, etc.)
- > Liason office: The EEA Brussels liason office keeps regular contacts with representatives of DG Environment, DG Clima and secretaries of the Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.
- >

In general, the data from interviews with all three main stakeholders and from the AMP and NFP workshops indicate that the coordination mechanisms are well-functioning and, also, that they have improved continuously. This should also be seen as a main explanatory factor as to why the EEA is able to maintain a relatively high degree of consistency between stakeholders' needs and EEA activities. However, some areas of attention have emerged:

AMP process

While the AMP consultation process is recognised as valuable, the stakeholders (especially the Commission but also voiced by MB members from Member Countries) emphasise that the AMP is not sufficiently clear on priorities (allocation of budget to various activities). In part, the critical voices of the Commission stem from an impression that the Agency is spending significant parts of its budget on activities, which are not core activities in the eyes of the Commission. However, it is unclear to the Commission representatives how much is actually spent on these issues. The evaluation team also finds that the information contained in AMPs and ARs does not provide clarity as to the prioritisation³⁹. More clarity could provide a better basis for the dialogue on prioritisation and this is also being attempted in connection with the current development of the 2013 AMP. There is a good basis for adding information on resource allocation to the AMPs and annual reports on the basis of the Agency's activity based budgeting and accounting system (see further in Chapter 5).

NFP dialogue

The NFPs find that their dialogue with the EEA has evolved to become very operational and focused on data flows, etc. They consider that there is a potential for involving the NFPs more in strategic discussions about EEA activities and how they can best generate value added for the Member States.

³⁹ See also chapter 5

Technical coordination of data centres

Both, from the side of the Commission and that of the EEA, a certain level of 'fuzzyness', in relation to the coordination of the activities of the data centres, is mentioned. Some Commission representatives state that they are unclear about how the data centres function or how the information streams are managed. Others, who are more involved with the technical level of specific data streams, acknowledge that the EEA is committed to the process but does not respond fast enough to the requirements⁴⁰.

The EEA, on the other hand, feel that the Commission has not followed through on the original intention, dating from 2005, when the Technical Agreement was made, and that there is limited overall coordination on what the common core functions of data centres should be, and thus, on the data centre managers (JRC, Eurostat and EEA) are doing. It is emphasised that the SEIS Communication forms the key background for the data centres and the lack of a directional and functional implementation plan for SEIS⁴¹ hampers responsive and collective development of the data centre concept and scope within the SEIS.

Some representatives of Member States have expressed that the area lacks coordination by the Commission and it is unclear to them whether (and how) the technical arrangement is still operational.

The needs of the Commission thus seem rather fragmented and not always clearly articulated. At the same time, the information offered in EEA AMPs and ARs on data centres is also quite fragmented, which reflects a situation where each data centre is very much managed on its own. This issue is important as it lies at the core of SEIS implementation and, hence, of EEA activity and a fairly large share of the operational budget is actually devoted to data centres⁴².

The Commission has very recently published an implementation outlook for the SEIS and the 2005 Technical Arrangement is currently under review by DG Environment. Seen in this light and in the context of developing a new strategy for the EEA, it seems relevant to raise the issue with the Commission to get a clearer view of the expectations to the EEA. A briefing from the EEA on the state of affairs with regard to data centres could be appropriate as basis for discussion.

4.1.4 Main findings on evaluation question 1.1

The data and observations presented above show that there is a lot of common ground in the needs and requirements of the main stakeholders (Member Countries, Commission and European Parliament) but also important nuances in the

⁴⁰ As mentioned above many emphasise the need for increased interoperability of the data systems and this is linked to the function of the data centres.

⁴¹ Which was supposed to be drawn up in 2008 according to the Communication

⁴² Ref. ETC Review, synopsis report

perceptions of what the EEA core tasks are. Seen in this light it is evident that it is not possible for the EEA to completely satisfy all stakeholders simultaneously. The fact that the main stakeholders are relatively satisfied shows that, overall, the EEA manages the different expectations quite well.

There is a continuous, on-going process of dialogue building on well-functioning coordination mechanisms, which is an important explanatory factor as to why the EEA maintains a high level of consistency between stakeholders' needs and EEA activities. However, there is room for further improvement in these mechanisms. This points to the importance of maintaining and further expanding coordination mechanisms seeking transparency in needs and expectations.

Coordination through the AMP development process could be improved through clearly distinguishing between recurrent, annual tasks and ad-hoc tasks and through providing clearer information on priorities (budget allocated to activities).

In relation to data centres, there is a need to revive the dialogue with the Commission to clarify needs and expectations in order to facilitate a discussion in the Management Board and properly reflect needs into the future EEA strategy.

It must be recognised that the EEA builds on a unique network structure with the Member States being directly integrated in the fabric of the EEA organisation through the Management Board and the Eionet. The value of the services and outputs delivered rests to a large extent on the effective functioning of the Eionet. There is, therefore, a delicate balance involved in securing the continued commitment of the Eionet partners while also seeking to further develop the services and outputs in a direction where they bring a high value to the Commission and the Parliament. The evaluation has identified some early warning signs that this balance is tipping too much in favour of the needs of the Commission and that a reinvigoration of the relations with Member States (NFPs in particular) would be relevant to consider. This is especially important considering that the Commission would like to see the EEA becoming more involved in implementation of legislation.

4.2 The adequacy of the EEA's response to new challenges

Q1.2: Did the EEA respond adequately to new challenges?

This question focuses on the 'implementation challenge', i.e. the ability of the EEA to meet the demand for new tasks to be undertaken by the Agency during the past five years, referring in particular to new tasks set out in EU legislation and policies, but also the fact that DG Clima was created, thus changing the institutional landscape of the EEA from one to two major counterparts in the Commission.

4.2.1 New tasks

As mentioned in the previous section, EU legislation may specifically require certain tasks to be performed by the EEA. During the evaluation period, a number of Regulations, Directives, Implementing Decisions and policies have come into force, which require the EEA to perform specific tasks. Also, the EEA has performed a number of tasks on request of the Commission. The box below mentions some key examples, but the list is not exhaustive.

Box 4-1 Examples of legislation with new EEA tasks during the evaluation period

DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 293/2012 on monitoring and reporting of data on the registration of new light commercial vehicles pursuant to Regulation (EU) No 510/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 12 December 2011 laying down rules for Directives 2004/107/EC and 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the reciprocal exchange of information and reporting on ambient air quality

Communication from the Commission - Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) - COM/2008/0046 final

Regulation 2010/911 on the European Earth monitoring programme (GMES)

An overview of these requirements is not available from the EEA AMPs or annual reports or any other EEA document reviewed. The relevant EEA programmes and units are well-aware of the specific requirements pertaining to their individual areas of operation.

It is also clear from the Agency's financial statements submitted to the Commission that the additional tasks associated with the specific requirements have led the EEA to redeploy staff and to request for increases in the number of posts. The growth in number of permanent and temporary posts /staff (ref. chapter 2) should thus be seen in connection with the additional tasks that the EEA has been required to perform.

4.2.2 Adequacy of response to requests for new tasks

Tasks based on legislation

The data from interviews with Commission representatives shows that there is a general satisfaction with the responsiveness of the EEA relating to tasks specified in legislation. This typically allows for sufficient time to work the tasks into the AMP and also the EEA can be consulted in relation to methodologies to be applied, etc. in advance allowing for a mutual and longer term planning process for the task in question. The data also shows that levels of satisfaction for DG Environment and DG Clima are similar, which suggests that the EEA has responded well to the challenge of having to coordinate their main activities with two Directorate Generals rather than just one.

Tasks not based on legislation

In respect to tasks not based on legislation, both the Commission and EEA emphasise that there is a well-functioning dialogue at all working levels, and that both parties make an effort to keep each other informed about developments which could influence work programmes (see under previous evaluation question). It is emphasised that this dialogue has improved. However, the EEA is at times seen as more reluctant to react to requests from the Commission. This is especially so for more urgent, ad-hoc issues where there is not enough time to follow the normal AMP planning procedures. This is aggravating for the Commission as they can be dependent on the EEA input in order to move forward a certain policy issue requiring immediate attention. The EEA, on the other hand, sometimes experience sudden requests without prewarning, requests which are not well-defined, and requests which do not follow the prescribed procedure which is communication through executive level. Interviewees (both Commission and EEA) have mentioned examples of cases where better communication at an earlier stage and/or a clearer definition of tasks requested would have been beneficial.

Reaction to impromptu, ad hoc tasks, such as those mentioned above shows that, even if communication and dialogue functions well, there is still room for improvement. Another barrier, which became evident from interviews and from the AMP workshop, is that the annual planning processes of the Commission and the Agency are not synchronised. The Commission starts its annual planning process later than the Agency, which implies a risk that Commission requirements come too late to be incorporated into the Agency AMP. This is an institutional reality, which is difficult to change, but it underlines the importance of keeping a close dialogue on policy developments and possible tasks arising from these developments.

4.2.3 Main findings on evaluation question 1.2

In many areas, the Commission and the EEA have established a close working relationship. This provides a solid background for agreeing to on new tasks - often with reference to specific EU legislation. This allows the EEA to respond promptly to any new tasks arising. There is focus on those tasks specified in legislation and response to these tasks has been satisfactory. In other areas, cooperation is sometimes less developed and the EEA is, at times, seen as unresponsive. Additional focus on mutual dialogue and task definition in the early stages of policy development could probably contribute towards improving this situation.

4.3 The quality of the EEA's work

Q1.3: Is the EEA's work consistently of high quality?

This question was assessed through the responses from the users of EEA's outputs. I.e. it has not been within the scope of this evaluation to provide professional

judgements of particular EEA outputs. The assessments were provided on two key parameters and the presentation of data is organised accordingly in this section: 1) the quality on six key performance criteria; 2) the quality of product types and the development in their quality over time.

4.3.1 Quality of information provided by the EEA on key criteria

Respondents, in both the user survey and the stakeholder survey⁴³, were asked how they would rate the quality of information provided by the EEA on six criteria. Table 4-4 provides an overview of the criteria and the responses in both surveys. As there are no significant differences in responses from different stakeholder groups, the table includes only total figures for the entire population who answered the question in the two surveys.

Table 4-4 Overall how would you rate the quality of information provided by the EEA on the following criteria?

Rating of quality	Stakeholder survey (n=390)				User survey (n=639)			
	Lower than medium (1-2)	Medium (3)	Higher than medium (4-5)	Average	Lower than medium (1-2)	Medium (3)	Higher than medium (4-5)	Average
Availability	3%	13%	83%	4.2	2%	13%	85%	4.3
Timeliness	6%	27%	67%	3.8	6%	18%	75%	4.0
Topical coverage	4%	20%	76%	4.0	5%	19%	76%	4.0
Reliability	4%	18%	77%	4.0	4%	10%	86%	4.3
Independence	5%	17%	78%	4.0	7%	12%	81%	4.1
Well-communicated	5%	22%	73%	4.0	6%	13%	81%	4.1

Source: COWI stakeholder survey and user survey, 2012

Overall, the quality is rated high or very high by a large majority of the respondents in both surveys and on all six criteria. Close to four out of five respondents rate the quality high or very high across criteria (score 4 or 5 on the 1-5 scale). The average score is between 3.8 ('Timeliness' in the stakeholder survey) to 4.3 ('Availability' by in the user survey). Looking at the low-scores, around one in twenty score low or very low (score 1 or 2 on the 1-5 scale). Low-scoring shares of respondents congregate around 5% with little variance, but the majority of them scored 2 on the 1-5 scale and around 1% scored 'very low'.

Data from interviews support the survey data. The independence and credibility of the EEA is considered very important by the Commission, because the Commission depends on the EEA's robust and reliable data and assessments in order to support its policy development process and the assessment of Member

⁴³ See chapter 3 / Appendix I for a description of the two surveys and respondent groups.

States' compliance and implementation of legislation. In the area of climate change, there is also the risk of legal actions against the EU, which further underlines the need for solid data to report to UNFCCC. The Commission underlines the value of the EEA in securing a high quality GHG inventory report for reporting to the UNFCCC. Only very few interviewed stakeholders have questioned the credibility of the EEA's products and this has been in relation to a few newer thematic areas.

4.3.2 Quality of EEA products

Respondents were also asked to rate the general quality of different types of EEA outputs. Table 4-5 sums up the answers to the question in both surveys combined⁴⁴. The outputs are ordered in descending order in the group 'high or very high quality'.

Table 4-5 Please rate the general quality of this EEA product? (n=1029)

	Low or very low quality	Medium quality	High or very high quality	Average
State of the Environment Report (last edition from 2010)	1%	17%	82%	4,2
Technical reports	2%	18%	81%	4,1
Direct, individual contact with the EEA (response to requests etc.)	5%	17%	78%	4,0
Indicators	3%	21%	76%	4,0
Other EEA reports	1%	24%	75%	4,0
EEA Workshops or conferences	2%	24%	74%	3,9
Graphs	1%	26%	73%	4,0
Data sets	3%	24%	73%	3,9
EEA Brochures	2%	26%	72%	4,0
Maps	2%	26%	72%	3,9
Interactive maps on EEA homepage	4%	25%	71%	3,9
EEA Meetings	3%	26%	71%	3,8
EEA Briefings	2%	28%	69%	3,9

Source: COWI stakeholder survey and user survey, 2012

The survey results suggest that the general quality per output is perceived to be high by both stakeholders and the users. Taken together, the average rate is 4 (= high quality) and outputs are rated high or very high by 69% to 82% of the respondents. The average share of respondents answering 'high' or 'very high' across output types is 73%. In other words, almost three-fourths of stakeholders

⁴⁴ There were no significant differences between the answers, although the user survey respondents rated the quality of outputs slightly more positively than stakeholder survey respondents on average (Stakeholder=3.9; User=4.1). Also, there were not significant differences in responses from different stakeholder groups.

perceive the EEA outputs to be of high or very high quality.⁴⁵ The remaining fourth of the respondents perceive the quality to be medium. Across all outputs, less than 1% of the respondents rate the quality as 'very low'.

The EEA outputs with the highest quality scores, from all respondents in the two surveys, are the 'SOER', 'Technical reports' and 'Direct, individual contact with the EEA'. 'EEA meetings' and 'EEA briefings' are the least highly rated, falling slightly under the overall average of 4. Around 5% were dissatisfied (score 1 or 2) with the direct individual contact with the Agency and the interactive maps.

Interviews with representatives of the Member Countries, the Commission and the European Parliament as well as the case studies also support that the quality of EEA products and services is generally high. In interviews, the SOER is often highlighted as a key product of high quality. The EEA products are several times referred to with expressions like 'as good as it gets' or 'best available'. The case studies support this finding. One example is the GHG Trends and Projections report (T&P report), which is considered to be of high quality by the Commission. In the past, data was not always of sufficient quality, inconsistent across Member States and/or the assumptions put forward by the Member States were not completely clear or data were not provided timely enough, sometimes due to resource problems in national administrations. The T&P report has with the 2011 report significantly improved and it has been a landmark in the Commission view. The EEA and the ETC/ACM has with the 2011 report considerably stepped up its quality assurance and control, e.g. through technical working papers. Thus, the EEA has made explicit the quality assurance criteria and Member States have responded positively to the more specified recommendations and guidelines provided by the EEA.

Development of the quality of EEA products over time

The two surveys also asked the respondents to assess the development over time of the quality of different types of EEA outputs. Table 4-6 sums up the answers to this question, combining answers from both surveys which do differ significantly.

⁴⁵ Confidence interval is between 70,3% and 75,7% (confidence coefficient=0.95).

Table 4-6 How would you evaluate the development of quality of this EEA product in recent years? (n=1029)

	Falling (-1)	Stable (0)	Improving (+1)	Total	Tendency [-1;1] ⁴⁶
Interactive maps on EEA homepage	1%	36%	63%	100%	+0,6
State of the Environment Report (last edition from 2010)	2%	46%	52%	100%	+0,5
Indicators	3%	46%	51%	100%	+0,5
Maps	1%	48%	51%	100%	+0,5
Data sets	1%	51%	47%	100%	+0,5
Technical reports	2%	52%	46%	100%	+0,4
EEA Brochures	1%	56%	43%	100%	+0,4
Graphs	1%	56%	43%	100%	+0,4
Other EEA reports	1%	57%	41%	100%	+0,4
EEA Briefings	2%	57%	41%	100%	+0,4
EEA Workshops or conferences	2%	59%	40%	100%	+0,4
EEA Meetings	1%	61%	38%	100%	+0,4
Direct, individual contact with the EEA	3%	61%	36%	100%	+0,3

Source: COWI stakeholder and user surveys, 2012

In Table 4-6, the tendency score is the average score of values from -1 to 1 assigned to the answer categories 'falling', 'stable' and 'improving'. According to the tendency score, EEA products have improved in recent years. The majority of respondents find that improvements have been made, in recent years, to 'Interactive maps', 'SOER', 'Indicators' and 'Maps'.⁴⁷ Very few respondents find that the level of quality has fallen. In fact, the low-scoring share of respondents is very similar (from 1% to 3%). So, the variance is between a stable quality and an improving quality.

A comparison of survey responses to the responses to the survey conducted in connection with the evaluation in 2008 also indicates that an improvement in product quality has occurred (see Appendix I). The interviews and case studies also clearly support this finding.

Drivers behind high quality

Stakeholders regard the staff of the Agency, the Director and the Eionet structure to be the main driver of the high level of quality. The EEA staff are commonly praised as skilled, experienced and easily accessible. The Director is praised for

⁴⁶ Tendency [-1;1] is calculated as an average of the categories weighted -1, 0 and 1 respectively. The continuum thus falls between -1 and +1. A negative number between 0 and -1 indicates a fall in quality and a positive number between 0 and +1 indicates an increase in quality.

⁴⁷ The perception among stakeholders that EEA's interactive maps are improving is statistically significant with a 99% significance level.

setting the bar high. Also, the networks and quality management systems managed by the EEA are recognised for their contribution to the good level of quality. Furthermore, the coordination and close cooperation between the Commission and the EEA is also perceived by stakeholders as an important driver enabling the EEA to produce products which are highly relevant.

The case studies generally confirm the data from the interviews. The case studies on the T&P Report and the Biodiversity Baseline Report point to the important role of the ETCs in providing technically and scientifically competent input and organising quality assurance and guiding Member Countries on monitoring, indicators and reporting in order to ensure quality and consistency in data.

Areas for improvement

Despite the general satisfaction with quality, some interviewees mention products, which they find of poorer quality. Interviewees from the Commission and international organisations have argued that the EEA does not have the sufficient capacity to produce good models and projections on all thematic areas.

Some Commission representatives have also offered the opinion that some ETCs are more well-functioning than others and that in some areas (water area put forward as concrete example) data and information delivered by the ETC has been less than optimal. It is felt that there is still room to improve the EEA's quality assurance procedures and systems to avoid such incidences.

Regarding the products of lower standard, the main concern of the Commission interviewees was that the credibility of the Agency and its products might suffer and consequently hamper the Commission's ability to produce policy. This was particularly seen as a problem in relation to newer policy-areas where the Agency has less experience and has fewer staff, or in policy areas where information is contested and the stakes are high.

One area of attention raised by interviewees in the Commission, in particular, is that policy frameworks are increasingly becoming integrated (e.g. climate change and air policies or biodiversity and water policies). This poses demands on the ability to provide integrated analysis across different data sets and hence, increased requirements as to the interoperability of data systems. It is recognised that the EEA is working in this direction and that 'silo-thinking' and organisation has been reduced, but it was also stated that in order to maintain a high standard in the future, substantial advances would have to be made in this area. One example is the WISE, where it is recognised that the EEA has played an important role in the establishment of Waterbase and WISE. However, it is still considered that the work on integration of various datasets has not been sufficiently prioritised by the EEA, and consequently, the progress made has been less than expected.

In relation to maps and data services, survey respondents and interviewees generally find considerable improvements in quality. This is also an area where a certain scope for improvement is still mentioned, in particular in relation to

recognition of data sources and provision of meta-data information, but also making data available faster. The case study on WISE also pointed to some of the emerging challenges in this field. New data sources and flows (e.g. science, businesses and utilities as well as citizen science) as well as new forms of data sharing (on-line sharing of data and mapping services) are increasingly becoming a reality and the EEA is embracing these developments. This further underlines the importance of data sources recognition and meta-data information. Also, it is likely to pose new challenges to the EEA in relation to facilitating interpretation and analysis when data and mapping services become more accessible to non-professional users.

4.3.3 Main findings on evaluation question 1.3

The third effectiveness question reads: *Is the EEA's work consistently of high quality?* The answer to this question is positive. The EEA's work is consistently of high quality and there are strong indications of improvements in quality over time.

Judging from the data, EEA's products and services are available with a good topical coverage and high reliability. Timeliness is rated somewhat lower and it is considered that products are not always aligned with the EU policy processes. The Agency is seen as independent and credible, something that is necessary if products from the EEA shall continue to be used for policy-formulation and support implementation of EU-legislation (see also Chapter 4.4.).

In relation to EEA products and services, the quality is high on all EEA products. Although quality is high, some stakeholders would like to see the EEA deliver more of the data it has at its disposal and, in particular, interoperability of data systems and maps and interactive services are mentioned as important areas in order to maintain the high standard.

4.4 The impact of the EEA's work

EQ 1.4 What impact does the EEA's work have or is likely to have in the future?

There is a long way from EEA activities and reports, to the impact on the European environment. This chapter is structured to reflect key steps in a simplified causal chain (or logic model) as illustrated in Figure 4-1 below. The logic model illustrates the flow where the EEA produces direct outputs, which are used by its stakeholders, and the general public, and which contribute to inducing certain indirect outputs. Stakeholders and users use the products to gain knowledge, to lobby government and to benchmark EU Member States etc. This, in turn, contributes to the production of e.g. EU measures or regulations to protect the European environment (outcome level).

Figure 4-1 Logic model



The evaluation has aimed to assess, qualitatively, each step in the model mentioned above, through asking informed stakeholders to assess the contribution and the results on the use of EEA products and services. The key steps in the model are linked to the one sub-question and five judgement criteria which are addressed in this chapter (and the chapter is structured accordingly):

- > What do stakeholders do with the EEA products?
- > Importance of EEA products to environmental policy making at the EU level and the national level
- > Importance of the EEA's work in relation to environmental research
- > Importance of the EEA's work in relation to advocacy
- > Importance of the E's work at the global level
- > Impact on state of the European environment

4.4.1 Use of EEA products

This sub-section analyses the frequency of use of EEA products, as well as how stakeholders use EEA products. To assess EEA impacts on the European environment, it is necessary to know to what extent EEA outputs are actually put to use and how often they are used. It is obvious that if information is not used, there will be no impact down the line. Both the stakeholder survey and the user survey included several questions on the use of various EEA product types⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Detailed data from the two surveys are presented in Appendix I.

Acquire knowledge and formulate policy

The answers to the stakeholder survey indicate that EEA products and services are widely used by stakeholders to update and acquire knowledge and formulate and adjust policy. It is noticeable that a majority of MB, NFPs and as much as 47% of the NRCs use EEA products and services for policy formulation or adjustment. A large majority (70%) of the Commission respondents indicate that they use EEA products for policy formulation. These data are supported by interviews with Commission staff. The EEA product categories mostly used by all Stakeholders in the Stakeholder survey, are technical reports, SOER, indicators, data sets and 'other EEA reports'. Technical reports are used on a monthly basis by almost a fifth of the respondents. On average, around 5% of respondents use EEA products on a weekly basis or more frequently. In respect to the Members of the European Parliament, which are not well represented in the survey data, the interview data indicates that the SOER is used as a work of reference and addition, specific technical reports are used as sources of information in the process of preparing legislation.

Comparing EU stakeholders with national stakeholders

Survey results show that EEA products are used less by national policy-makers compared to EU-level policy-makers. Individual contact with the EEA is not widely used on the national level.

4.4.2 Importance of EEA products to environmental policy making

The general importance of EEA information

The two surveys contained a question related to the importance of EEA products in relation to the work of the respondents' organisation. This question shed light on what could broadly be referred to as 'usability' of EEA information.

Table 4-7 To what extent are EEA product(s) a significant factor with regard to you or your organisation's work/methods/knowledge?

Survey	Respondent group	1. To a very low extent	2.	3.	4.	5. To a very high extent	Total	Average	n
Stakeholder survey	Research community + SC	9%	9%	45%	23%	14%	100%	3.2	22
	Commission	14%	6%	22%	20%	37%	100%	3.6	46
	Member Countries	9%	12%	39%	29%	10%	100%	3.2	298
User survey	All respondents	7%	11%	30%	31%	21%	100%	3.5	520
All respondents		8%	11%	33%	29%	18%	100%	3.4	889

Source: COWI stakeholder survey and user survey, 2012

Across stakeholder groups and the user survey respondents, an average share of 81% respondents perceive at least to some extent (score 3 to 5) that the EEA products are a significant factor in their work or the work of their organisation. The majority of Commission respondents, and respondents in the user survey, respond that the factor is significant to a high or very high extent.

Importance to EU-level policy-making

Use in policy documents

The desk study of the General Union Environment Action Programme 2020 and the 6th Environment Action Programme found that EEA products are mentioned as a source of information and the EEA is mentioned as well in relation to the role to be undertaken. EEA outputs such as the SOER, technical reports and indicators are referred to in the General Union Environment Action Programme 2020. The role of the Agency is primarily described as important with regard to the monitoring and interpretation of the successful implementation of the programme. In the 6th Environment Action Programme, the EEA has a similar important role and several EEA reports also substantiate strategic objectives. Hence, the EEA's impact on EU strategy is unambiguous.

Stakeholders' assessment

Table 4-8 summarises the answers of the Stakeholder survey and aggregated figures for the user survey with regard to EEA information's role in EU-policy-making.

Table 4-8 Does the EEA information play a role in environmental policy making at the EU level?

Survey	Respondent group	1. Completely insignificant role	2.	3.	4.	5. Very significant role	Total	Average	n
Stakeholder survey	Commission	0%	7%	28%	45%	18%	100%	3.7	40
	Member Countries	1%	9%	26%	40%	24%	100%	3.8	263
User survey	All respondents	2%	10%	26%	38%	24%	100%	3.7	397
	All respondents	2%	9%	26%	39%	24%	100%	3.7	715

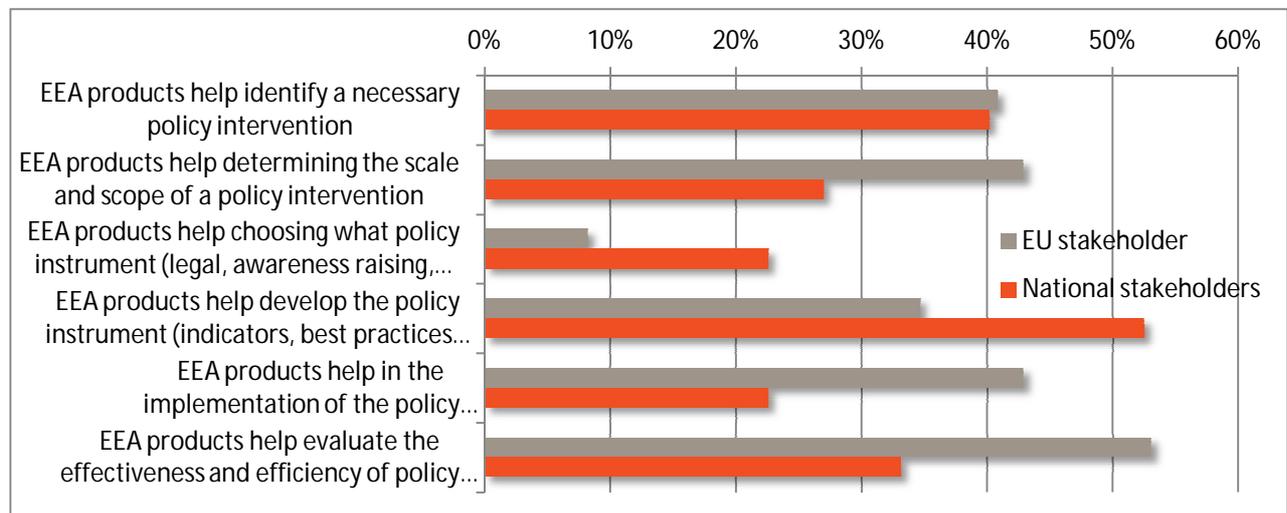
Source: COWI stakeholder survey and user survey, 2012

The table shows that a majority, in both surveys, found that EEA information's role in EU policy-making is significant (score 4 or 5). The answers of the respondents in the user survey were remarkably similar to that of the respondents to the stakeholders survey. In the user survey, 62% of the users respond that EEA information's role in EU policy-making is significant (score 4 or 5) (compared to an overall average of 61% for stakeholders).

The stakeholder survey also contained a question on how EEA products are used in policy-making. Figure 4-2 gives an overview of the answers.

Figure 4-2 shows that EEA products are used widely by EU policy-makers in the policy-cycle, except in relation to choosing policy instruments. EEA products are used by a majority of EU-stakeholders to help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of policy interventions. EU-level stakeholders use EEA products more frequently in the scoping of the policy intervention, the implementation and evaluation of the policy intervention and evaluation relative to national stakeholders (impact on national level policy making is analysed in the next section).

Figure 4-2 In policy-making, how do you typically use EEA products? (percentage of group total, n=390)



Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012

Interviews with Commission representatives clearly confirm the important role of EEA information and emphasise that EEA products are sometimes crucial or 'indispensable' for EU policy making and assessment of implementation of EU-legislation. The MEPs express their appreciation of the EEA data and reports in providing them with robust and highly credible data as basis for their decision-making. Some of the examples of positive contributions to impacts on the European policy development that were mentioned in interviews as well as from findings in case studies are summarised below:

- > Related to policy-development on biodiversity, the EEA in close cooperation with DG Environment produced the Biodiversity Baseline Report in 2010. Interviews with the Commission suggest that the baseline was a major achievement allowing the Commission to further the biodiversity agenda and greatly supported the development of the Biodiversity Strategy 2020.
- > The case study on WISE / Waterbase shows that Waterbase data is widely used at EU-level, e.g. in the recent Blueprint for safeguarding Europe's waters.
- > The importance of the annual trends and projection (T&P) reports is considered to be high at both Member State and EU levels as well as on the international level. It is a key mechanism for tracking progress towards the targets of the Kyoto Protocol as well as the Europe 2020 targets. The T&P reports are recognised as providers of the most consistent and updated data available on these aspects.

Importance to national level policy-making

Table 4-9 summarises the answers of the stakeholder survey and the use survey with regard to EEA information's role in national policy-making.

Table 4-9 Does the EEA information play a role in environmental policy making in your country?

Survey	1. Completely insignificant role	2.	3.	4.	5. Very significant role	Total	Average	n
Stakeholder survey	9%	22%	35%	29%	6%	100%	3.0	263
User survey	14%	23%	32%	21%	10%	100%	2.9	378
All respondents	12%	23%	33%	24%	9%	100%	2.9	651

Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012. Notes: No significant differences in responses from stakeholder groups, so only totals are shown.

National stakeholders estimate that EEA information plays a role at national level, though not as significant as on the EU-level (see Table 4-8). The average score is around 3 for respondents in both the stakeholder survey and the user survey, which indicates that EEA information plays some role in national policy-making. The variance across categories is relatively high indicating very different roles of EEA information e.g. across thematic areas and products, countries etc.

The data on types of use (ref. Figure 4-2) also indicates that EEA information plays a less significant role in policy making at Member State level. Around half of the national stakeholders use EEA products to develop policies through e.g. best practices from other countries. A large share of interviewees indicate that pilot studies, guidelines and cases of best practice are very useful to Member Countries and that the EEA could produce more of this type of information⁴⁹.

The above finding is supported by interviewees from the NFP group, suggesting that Member Countries often have access to many national sources of data on which national policy is based. EEA information is thus often one of many information sources on policy-making. However, in countries with less advanced environmental information systems, the EEA data has played a more important role. For example, in the Waterbase/WISE case study it was found that, WISE provided a better database and basis for decision making in countries where environmental information systems were less advanced. However, in many countries, the national systems have been in use longer and provide more detailed data and analysis than WISE/Waterbase can provide.

Other impacts

Apart from impact on policy making at national level, other important impacts have also been identified through the interviews. Several interviewees from Member States as well as the Commission with prior experience from national administrations argue that the effect on national policy implementation from

⁴⁹ It has not been within the scope of the evaluation to interview parliamentarians at national level and the interview data is derived from interviews with EEA Board Members, NFPs and other officials in national environmental administrations.

benchmarking is considerable. Interviewees gave examples of how Member States could be exposed to 'bad press' from national media after a low ranking and how such incidences had contributed to increasing efforts in relation to policy implementation.

Also, interviewees, as well as participants in the NFP workshop, underlined the importance of the EEA in relation to establishing common methodologies and approaches to indicators and assessments. The case study on the Biodiversity Baseline Report also showed that the process of elaborating the report had an important side effect in terms of allowing the Member States a better understanding of the need to make use of standardised indicators and reporting structures for the purpose of providing comparable data on national and EU biodiversity. Interview data suggests that the MSs have been inspired by the SEBI process to put further efforts into establishing national baselines and indicator systems, which in turn will serve to improve the SEBI system and the EEAs ability to provide qualified data on EU biodiversity and ecosystems.

4.4.3 Importance of the EEA's work in relation to environmental research

Respondents from research community and the SC were asked whether the work of the EEA has an impact on environmental research. The average score given was 3.7 indicating that the EEA has some impact on environmental research. But this figure should be treated with caution due to a low number of respondents (17 academics and 6 SC Members). Data from open questions in the surveys and interviews indicate that the EEA's work has a fairly limited importance in relation to research as researches mostly rely on more detailed data from national sources or collected directly through the research projects. However, the EEA data is used for referencing and it is used quite widely for teaching purposes.

4.4.4 Importance of the EEA's work in relation to advocacy

The Stakeholder survey contains some information on advocacy (see Appendix H), but the number of responses is very low. A majority of NGOs in the Stakeholder survey (n=4) use EEA's work in relation to advocacy. This is supported by data from the user survey, where the number of respondents is higher. The results of the user survey in relation to advocacy are illustrated in Appendix I. Interview data from the European Parliament as well as NGO and business also suggest that EEA information is widely used to support advocacy activities and further that the EEA is very responsive regarding questions posed directly to the Agency from users and stakeholders.

4.4.5 Importance of the EEA's work at the global level

The interviewees at key international organisations describe the EEA as a forward-looking organisation, which uses its experience with large data networks to place

itself in a leading position with regard to innovation of future technologies. These technologies have a global reach. It is thus suggested that with the experience from managing the advanced level of environmental information in Europe, the EEA is able to contribute significantly to the development of global technologies, regional networks in Third countries, capacity building in neighbouring states and in cooperation with international organisations etc. The impact is indirect through the setting of standards of e.g. reporting format (example of the SOER), practices related to communication and capacity building, network infrastructures, indicators etc. In several ways, the EEA is considered by international stakeholders to be a first-mover and also a very important partner. Initiatives such as Eye on Earth is praised by most interviewees though interviewees from the Commission raise concern that the EEA stray too much from the core mandated tasks, which are related to policy-making in Europe and not a global out-reach.

4.4.6 Impact on state of the European environment

This section analyses the perceived impact the EEA has on the European environment and in which thematic areas this impact is perceived by stakeholders to be greatest. Whereas the previous questions have treated key elements in the logic model, this section is directly addressing the issue of impact to gauge the common perception of stakeholders and the users of EEA information.

EEA impact on the state of the European environment

Table 4-10 summarises the responses from both surveys regarding the question to what extent the EEA has a positive impact on the state of the European environment.

Table 4-10 To what extent has the EEA had a positive impact on the state of the European environment?

Survey	Respondent group	1. No effect	2.	3.	4.	5. Very large effect	Total	Average	N
Stakeholder survey	Research community (+SC)	0%	33%	17%	25%	25%	100%	3.4	12
	Commission	0%	22%	34%	34%	9%	100%	3.3	32
	Member Countries	2%	14%	32%	38%	14%	100%	3.5	222
	NGO	0%	20%	40%	20%	20%	100%	3.4	5
User survey	All respondents	5%	12%	34%	35%	15%	100%	3.4	391
All respondents		4%	13%	33%	36%	15%	100%	3.4	662

Source: COWI stakeholder and user surveys, 2012

There are no statistically significant differences between the groups. This probably reflects the nature of the question, which is very general. Therefore, it is fair to regard the average of 3.4 across stakeholder groups as reliable and signifying that the perception is that EEA has between some and a large impact on the European environment. Hence, there is a strong indication that knowledgeable users and stakeholders in the field, perceive that the EEA impacts the European environment

from "some" to a "significant" extent. Also, about half of the respondents (across the two surveys) believe that the EEA has a large effect on the European environment (score 4 or 5).

Areas of impact

Respondents in both surveys were also asked to assess which thematic area they believe that the EEA has a positive impact on in relation to the European environment. Table 4-11 summarises the results for both surveys. Stakeholder survey and user survey answers are relatively similar. Although in different order, the five thematic areas most often mentioned are the same, as are the areas least often mentioned.

Table 4-11 On what thematic area(s) do you think the EEA has had a positive impact on the environment in Europe?

Stakeholder survey (n=208)			User survey (n=195)		
Theme	#	%	Theme	#	%
Air pollutant emissions	125	60%	Air pollutant emissions	130	67%
Air quality and noise	118	57%	Air quality and noise	120	62%
Biodiversity and ecosystems assessments	105	50%	Climate change mitigation and greenhouse gas emissions	113	58%
Climate change mitigation and greenhouse gas emissions	101	49%	Climate change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability	105	54%
Climate change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability	97	47%	Biodiversity and ecosystems assessments	101	52%
Freshwater	91	44%	Environment and health	95	49%
Sustainable consumption and production (SCP), resource efficiency and waste	77	37%	Energy	92	47%
Environment and health	72	35%	Land use	83	43%
Land use	65	31%	Freshwater	76	39%
Energy	64	31%	Sustainable consumption and production (SCP), resource efficiency and waste	74	38%
Transport	64	31%	Transport	73	37%
Marine environment	54	26%	Agriculture and forestry	70	36%
Agriculture and forestry	54	26%	Marine environment	61	31%
Atmosphere: Climate Air Interactions	52	25%	Atmosphere: Climate Air Interactions	61	31%

Source: COWI stakeholder and user surveys, 2012

Judging from this data, the areas of air quality, climate change and biodiversity are thus the three areas seen to be most impacted by the EEA, whereas the thematic areas least impacted are perceived to be the marine environment, agriculture and forestry and climate and air interaction⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ This could be an indication of the areas where most respondents are active, however, the average number of themes checked by each respondent was 5.5 in the Stakeholder survey and 6.0 in the User survey, indicating a rather large variance contradicting that respondents are likely to only check the theme representing their field of knowledge.

4.4.7 Main findings on evaluation question 1.4

The fourth effectiveness question that has been addressed by the evaluation concerns the impact of the work done by the EEA. It reads: *What impact does the EEA's work have or is likely to have in the future?* As explained in the introduction to this evaluation question, the impact of the EEA is very hard to assess because of its indirect nature. However, by measuring the constitutive indicators of impact, the existence of EEA impacts can be inferred.

Firstly, the assumption that EEA products and services are used by stakeholders and the public holds true. This finding is supported by two surveys, interviews and the desk study. Secondly, the findings from the surveys, interviews and case studies show that EEA products and services are used by political stakeholders for policy-formulation and adjustment and by wider audiences for advocacy and lobbying. The impact of the EEA is clearly more pronounced on the EU-level than on the national level. At the national level, EEA information is often one out of many sources of information to support policy-making. Survey responses indicate that EEA information is used in all parts of the policy-cycle. It is clear from the data that the use of EEA information varies greatly depending on thematic area, country etc.

Thirdly, academics also make use of the EEA's products for scientific work and the impact on environmental research is perceived to be fair depending on thematic area. Sometimes EEA information is the best source of information. In many cases, respondents use EEA information as a point of reference. Fourthly, the EEA is respected on the global level as an innovative Agency that is an important partner in international cooperation and sometimes as a first-mover on particular technical issues and issues related to data networks. EEA's global impact is very indirect and the global impact is certainly much smaller outside Europe than in the European member countries.

Fifthly, a majority of the respondents in the surveys find the EEA impact on the European environment to be significant or very significant. This is a strong indication of an impact taking into consideration that the respondents assumingly are knowledgeable about the EEA and its effects.

Concluding, the data clearly suggest that the EEA has an impact on the European environment. The exact impact is not possible to assess. But, each step and key element in the analysis of the EEA's contribution to an impact on the European environment has been verified. That is the closest a study of this scope can come gauging the impact of the EEA taking the multiplicity of the EEA's outputs, stakeholders and users into consideration.

4.5 European added value

EQ 1.5: To what extent does the EEA provide European Added Value?

The assessment of the EEA's European added value is highly complex and contingent on other factors such as impact and cost-efficiency. The key question regarding European added value is whether the EEA is complementary to action at the national level, which is first judgement criteria applied in the evaluation. Three other judgement criteria have also been applied. They are related to the economies of scale of the EEA, transnational sharing of expertise and best-practice and whether the EEA contributes to policy-making on the EU-level. Some of these issues have been analysed in the previous section related to impacts.

4.5.1 EEA as complementary to national action

The Stakeholder survey contained the question; *'To what extent do you agree with the following statements: EEA work is complementing work undertaken at national levels'*? Table 4-12 summarises the results of the survey across stakeholder groups.

Table 4-12 Statement: EEA work is complementing work undertaken at national levels (N=341)

Respondent group	1. Do not agree at all	2.	3.	4.	5. Fully agree	Total	Average	n
Research community + SC	5%	0%	14%	43%	38%	100%	4.1	21
Commission	0%	14%	22%	34%	29%	100%	3.8	35
Member Countries	4%	13%	29%	37%	18%	100%	3.5	285
All respondents	3%	12%	27%	37%	20%	100%	3.6	3.6

Source: COWI stakeholder survey, 2012

Across Stakeholder categories, 69% agree or fully agree (score 4 or 5) that the EEA work is complementing work undertaken at national levels. Interviews substantiate the survey results. According to interviewees, the EEA's publications might be the only source on a particular environmental issue in some countries, whereas in other countries, the EEA outputs are regarded as supplements to an already existing and developed knowledge base. This might explain the variation in responses from MB-members.

4.5.2 Economies of scale

Economies of scale concern whether or not the EEA exploits potential savings from pooling resources at the European level, i.e. whether or not there are alternatives to the EEA, which could be more effective and efficient. The possible alternatives which could be considered are: 1) hiring external consultants to do the same job; 2) integrating the tasks in the Commission's DG Environment and DG Clima; or 3) relying on Member States to collect the same data and provide similar outputs.

The Report 'Evaluation of the EU decentralized agencies in 2009'⁵¹ concluded in relation to the EEA that "*there were and are no viable alternatives to the agency. ... We consider the Agency is therefore the most efficient way to deliver the products and services required by the stakeholders.*"

Interviewees with the Commission and Member Countries indicate that the EEA (and Eionet) is seen as the most cost-efficient alternative to perform European-wide environmental data collection and reporting compared to the three alternatives above. All options are considered to be less effective and efficient in terms of the quality/price considerations by all interviewees (Member States and Commission), who answered the question. This is supported by the findings of this evaluation, which indicate that the EEA and the Eionet is working well and cost-efficiently (developed later in this report). In particular, Member States emphasise the importance of Reportnet in streamlining and simplifying reporting requirements and procedures for Member States.

Thus, based on a qualitative assessment, it is considered that the EEA does contribute to economies of scale and the finding from the 2009 evaluation that the Agency is the most efficient way to deliver the services is confirmed as well by this qualitative assessment⁵².

4.5.3 Transnational sharing of expertise and good practise

The Stakeholder survey contained the question; '*To what extent do you agree with the following statements: EEA contribute to transnational sharing of expertise and good practise* '? Table 4-13 summarises the results of the survey across stakeholder groups.

For all respondents across Stakeholder groups, 81% agree or fully agree (score 4 or 5) that the EEA contribute to transnational sharing of expertise and good practise. Again, the most positive are the Commission as well as the research community. But around 70% of national stakeholders agree or fully agree (score 4 or 5) to the statement, so their responses are also clearly positive towards the statement.

⁵¹ Rambøll (2009). Evaluation of the EU decentralized agencies in 2009. Evaluation for the European Commission: 81-82

⁵² It has not been within the scope of this evaluation to perform an actual cost-benefit assessment of the Agency.

Table 4-13 Statement: EEA contribute to transnational sharing of expertise and good practise (N=349)

Respondent group	1. Do not agree at all	2.	3.	4.	5. Fully agree	Total	Average	n
Member Countries	1%	6%	22%	38%	33%	100%	4.0	289
Research community + SC	0%	10%	5%	38%	48%	100%	4.2	21
Commission	0%	10%	5%	46%	38%	100%	4.1	39
All respondents	1%	7%	19%	39%	35%	100%	4.0	351

Source: COWI Stakeholder survey, 2012

Interviews suggest that international sharing of expertise and good practices happens through e.g. dissemination of best practice in the Eionet and directly from the EEA to Member countries. In relation to capacity development and support to Member Countries, several interviewees (many from EU12 countries and candidate countries) argue that the EEA has been pivotal in relation to building and supporting the administrative staff, particularly in South-Eastern countries, with regard to issues relevant for the implementation of EU-legislation. According to some interviewees, especially in the areas of climate change, water conservation and ecosystems the EEA has had an important role to play with regard to lifting the standards in Europe.

In relation to comparative data, many interviewees including NFPs, stress the importance of the possibility of comparing data between Member Countries. One such example from Switzerland concerned air pollution thought to emanate from highways crossing the country. Political measures were taken in Switzerland until comparative data from the EEA located the source of pollution partly in the Milanese metropolitan area and thus made it redundant to take any more measures in Switzerland.

4.5.4 Main findings on evaluation question 1.5

The data collected indicates that the EEA provides European added value because; 1) it complements work undertaken at the national level to a relatively high degree; 2) represents economies of scale; 3) shares experience and best practices; and 4) contributes to European policy-making. The qualitative assessment provided through the evaluation confirms previous evaluation results that the EEA is the most cost-efficient alternative to collect and report on European environmental data.

5 Findings on efficiency

In this chapter, the data and main findings concerning the five evaluation questions relating to efficiency are presented. The chapter is structured according to the evaluation questions and thus contains the following five sections:

- 5.1 EEA performance in relation to planned objectives and outputs
- 5.2 Value for money
- 5.3 Potentials for optimisation
- 5.4 Efficiency of governance and network structures
- 5.5 Fitness of the Agency for future challenges

In each section the sub-questions and judgement criteria definitions for assessing the evaluation are used as the main structuring elements (see Appendix B for an overview of evaluation questions and judgement criteria).

5.1 Performance of the EEA in relation to planned objectives and outputs

Evaluation question 2.1: Did the EEA deliver?

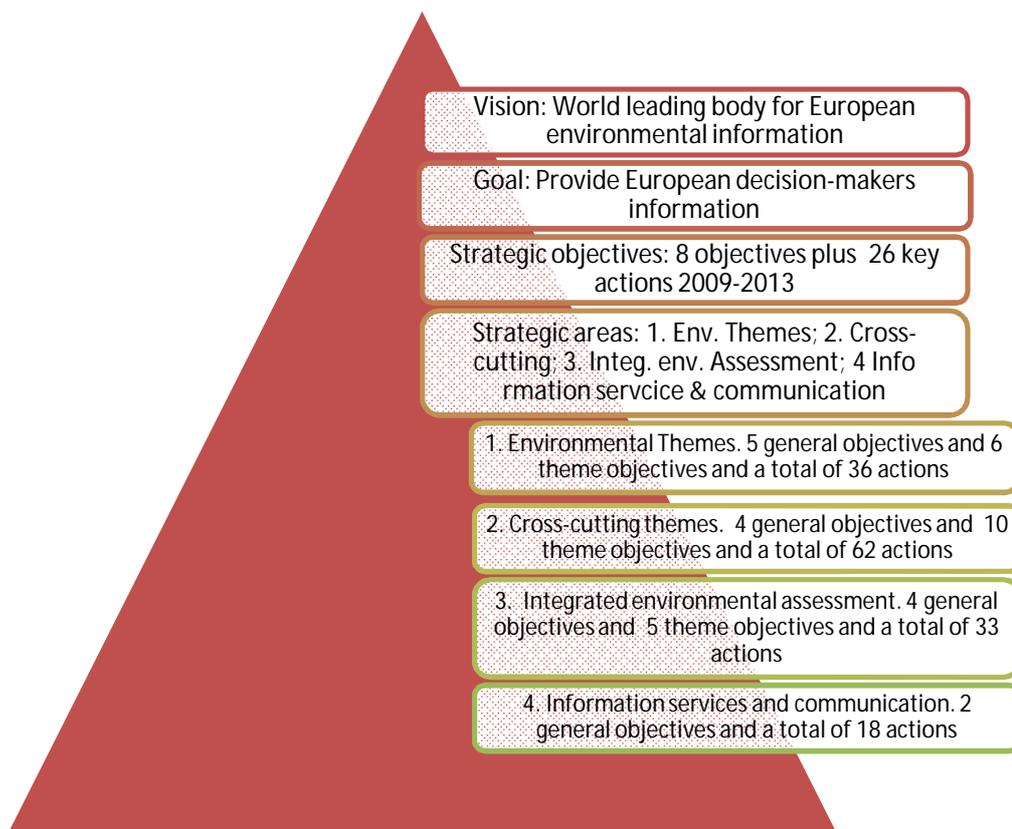
This evaluation question deals with the extent to which the EEA has delivered, as scheduled and planned in the strategy and the AMPs. The findings presented in the following paragraphs look at 1) delivery on multi-annual objectives in the 2009 strategy, 2) delivery on objectives in the AMPs, and 3) delivery against planned outputs of the annual publication plans.

EEA strategy objectives

5.1.1 Delivery on multi-annual objectives

The Strategy 2009 - 2013⁵³ is the 4th Multi-annual Work Programme. The EEA 2009-2013 strategy and the various goals, objectives and thematic areas are shown in a hierarchical format as seen in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Objectives hierarchy in the 2009-2013 strategy



Source: COWI evaluation 2012 (based on EEA multi-annual work programme 2009-2013)

The evaluation's review of the strategy leads to three findings:

- > Firstly, the objectives hierarchy of the strategy is not completely consistent. Organisational assessments normally assume that visions, goal, objectives, results and actions can be structured in a hierarchy, where each lower level is assumed to be a logical specification of the upper level. This implies that attainment of lower level objectives is a prerequisite for attainment of higher level objectives (or goals). This logic is not completely clear in the strategy.
- > Secondly, the objectives listed in the strategy (at several levels) are not very specific. The strategic objectives can only be understood as *directional*

⁵³ EEA Strategy 2009-2013. Multi-annual Work Programme. European Environment Agency 2009

objectives or *process-type objectives*, defining the orientation of the work of the EEA. The problem with directional objectives is, however, that they only define direction, and in some cases, also a process, but they do not state how much the EEA shall accomplish, how much help the EEA shall provide or how many integrated assessments the EEA shall present as a result of the annual budget allocation. And, as such, it is not possible to say whether or not the objective has actually been attained.

The directional objectives are not linked to, or include specifications of, when, how and how much. And they are all formulated as action-type descriptions or activities that, in principle, are without beginning or end - e.g. in 'to play a key role', 'to monitor', 'to support' etc. As shown the directional objectives are formulated as never ending activities - to support, to monitor etc. Nobody is able to say whether or not the EEA has played a key role or monitored or contributed sufficiently. Even directional objectives would require success criteria and performance indicators in order to be able to document more precisely agreed, planned or promised results (in line with SMART approaches⁵⁴).

The major part of the EEA's workload is regular, recurrent tasks - maybe up to 80%. It is not clear from the strategy precisely which objectives and activities are linked to this work. Considering that most of the tasks are relatively well-established, and predictable, it would be relevant and should be possible to establish clear objectives and performance indicators for these tasks.

- > Thirdly, the strategy has been formulated using a very complex structure and an abundance of objectives and actions, making it almost impossible to develop more specific performance or success criteria. The strategy introduces four strategic areas. For each of these, the strategy presents general and specific thematic objectives and a number of actions. In total, the strategy has defined 38 objectives and 149 actions - all to be achieved or attained during a plan period of 5 years. The delineation between the thematic objectives in the environmental themes and cross-cutting themes does not seem clear in all cases⁵⁵.

All in all, these characteristics make it difficult to track and monitor performance and to assess the attainment of strategic objectives⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Objectives that are SMART - Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Realistic and Time bound

⁵⁵ E.g. biodiversity in environmental themes and ecosystem in cross-cutting themes; Marine in environmental and Maritime in cross-cutting; or greenhouse gas emissions in environmental and climate change impacts in cross-cutting.

⁵⁶ This also has implications for the Management Board's ability to exercise its role. This is dealt with in section 5.4.

Delivery

With this being said, the documentation reviewed during the evaluation clearly shows that the EEA has operated within the objectives of the strategy. The desk study on management plans and annual reports, combined with information from interviews, document that the EEA has designed and implemented programmes and projects and achieved a number of outputs within the scope defined in the strategic objectives. And as such the portfolio of EEA programmes and activities are well anchored within the scope of the directional objectives. A review of the data contained in the activity based budgeting and accounting system, which is organised according to strategy objectives, also shows that EEA resources and planned activities are allocated within the broad scope of the strategy (see below).

The data from interviews with Member Countries and the Commission generally point to a high level of satisfaction with the work and achievements of the Agency although there is also scope for improvement (ref. chapter 4). Stakeholders do emphasise that a precise assessment of achievement against objectives is difficult due to lack of clear indicators and complexities in the strategy and AMPs.

5.1.2 Delivery on objectives in Annual Management Plans

The AMP and AR

The annual work programme forms part of the Annual Management Plan (AMP), which is the consolidated and agreed programmatic statement for each year's work programme. The AMP offers a narrative description of key activities for the coming year, as well as selected performance indicators for the agency (EMAS and Balanced Scorecard), followed by a narrative description of the annual work programme in six sections, which correspond to the four thematic and two operational areas covered in the strategy. The Annual Reports (AR) provide descriptions of key activities undertaken in the six areas also covered by the AMP as well as reporting on the selected performance indicators.

Review of AMPs and ARs

The desk studies of AMPs and AR conducted by the evaluation led to the following findings:

- > The AMPs, to a large extent, suffer from the same weaknesses as the strategy with regard to complexity and lack of specificity in objectives, targets and expected outcomes.
- > Reporting in ARs predominantly reflect programme activities and the resulting publications. There is little reporting in relation to objectives.

This again makes it difficult to make a direct comparison of planned objectives in relation to realised objectives and, thus, assess the extent to which the EEA delivers on its annual objectives.

Activity-based budget and accounting data

The EEA has developed an activity-based budgeting and accounting system, where budget and time allocations and actual use are distributed according to the strategic areas and themes mentioned in the strategy and the AMPs. The system operates

with three levels, which correspond to the strategy: Level 1: The six strategic areas (four themes and two operational); level 2: 'Project group' (corresponding to objectives under themes); level 3: Projects.⁵⁷

Analysis of data from this system provides an overview of allocations of funding/resources and work days to the thematic areas of the strategy/AMPs and allows for a comparison of plans against actual use of resources. Appendix J provides an overview of the figures and the analysis. The main findings which emerge from this analysis are:

- > The system is quite advanced and appears to be used in a structured manner and, thus, provides a good basis for insight into the prioritisation and actual implementation of activities in the Agency. Its organisation according to the structure of the strategy means that the information is organised according to the same rather complex structure.
- > The data from the system shows that resources have been committed and spent on all the thematic areas and the objectives mentioned in the strategy/AMPs. The project groups/objectives given highest priority (with respect to allocation of resources) are SEIS (which accounts by far for the largest share of resources), followed by an additional seven project groups: Air quality and noise; Biodiversity; Land use; Freshwater; SCP, resource efficiency and waste; Quality management and operational services; Governance and country networks, and Communication with target groups. This prioritisation is not clearly reflected in the strategy or AMPs. The AMP e.g. holds a narrative statement each year on topics to which special focus shall be addressed without indication of the corresponding allocation of resources.⁵⁸
- > Overall, the data points to a fair degree of correspondence between planned resource use and actual resource use thus indicating that planned activities have been undertaken. However, the analysis shows underperformance for certain projects in the sense that allocated days have not been used. It also shows instances where project groups have used resource days far beyond what was originally planned. This deviation with regard to time allocation needs to be seen in the relation to the desire for flexibility from the EEA. The Agency is expected to respond to issues which arise during the year and therefore one cannot, at the same time, expect that all activities can be undertaken as planned.

⁵⁷ The project groups are sum totals of projects. Information is provided with a break-down to project level. The project group Air Quality for example comprised 4 projects in 2012.

⁵⁸ In the 2013 AMP the allocated resources are shown

5.1.3 Intended outputs and results

Publication plan

Direct intended outputs, produced by the EEA, are publications, comprising reports, assessment, data, web content etc. The intended outputs are presented in the annual publication plan, which is approved by the MB in March. The actual number of publications is reported in the Annual Report and the performance is reflected as part of the Balanced Scorecard, focussing on timeliness.

Table 5-1: Planned and Realised publications 2010 and 2011

	2010	2011
Planned publications	71	89
Finalised publications	56	54

Source: EEA Annual Report 2010 and 2011

Output performance

According to balanced scorecard data, performance was 79% of planned in 2010 and 61% in 2011. There are, however, some uncertainties surrounding these figures and the definition of what type of publication should factor on the scorecard has shifted during the period. According to interview information, the EEA, on an overall level, estimates that performance under the publication plan broadly speaking is around 50%.⁵⁹ This estimate stems from the figures compiled for the EEA Excellence Model. These figures differ from those of the Balanced Scorecard and demonstrate a much weaker performance rate. As already mentioned in chapter 4.1, the publications corresponding to mandatory legal requirements are produced, so the underperformance in relation to the publication plan relates to publications not associated with legal requirements.

There are of course many factors influencing actual production and causing delays in the process. Not all can be factored into an output-oriented planning system. The most common problem mentioned was late data delivery from partners e.g. in the Eionet, forcing a delay in the publication. Also, according to the EEA, some publication are dropped during the year in a dialogue with relevant stakeholders because they have found to be redundant. Interviews also indicate that the ambition level, at the start of the year, could be too high, compared to the actual resource inputs during the year when additional external demands from stakeholders also have to be factored into work plans.

⁵⁹ The EEA has reported planned and delayed publications for 2009 to 2011 in the *EEA Excellence Model Book of Evidence*. Figures do not tally with balanced scorecard figures. Planned publications in 2009 were 52; 50% were on time. Planned publications were 41 in 2010; 27% were on time; and in 2011 planned were 50 of which 52% were on time

A high level of ambition can be a good driver for optimising performance and, likewise, a critical review of the publication plan during the year and dropping irrelevant publications is also resource efficient. However, a 50% achievement of the publication plan is a low figure and calls for a review of the planning processes.

Did EEA deliver?

5.1.4 Key findings on evaluation question 2.1

Assessing to what extent the EEA has delivered as planned is difficult due to complexity and vagueness in stated and agreed objectives. Objectives are predominantly of directional nature or expressed as broad activities rather than tangible targets. The available data shows that the EEA has worked broadly within the planned objectives and activities. It is not possible to provide a precise assessment on the degree to which objectives have been fulfilled.

Priorities are reflected in the activity-based budgeting and accounting system of the agency, which shows allocation of resources in relation to different themes and project groups, corresponding to the strategy/AMPs. This prioritisation is not reflected in the strategy/AMPs. Overall, the data indicates that resources have been planned and spent on all objective areas of the strategy/AMPs and there is a fair degree of correspondence between planned and actual resources use. However, there are also variations.

Consideration could be given to improving the AMP by applying SMART objectives to a greater extent. By placing greater focus on measurable objectives and indicators, the AMP would constitute an improved framework for measuring the Agency performance. In this regard, a simpler structure and clearer distinction of recurrent and ad-hoc tasks would also be relevant.

Based on data on performance in relation to the publication plan, the EEA does not produce planned outputs. The 50% achievement seems low. Based on qualitative assessments, this inability is due to overambitious planning rather than unsatisfactory performance. A more realistic plan and integration of the publication plan into the AMP would seem appropriate.

5.2 Value for money

Evaluation question 2.2: Did the EEA represent value for money?

The question on value for money is assessed on the basis of the perceived degree of value for money generated by the EEA reported on by the stakeholders. It has not been within the scope of this evaluation to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the EEA.

Table 5-2 shows how the stakeholders have rated the extent to which the EEA represent value for money, scaled from 1= a very low extent to 5 to a very high extent.

Table 5-2: Comparing the costs and benefits of the EEA, to what extent do you think that the EEA represents value for money?

	1. To a very low extent	2.	3.	4.	5. To a very high extent	N=	Total
European Topic Centre	0%	33%	33%	33%	0%	3	100%
Management Board	0%	0%	24%	48%	29%	21	100%
National Focal Point	8%	0%	31%	38%	23%	13	100%
National Reference Centre	2%	9%	27%	45%	17%	217	100%
Scientific Committee	0%	0%	11%	44%	44%	9	100%
All respondents	2%	8%	27%	44%	19%	263	100%

Source: COWI governance survey, 2012

Stakeholder opinion shows that a solid majority, at 63%, feels that the EEA represents value for money to a high and/or very high degree, taking size, budget and outputs into consideration. 10%, primarily from the NFPs and NRCs, find that the EEA hardly represents value for money.

This picture was confirmed during interviews where the vast majority of stakeholders (across all stakeholder groups) have indicated that the EEA provides value for money to a high extent. As mentioned in section 4.5, stakeholders regard the EEA as the most cost-effective option available to perform the allocated tasks. Stakeholders consider EEA products to be of high quality, ones which respond to their needs (see chapter 4) and that the level of costs is generally commensurate to the outputs provided. However, they also emphasise that it is difficult to provide a detailed assessment as they are unclear on how exactly resources are prioritised and used. Also, as reflected in chapter 4, the Commission (and Member Countries to some extent as well) considers that there are areas of activity, which are less important and where resources cut be cut. It is likely that these views underpin also the scores given to the question of value for money, where the most prevalent scores are 3 and 4, indicating that most stakeholders consider that there is room for improvement.

5.3 Potentials for optimisation

Evaluation question 2.3: Are there any potentials for optimization of the EEA?

Under this question, the evaluation has assessed four main issues and this section is structured accordingly:

- 1.3.1 The administrative efficiency of the Agency
- 1.3.2 The efficiency of the Eionet network
- 1.3.3 The efficiency of work relations with other data providers at EU level
- 1.3.4 The efficiency of work relations with the Management Board, in particular the AMP development process

5.3.1 Administrative efficiency

- Administrative budget** A high proportion of administrative costs, in relation to total costs, can indicate a potential for optimisation.
- Benchmarking costs** In general, it is difficult to meaningfully benchmark the EU agencies against each other due to the dissimilarity of their tasks, structures and budget components. The working paper on cost benchmarking of EU agencies from the European Court of Auditors⁶⁰ uses number of persons - full time equivalents - employed in selected administrative areas in percent of total staff as an indicator. The table below shows the average percentage for 22 agencies and the percentage for EEA as reported by the Court of Auditors.

Table 5-3 Percentage of full time equivalents (FTE) working in selected administrative areas

Agency	2008	2009	2010
Average (22 agencies)	24%	24%	22%
EEA	17%	16%	14%

Note: Selected administrative areas include: Finance, planning/strategy, HR, central procurement, legal, internal audit/quality management, the offices of heads of administration and directors. Source: Cost benchmarking of EU agencies, version 1.5, 28th September 2011. European Court of Auditors, p. 31.

- Low admin quota** The table shows that the EEA figures are considerably below the average for 22 agencies and there is a declining tendency. This indicates that administrative costs of the EEA are at a reasonable level.

⁶⁰ Cost benchmarking of EU agencies, version 1.5, 28th September 2011. European Court of Auditors.

5.3.2 Efficiency of Eionet network

Network efficiency The issue of network efficiency deals with working arrangements and coordination and whether there are potentials for optimising and streamlining work processes.

The work processes in the Eionet are complex and multi-dimensional. They deal with data flows, monitoring arrangements, IT infrastructure, assessments, EEA governance, capacity building and many other issues and incorporate the NRCs, the NFPs and the ETCs (as well as the EEA). Each year, a number of meetings are held in the framework of the Eionet. These include NFP meetings and Eionet and NRC workshops. In addition, there is both formal and informal dialogue on-going between the EEA and actors in the Eionet.

Eionet review Each year, the EEA reviews the meetings and workshops held and evaluates on performance. The evaluation of 2011 meetings (Eionet review 2011 - internal EEA document) shows that the number of Eionet meetings and workshops arranged have been in the area of 15-18 per year in the period 2008-2011. In the same period, there has been a gradual increase in country participation in NRC workshops. Overall, EEA member country participation reached 69% in 2011 (65% in 2010). More than 470 NRC experts attended the workshops in 2011, compared to 340 in 2010. NRCs are generally satisfied with the workshops (66% rated workshops as good and 25% as excellent⁶¹).

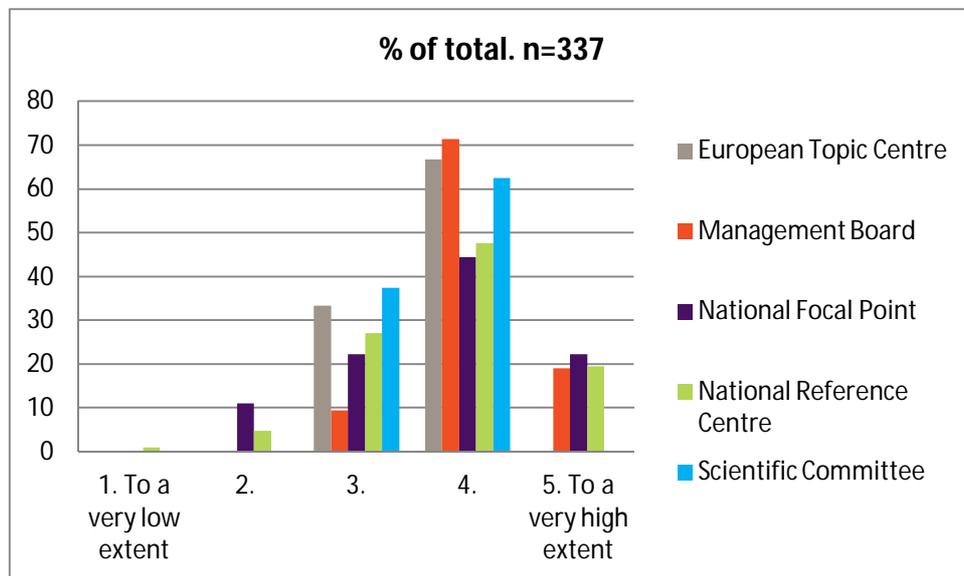
Resource use Resource use in EEA budgets for Eionet coordination amount to 2.7% of total commitments as an average for 2009-2012. Budget commitments have shown a declining tendency.⁶² Resource use outside EEA budgets are considered modest by Eionet partners.

Eionet effectiveness The governance survey included two questions on perceived effectiveness and perceived efficiency of the Eionet work. Both relate to the overall assessment of potential for optimisation. Figure 5-2 shows how the different respondents have assessed the effectiveness of the Eionet network.

⁶¹ Scale: excellent, good, satisfactory, poor

⁶² Data from EEA activity based budgeting system

Figure 5-2: To which degree do you agree with the following statement: The Eionet works effectively



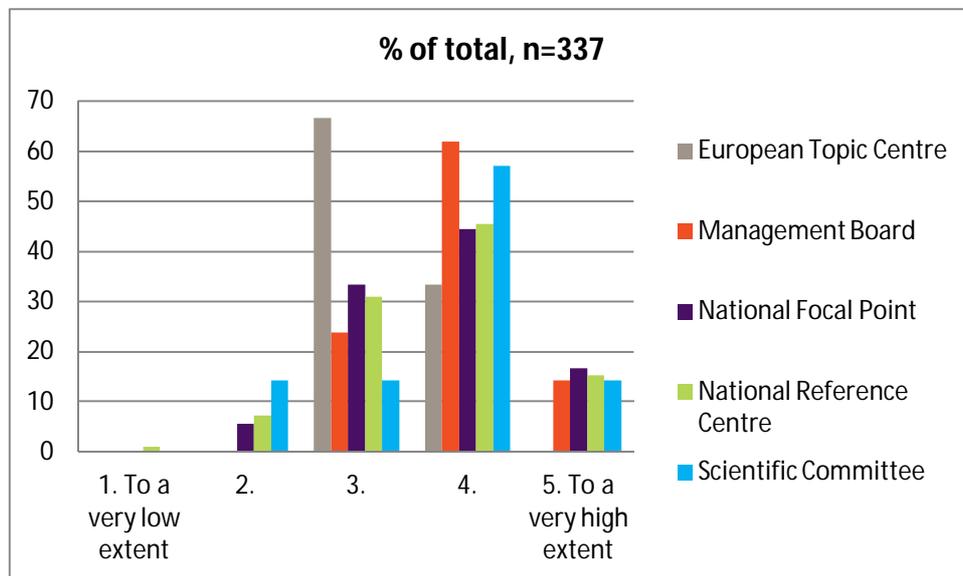
Source: COWI governance survey, 2012

There is a general finding that the Eionet network is effective (68% scoring 4 and 5). Criteria would be: delivery on time and on agreed quality. This finding tallies with the findings on timeliness and quality of Eionet data in section 5.4.2. The most negative assessments stem from the NFPs, where 11% ranks effectiveness as low.

Eionet efficiency

As shown in Figure 5-3, the efficiency of the network is rated lower than effectiveness. 62% find that the Eionet works efficiently to a high and very high degree. 8% are negative. The negative ratings stem mostly from NRCs, NFPs and the Scientific Committee.

Figure 5-3: To which degree do you agree with the following statement: *The Eionet works efficiently*



Source: COWI governance survey, 2012

Qualitative data

Qualitative data from interviews indicate that the EEA has been involved in an ongoing process to optimise use of resources and, in general, it appears that few options remain unexploited. Consequently, stakeholders have few additional observations to this aspect:

- > Regarding resource use for EEA / Eionet tasks shared perception is that resource use is already very low, compared to increasing requirements. Financial constraints in Member Countries have already resulted in minimising resource allocation. Budget allocations to some Eionet functions, e.g. for the NFPs, are extremely limited in some countries. The potential for reduced resource use is considered to be small;
- > Operational expenses for some activities, for example, annual meetings and conferences may possibly be reduced by shifting venues away from high cost Member States. Developing a rotation system would further stimulate and enhance the performance of the NFPs, as more attention would be directed towards the different Member States. Such an initiative has already been agreed among the NFPs;
- > The existing Reportnet paradigm is considered practical, efficient and requiring minimal resource use; further automation is not regarded as necessary for the time being. The implementation of SEIS and Eye on Earth may trigger opportunities for rethinking and automating data flows in the future and could, viewed over a longer perspective, also reduce costs - but at present the development of SEIS is in the investment phase and has been the most resource demanding activity ;

- › Findings from the NFP workshop indicate that there are few obvious areas for simplification of Eionet procedures and processes. However, diverse data requirements from e.g. OECD and UN, compared to requirements from EEA, is considered a burden and further streamlining and simplifications would mean a lot for the NFPs. It is noted that the EEA has taken the lead and a lot has already been accomplished in this area.
- › Some NFPs have mentioned that if the EEA AMP reflected more clearly the implications for NFPs/Eionet actors, this would allow them to better plan their activities in line with EEA plans.

Box 5-1 Main impressions from NFP workshop

NFPs assessment of working relations

- › With regard to working relations the EEA is accessible and helpful. The Country desk officer setup is good. EEA staff are helpful when replying to NFP questions. Often, the thematic experts can also assist in solving problems.
- › There is a coordinated effort for constant methodological improvement e.g. around SOER, harmonisation of indicators and within communication methods in order to ensure that target groups among decision-makers, and the general public, are reached.
- › The effective coordination within the Eionet/EEA partnership has according to the NFPs resulted in Eionet and Reportnet becoming the most efficient reporting scheme providing data accompanied with assessments.

The NFPs express concerns regarding the regular EEA/NFP meetings and seminars, and NRC cooperation:

- › Regular NFP meetings are good but could work better; there are too many presentations, resulting in a "PowerPoint sickness". There is insufficient attention to quality of presentation e.g. length and consideration of audience. NFPs "feel like a mailbox taking information back to our colleagues";
- › As the EEA partnership arrangements have grown, meetings have become large. Only a few NFPs are heard at NFP-meetings, and this depends, very much, on personality, dedication and allocation of resources. Small and new countries within the Eionet context do not have the capacity to follow-up on all issues. Considering the large turn-over among NFPs, this needs to be factored in to meeting preparations.
- › The NFPs recommend that meetings and their resources in general be put to more strategic use. NFPs are central in the information flow and they have insight into most issues, often beyond the scope of the Eionet and EEA.
- › The NRCs generally consider the EEA tasks a burden rather than reward. It is difficult to 'recruit' new NRCs - hard to convince them that they get something out of cooperation with the EEA. The arguments used are related to the exchange of ideas and experience with other countries and thereby obtaining a broader European perspective;
- › Feed-back to the NRCs is insufficient. Some NRCs can experience a whole year without being contacted from the EEA. They do not know what is going on. Some consider that a newsletter/e-mail from the EEA would be a good initiative (monthly or bi-monthly), others emphasise that the NFPs receive sufficient information already and it is up to them to inform the NRCs.

The ETCs⁶³

The desk review carried out under the evaluation shows that the ETC consortia work under framework partnership agreements covering a four or five year period. Under each specific agreement, annual contracts are drawn up. These include a detailed implementation plan, providing a break-down of activities for each EEA project area by budget allocation, individual partner allocations, milestones, deliveries, delivery schedules, responsible ETC partner and responsible EEA project manager. ETC partners are paid when all contractual agreements and deliveries have been fulfilled. According to information supplied by the EEA, no breaches of contract or delays of payment caused by delivery problems have occurred. The work processes and planning procedures used to coordinate the activities of the ETCs are regularised and institutionalised in the EEA and build on the experience in managing the ETC gained over a number of years.

Qualitative information from interviews confirm that coordination and cooperation between EEA and ETCs is regarded effective and without any major problems. There is regular and frequent contact between EEA staff and ETC partners. It is a particular challenge to 'cascade' the work programming from the overall AMP to the individual implementation plan for the ETC and also ensuring flexibility to accommodate new issues during the year, while at the same time factoring in other procurement processes by the EEA and the Commission. However, interviewees in the EEA and the Commission generally consider these processes to work fairly smoothly. Some representatives of the Commission have voiced a concern that organising the ETCs according to environmental topics implies a risk that 'silo-thinking' is maintained and potential synergies across different areas are not sufficiently exploited.

All in all, it is assessed that working relationships with the ETCs function effectively and efficiently. Further streamlining of planning procedures and coordination between ETCs and the EEA could potentially lead to a more optimal use of resources.

5.3.3 Efficiency of coordination between the EEA and the Commission as user and the JRC and Eurostat as providers

Coordination

As already discussed in chapter 4.1, the EEA coordinates with the Commission / DG Environment and DG Clima as users, and JRC and Eurostat as data providers. The technical Agreement on data centres provides for a fairly clear distribution of responsibilities in terms of the topical data centres to be managed by each data provider. Judging from interviews with the parties, the coordination at the daily technical level is working fairly smoothly. However, examples have been

⁶³ The evaluation has not encompassed a detailed review of ETCs as these were undergoing a separate review process in parallel to the evaluation

mentioned of cases where data exchanges between data providers were problematic. The interviewees from all sides generally consider that cooperation has improved in recent years.

As pointed out in chapter 4.1, there is a lack of overall coordination and a common sense of direction with regard to the data centres, which are managed by the data providers (the majority by the EEA). Each data centre is managed individually rather than within a common framework, which was the original intention. This means that the current management and level of coordination is not supporting the development of SEIS in an optimal way and potential advantages of shared and integrated environmental data are not fully exploited. As suggested in Chapter 4.1, a revival of the dialogue with the Commission to clarify needs and expectations seems relevant.

5.3.4 Efficiency in working relations with the Management Board

The data collected from the governance survey and interviews show that Management Board members consider that the EEA provides them with timely and adequate information and that working relations with the Management Board are functioning reasonably efficiently. The main concern for most Management Board members is that they have limited time and are sometimes overwhelmed by the wealth of information available to them. They would like to see less detailed activity reporting and more focus on strategic issues.

The AMP workshop pointed to the extensive consultations and the lengthy process in developing the Annual Management Plan as a possible area for optimisation. Economic gains are, however, considered marginal and any steps should be carefully assessed in order not to jeopardize the consensus-building process, which is felt to be essential (see chapter 1.4).

5.3.5 Main findings on evaluation question 2.3

Findings under the optimisation question relate to several variables in the networking cooperation.

Administrative quota	The proportion of administrative costs, in total, for the EEA appear relatively modest compared to other Agencies, as documented by the Court of Auditors. This indicates an appropriate level of administrative efficiency.
Efficient processes	The operational processes of the work in the Eionet network are assessed as effective and efficient. The parties in the network do not see obvious areas where efficiency could be increased. Resource use outside EEA budgets are considered very modest by Eionet partners. Resource use in EEA budgets for Eionet coordination amount to 2.7% of total commitments as an average for 2009-2012. Budget commitments have shown a declining tendency.

Eionet coordination As lead party in the EEA/Eionet partnership, EEA is tasked the main responsibility for coordination effort. The Regulation has established a unique partnership, and the coordination tools applied in the network are assessed positive, effective and efficient. All in all, EEA coordination has been unanimously praised by all involved parties.

NFP concerns However, NFPs express concern with respect to practical arrangements of meetings and information exchange. They also consider that the potential for using their resources in the framework of the Eionet are fully exploited - they wish to be used more in relation to strategic processes.

Coordination Coordination between central EU institutions (COM, DGs, JRC, Eurostat) has been fairly smooth, and all parties recognise that it has improved in recent years. Coordination and a common sense of direction appears less optimal with regard to data centres and, as a consequence, data centres are not always supportive to the development of SEIS.

Management Board / AMP Management Board members assess timeliness and adequacy of information to be high or very high. However, they would like to see more strategic focus and less activity reporting. There could be a potential for reducing the number of iterations for AMP development, however, the benefit in terms of reduced resource use would most likely be limited.

In summary, the evaluation indicates that the EEA is running a modern and efficient network organisation with a limited potential for optimisation.

5.4 Governance and network structures

Evaluation question 2.4: Do the Agency's governance and network structures facilitate the Agency in achieving its mission?

This question deals with the extent to which the governance structures (the MB, the Bureau and the SC) and the network structures (the Eionet partnerships) function in a way which helps the EEA to establish and pursue its goals and mission (as specified in the founding regulation and strategy/AMPs).

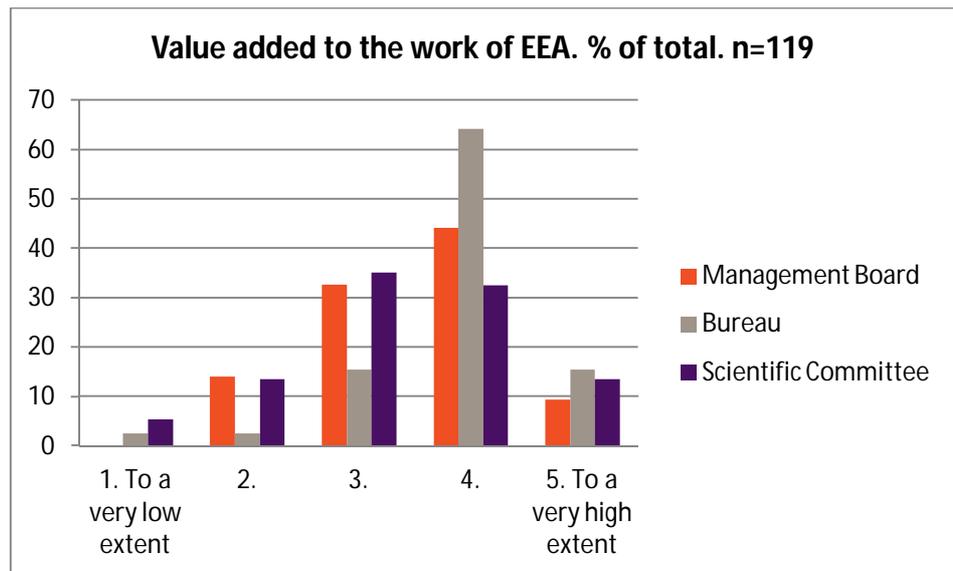
In the following, governance structures are addressed in section 5.4.1 and network structures in section 5.4.2.

5.4.1 Functioning and contribution of governance structures

Value added In the governance survey, the respondents were asked about the degree to which the MB, the Bureau and the Scientific Committee add significant value to the work

and outputs of the EEA. The question has been directed in the survey to members of the MB, the Bureau and the SC and findings are thus a self-assessment. Figure 5-4 below shows the responses.

Figure 5-4: To what extent do the MB, the Bureau and the Scientific Committee add significant value to the work and outputs of the EEA?



Source: COWI governance survey, 2012

Calculated on the basis of indications as high or very high extent the following results are presented in the figure above:

- > 53% of the respondents in the Governance Survey find that the Management Board adds significant value to the work of the EEA.
- > 79% find that the Bureau adds significant value to the work.
- > 45% find that the Scientific Committee adds significant value.

Management Board and Bureau

Qualitative data indicate that the role of the Management Board has changed over time. The MB has expanded up to almost 40 members as of June 2012. It is evident that a Board of this size will not be able to discuss all matters in detail. The decision making power still rests with the Management Board, but for all practical purposes it has to a large degree shifted to the Bureau. The value of the Bureau is recognised by most of the stakeholders. However, the findings do indicate that the members would like to focus the attention of the Management Board.

This shift towards the Bureau is valuable in operational terms. However, it must be recalled that the composition of the MB, involving all Member Countries, questions an important element pertaining to the overall legitimacy of the EEA. The composition of the Bureau may enhance efficiency, but does not necessarily safeguard such legitimacy, as fewer national stakeholders are involved in the

Bureau. The shift towards the Bureau, where the EU stakeholders are predominant, may add to the general perception amongst e.g. Eionet partners that the EEA increasingly is addressing EU policy objectives rather than fulfilling national objectives (ref. chapter 4.1). Seen in this light, it seems relevant to consider ways in which the governing role of the Management Board can best be facilitated given its size.

The AMP system

The AMP and annual reporting are the focal points for the Management Board/Bureau to exercise their decision making and supervisory role of the Agency. The performance of the EEA planning system, comprising the strategic objectives or the multiannual plan, the AMP was directly addressed in the Governance Survey. Table 5-4 shows the responses.

Table 5-4: Do you feel the way the EEA plans its work at a strategic and management level contributes to the effectiveness of your activities?

	1. To a very low extent	2.	3.	4.	5. To a very high extent	N=	Total
European Topic Centre	33%	0%	33%	33%	0%	3	100%
Management Board	0%	10%	38%	33%	19%	21	100%
National Focal Point	0%	6%	47%	41%	6%	17	100%
Scientific Committee	22%	11%	0%	44%	22%	9	100%
All respondents	6%	8%	34%	38%	14%	50	100%

Source: COWI governance survey, 2012

The table shows that 52% find that the planning system has contributed to a high, or very high extent, to efficiency in work (4 plus 5). Although there is a slight majority on the positive side, 14% are directly negative (1 plus 2).

The AMP process

The AMP development process runs for little more than a calendar year and is divided into several phases. It is initiated by an informal phase, which is spearheaded by the Senior Management Team (SMT). The formal kick-off takes place at the Bureau meeting in May, where the SMT presents a first outline of the coming AMP. From here an intensive hearing and consultation phase takes place and by mid September the SMT will integrate comments into a second draft, ready to be discussed with COM and the SC before approval at the MB meeting in

November.⁶⁴ The backbone and key elements of the AMP are developed and agreed in very close cooperation with the core stakeholders mostly during the informal phase. The consultations for the draft AMP include Eionet partners, the Member States represented by the MBs and the Parliament.

The AMP workshop conducted under the evaluation gave rise to the following key findings in respect to AMP process:

- › It is a time consuming process and the stated aim is to obtain a solid programme, reflecting and incorporating all stakeholders' observations. Although time consuming, the process has been praised in interviews and is seen as a process, which could serve as paradigm also for other agencies. The process is consensus driven and as such indispensable for a network-based organisation.
- › Stakeholders find that the AMP lacks outputs and performance indicators. Parallel to this, it is questioned whether or not the AMP is sufficiently clear and distinct on prioritisation, and consequences of prioritisation, with respect to resource allocation within the different programmatic areas. Consequently it is difficult for, e.g. the Management Board to gain a complete pictures of how priorities are set, how resources are distributed and how performance, within specific priority area are developing. The supervising and monitoring functions of the MB are, consequently, very difficult to fulfil.
- › The final and approved AMP /AWP can be regarded as a plan describing requirements and obligations as agreed with stakeholders. Internally however, within the EEA, it is not seen by programme managers as a prioritised work plan for the professional staff of the EEA. Staff can always find aspects, relating to their topical areas and, as such, the AMP is inclusive, but, seen from the responsible programme managers' perspective, it has limited bearing in planning actual day-to-day activities or the operational implementation plans for programmes.

The Scientific Committee

Referring to Figure 5-4 above, the rating for the Scientific Committee is quite low. Combined with information on the effectiveness of the feed back from the SC to the EEA, and the flow of information from the EEA to the SC, there are indications which show that the modalities for using the SC are problematic. Membership of the SC is voluntary and interest driven. The EEA does not compensate work delivered by SC members. Consequently, the SC as a resource base depends wholly on personal interests and personal availability, which does not always tally with needs of the EEA. This is a rather important observation as the Scientific

⁶⁴ A process note " Standard operational procedure for development of Annual Management Plan (AMP)/Annual work programme" is now being prepared to form part of the QMS

Committee, in accordance with general institutional theory, constitutes a main element in establishing the credibility of an independent agency.

Qualitative data from interviews indicate that use of the SC, by EEA staff, is very limited and irregular⁶⁵. The SC is, when used, often only used relatively late in the production process, and sometimes, at a stage where professional intervention is disrupting and disturbing. It is evident that it would be more beneficial if the SC was used early in the process, when methodologies for assessments are under discussion and development.

The Scientific Committee represents a strong link to research structures across Europe and a strong resource base in the personal capacity of the SC members. This resource base could, in all probability, be better exploited, to the benefit of the EEA. Working relations between the SC and the EEA should be addressed, encouraged and improved and the SCs modus operandi should state explicitly that its goal is to benefit the EEA rather than individual members.⁶⁶

5.4.2 Functioning and contribution of network structures

Data provision by
Eionet

As a network, Eionet assists the EEAs in attaining its objective to provide data within a specific timeframe, with certain accuracy and of an agreed quality. This is organised in the Priority Data Flow system and results are documented in the *Eionet Priority Data Flows* report.⁶⁷

Here, the EEA applies a performance scoring system, giving a maximum of 3 points to each data flow, and the minimum score is 1. Scores from all priority data flow areas are summed up for each country and then expressed as a percentage of the country's maximum score. A result of 0% means that no data has been delivered and a result of 100% means that complete data sets have been delivered on time. The performance history for 39 participating countries documents improved performance with respect to timeliness and quality of data

⁶⁵ In his outgoing presentation the previous chair of the SC, Dr. Detlef F. Sprinz expressed his concerns in respect to the cooperation between the SC, the Executive Director and the Management Board. Slides for MB Meeting 63, June 2012

⁶⁶ The *Draft Joint Statement of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission on decentralised agencies* point in clause 20 of the annex to a requirement for the functioning of the scientific committees to be improved. Here the clause is focussing on selection procedures and independence of scientific experts.

⁶⁷ *Eionet priority data flows, May 2011 - April 2012, EEA. ISSN 1830-7701*

Table 5-5: Timeliness and quality in priority data flows. Average score for all countries

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Average all countries	53	62	64	57	62	69	73	77	78	80	83

Source: Eionet priority data flows, EEA

Performance has improved every year, and has improved by 5 percentage points from 2009 to 2011.

Qualitative interview data confirm that the process has improved over time and data flows are now implemented without major problems - although of course delays do occur. Delays in the data flow system will transcend to the planning and production system in the EEA and has been cited as one of the main causes for delays and low performance in production of publications.

NFP and NRC performance

As is already described in section 5.3.2, the findings of this evaluation point to the highly important role of the NFPs and NRCs - not only in securing the availability and reporting of data from the Member Country level, but also in cooperating with the EEA in relation to a number of key issues in relation to the EEA's strategy and work programme. This includes, inter alia, SOER-processes, indicators, SEIS and GMES implementation, country profiles in relation to various policies, etc. The role of the NFPs as described in the NFP Profile reflects this broad framework of operation. Especially the case study on the trends and projections report provided a good insight into the important processes whereby the work of the EEA is qualified by the interactions with the national experts and vice-versa (on projection methods, etc.).

ETC performance

The ETC support the EEAs mission by delivering data and analytical work according to contract and an agreed schedule. In addition to observations reported in section 5.3.2, qualitative observations from interviews with stakeholders confirm the general positive performance of the ETCs. However, as also stated in chapter 4, the Commission have reported incidences with lower performance by ETCs. The review of the ETCs generally points to the important contributions the ETCs make to the work of the EEA and one of the particular advantages emphasised is the strong links between ETCs and Member Countries making the ETCs well placed to understand the challenges of Member Countries and to provide support.

5.4.3 Main findings on evaluation question 2.4

Well functioning governance structures are imperative to the success of a network-based organisation. Each part within the governance structure is coordinated to provide support value added initiatives in order to ensure that the EEA attain its objectives and meet its targets.

Value added

The evaluation has shown that the Bureau, in particular, provides value added to the EEA's work. This has been stated by a large majority of stakeholders. The MB also has received a positive score from more than 50% of the respondents. And there has been a shift towards extending the importance and influence of the Bureau.

The AMP is developed through a consultation procedure, which is valuable because it is all inclusive. However, the AMP lacks specificity, which makes it difficult for the MB to follow up and to discuss the consequences to resources due to a change in priorities, or pursuance of new activities stemming from external demand. Without endangering the valuable consensus process for the AMP it could be considered improving the AMP by applying hierarchical SMART objectives to a higher extent, as also suggested in section 5.1.

For the SC, however, the score is unsatisfactorily low. The evaluation shows that the use of the SC by EEA staff is erratic and the scientific resources in the SC are only utilised to a limited extent.

As a network partner, the Eionet contributes and sustains the ability of the EEA to produce and deliver the different outputs: publications, data series, analyses etc. The contribution is efficient and of high, and improving, quality, as acknowledged in EEA documents.

5.5 Fitness of the agency

Evaluation question 2.5: Is the Agency fit for likely future environmental challenges that could fall into its purview?

This evaluation question deals with the organisational fitness of the Agency enabling the Agency to take on new tasks. Here, the evaluation has assessed the parameters of organisational structure and size, systems, staff and network. The chapter is structured accordingly.

Draft Joint Statement on Agencies

The Draft Joint Statement on Agencies⁶⁸ provides an indication of the type of requirements which could become relevant for all agencies and, hence, also the EEA. The contents of this Draft Statement have been considered where relevant in the assessment of this evaluation question. In general, the evaluation finds that

⁶⁸ Draft Joint Statement of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission on decentralised agencies of June 2012. The statement was endorsed by the three institutions in July 2012.

there is a high degree of conformity between the requirements indicated in the Draft Statement and the EEA set-up and organisation⁶⁹.

5.5.1 Organisational structure and size

Matrix organisation

The EEA is organised as a matrix organisation, consisting of three operational programmes, two operational support programmes and three services programmes. This organisational set-up has developed over time, starting from a basic structure with operational programmes - or departments - and support programmes.

In this matrix, managerial responsibilities refer to management of staff within each organisational entity. On the activity side, managerial responsibility is given to project leads or project managers, whose responsibility will range horizontally throughout the organisation as a project may involve staff from several different entities.

Being a matrix organisation, consisting of programme units, the EEA is, organisationally, as stable as its programme units. It is flexible in the sense that new activities / projects can easily be added, either inside an existing unit or by forming additional units.

Size of EEA

Qualitative information from interviews clearly indicates that its size is seen as appropriate and sufficient, also in relation to establishing new initiatives. If the EEA experiences budget constraints vis-à-vis new initiatives, stakeholders find that the EEA should reassess the necessity of existing activities. Due to the financial crisis, all Member States and the Commission implement austerity policies and it is felt that this should also apply to the EEA.

5.5.2 Systems

The EFQM

In 2012, the EEA initiated a process towards assessing the organisation as a Centre of Excellence, applying the *EFQM Excellence Model* which by November 2012 resulted in the *EEA Excellence Model, the Book of Evidence*⁷⁰. This demonstrates the willingness of EEA Senior Management Team to critically assess, and further develop, their processes and procedures. This indicates agility and pro-activeness within the organisation. This is still an on-going process of which the Book of

⁶⁹ However, a full conformity check has not been conducted. Appendix K compares the Draft Statement and the founding regulation and rules of procedure of the EEA and highlights possible areas where adjustments could become relevant. Please note that the Commission by the end of 2012 presented a Road Map based on the Draft Statement.

⁷⁰ EEA Excellence Model, The Book of Evidence; 11/28/2012 The EEA EFQM assessment group. Preliminary draft of internal working paper

Evidence represents a first step in mapping key information and processes of the EEA.

QMS

The EEA has implemented a professional quality management system and has also, as part of this, developed and implemented documented strategies for internal processes, including an IT strategy and a communication strategy. Some interviewees in the Commission have indicated that they would like to see the Agency's communications strategy better integrated with the Commission's (DG Environment and DG Clima) communication strategies. This is also mentioned in the Draft Joint Statement and could thus become an area for the EEA's future consideration.

Planning system

The annual planning system provides for flexibility in incorporating new issues and tasks every year and this is also reflected in the planning and coordination of ETC activities (annual contracts and implementation plans). If there are notable drawbacks in this system, they relate to the lack of clear objectives and performance indicators as well as the relatively weak links between high level top-down planning and programme level bottom-up planning. This has been developed in other sections of chapter 5.

5.5.3 Staff

Staff are employed under different contract forms in line with Staff Regulations of Officials and Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Community. The EEA has (i) temporary agents and officials of which a small number are permanent posts and a larger number temporary agents on contracts, which are identified as posts of long-term employment; (ii) contract agents are working under time limited contracts up to a maximum of six years; (iii) seconded national experts, being seconded initially for one year, but can be renewed up to four years.

The EEA estimates that approximately 50% of the present staff are on time limited contracts. This can of course mean that there is a real risk for loss of professional competence and institutional memory with staff rotation. On the other hand, it also allows for a higher level of flexibility in terms of staff exchange in order to acquire new competencies, possibly at the expense of others, considering the high degree of specialisation required of the professional staff.

5.5.4 Network

Network

As network the EEA and Eionet are considered stable, but partners in the Eionet indicate warning signs.

- › NFPs are under pressure due to financial and time constraints, combined with reduced public interest and prioritisation of environmental issues.

- > There is an impression among some NFPs that they are not being used appropriately by the EEA; compared to previously the NFPs are no longer involved in strategic discussions and they have the impression that the EEA today does not really know what they want from the NFPs.

Consequently, and to ensure future stability and a solid basis for cooperation, we recommend that the role of NFPs be discussed view a view to identifying how the resources and knowledge of the NFPs can most optimally contribute to adding value to the EEA and the Eionet

5.5.5 Main findings on evaluation question 2.5

Matrix organisation

The EEA is organised according to matrix principles for an organisation. Units in the matrix organisation consist of programmes: 3 operational, 2 operational support programmes and 3 service programmes. Line or departmental organisations are normally considered less flexible than matrix organisations, and accordingly the EEA is considered very flexible. This has clearly been shown also in its ability to incorporate new programmes and respond to new challenges.

Staff

In addition to the lifespan of a programme, which may in itself constitute a risk to the organisation, the fact that a very large proportion of staff are contracted for a specific period constitutes a risk. A large proportion of professional staff will leave after three or six years and there is a major risk that institutional memory will be lost. Rapid staff exchange also increases costs for activities such as newcomers' training and introduction to EEA systems.

Network

As a network the EEA and Eionet are considered stable, working under well coordinated and agreed principles, but the evaluation has documented a number of early warning signs or fatigue in the structure. There is, among NFPs, an impression that EEA does not really know how to make use of the NFPs. This is in spite of the fact that NFPs are central in relation to compiling data, information dissemination, policy formulation in Member Countries and maintain relations to the EU system.

The Evaluation Team finds sufficient evidence to conclude that the EEA, as an organisation, is agile and have been able and willing to adapt to and incorporate several new features.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the analysis of the evaluation questions.

6.1 Conclusions

Overall conclusion

The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that the EEA and the Eionet are well-established and well-functioning structures, which deliver solid and reliable outputs and which, to a large extent, satisfy the needs of their stakeholders.

In line with what has been established in previous evaluations, the qualitative assessment inherent in this evaluation indicates that the EEA continues to be the most effective and efficient solution to delivering credible environmental information on the state of the European environment.

The evaluation has identified areas of attention, where improved performance is possible or where additional effort is needed in order to maintain the present high level of performance. These areas are addressed in the recommendations.

The evaluation has assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of the EEA. The effectiveness dimension assessed the performance of the EEA in relation to its external context, i.e. a focus on responsiveness to needs of main stakeholders, quality of outputs delivered and the value and impact of the Agency. The efficiency dimension looked at the internal organisation and management of the Agency and the Eionet.

Below, conclusions are presented individually for effectiveness and efficiency. The conclusions integrate the findings in respect to the ten main evaluation questions, which have guided the evaluation.

6.1.1 Conclusions on effectiveness

Quality

The analysis of effectiveness has shown that the users of EEA products, and services, consider these to be of a high quality. The data and assessments provided by the EEA are considered robust, credible and reliable and the main authoritative source on the state of the European environment. The data also indicates that the quality has improved in recent years. The key parameters supporting this high standard are, in particular, the Eionet structure, which ensures a long-term, stable institutional structure for delivering environmental data, the professional and dedicated staff and management of the Agency and the well-designed data flows and quality assurance processes.

The key stakeholders, especially the Commission, increasingly demand services based on the interoperability of data systems, where different data sets can be combined and analysed in an integrated way. This requires considerable effort on the part of the EEA and the Eionet and is related to SEIS implementation. EU and national stakeholders recognise the commitment and progress made by the EEA in this area. However, it is an area where efforts need to be stepped up if the high level of quality is to be maintained in the future.

The EEA has well developed systems for ensuring quality assurance of data reported from Member Countries. This is an important factor and one which contributes to the high quality of outputs. There is a continuous process and dialogue through Eionet where data and methodologies are discussed to seek to optimise data and reporting. It is important to maintain this process as it provides the basis for the ability of the EEA to deliver data and analyses which are 'the best available'.

One area for further improvement of quality is the better identification and recognition of data sources and meta-data descriptions. This is particularly important as new forms of data sharing and communication are becoming more prevalent and are being used on a greater scale (e.g. data from citizens, companies, etc. and on-line sharing of data and maps). The EEA itself is part of this development and makes these services available.

EU policy making

The importance of the EEA is clearly visible when studying the EU's key environmental policy documents, which contain key references to EEA assessments and reports. This is true, not only for overall policy documents relating to the 6th EAP and proposals for the 7th EAP, but also for policy processes in key environmental sectors, such as water, climate change and biodiversity. Case studies conducted have shown the importance of EEA data and assessments when defining problems and in providing the background understanding necessary for policy development. Both the European Parliament and the Commission rely extensively on the EEA to provide the necessary information. This, together with data from surveys and interviews, clearly establishes that the Agency provides important inputs to the EU policy making process.

Member State policy making and environmental information	In relation to the policy-making process at national level, the importance of the EEA is less evident. Many Member States draw on their own national data and systems when establishing policy. However, the EEA data is used for benchmarking, and for assessment of cross-border issues. Also, in those Member States with less developed systems for collecting and processing environmental information, the EEA data and assessments play an important role. The EEA has had an important impact in terms of supporting methodological development in relation to environmental data and indicator management and also in relation to environmental assessment. In particular, in EU-12 and Candidate Countries, the EEA has played an important role in building environmental information management capacity.
Implementation of legislation	The EEA plays an important role in relation to providing data and reporting on the implementation of environmental legislation. Both EU and Member State stakeholders agree that solid and transparent data on the implementation of legislation (combined with general information and assessment on the state of the environment) has contributed to increasing the awareness about the importance of compliance, and that this has, more than likely, positively affected levels of compliance. The EEA has contributed positively to implementation of legislation by providing case studies, sharing experience and best practises among Member States.
Other stakeholders	The EEA products and services are used by other stakeholders, notably in the research community for teaching and referencing and by NGOs for advocacy.
Wider impact on the European environment	The findings of the evaluation indicate that the EEA has, indirectly, a positive impact on the European environment. This conclusion is derived from the intermediate impacts described above and it is not possible to quantify the extent of this impact within the scope of this evaluation. Most stakeholders feel that the European environment would be worse off if the EEA did not exist, but they do, however, emphasise that the EEA is one among many factors influencing the state of the European environment.
European added value	The evaluation has found that the EEA has generated European added value through complementing work undertaken at national level and exploiting possibilities for achieving economies of scale in relation to environmental data and reporting. The Agency's contribution to European policy making, and its role in relation to supporting transnational sharing of experience and best practises between European countries, also points to key areas where the value of the Agency is very markedly visible.
Consistency between EEA priorities and needs of main stakeholders	The conclusions presented above show that stakeholders appreciate the work of the EEA and this also indicates that they regard the work of the EEA to be relevant. The data shows that when questioned directly about consistency with needs, most stakeholders are satisfied, but, generally, consistency with needs is rated lower than quality.

The EEA's key stakeholders (the Commission, the Member Countries and the European Parliament) have needs and requirements, which share considerable common ground, but they are not identical. The Agency has to navigate this course and to optimise the degree of fulfilment of the needs for each individual stakeholder by divining an appropriate balance of activities. The survey and interview data shows that the majority of stakeholders are either satisfied or very satisfied and few are dissatisfied. This shows that the EEA has managed to maintain a reasonable balance in meeting stakeholders' needs.

Dialogue with stakeholders

A key factor explaining why the EEA is able to attain this fairly high level of consistency, despite varying stakeholder needs, is the emphasis placed on maintaining a strong and consistent dialogue with stakeholders at all working levels. This is evident in both formal and informal consultation procedures for the AMP, institutionalised dialogue at senior management level (including annual meetings with the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, DG Environment and DG Clima), Eionet meetings and communication, and meetings and dialogue at the technical working level.

Dynamics in needs

Stakeholders' needs are not constant. On the contrary, it is a dynamic environment and therefore, a constant focus on dialogue and continuous interaction with stakeholders is vital. Representatives of the three main stakeholders emphasise that dialogue has improved over the years and that the Agency is attentive to their needs. However, the evaluation also points to certain areas in need of attention. Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that these areas were critical to the future orientation of the Agency.

The Commission expressed concerns that the EEA is not always sufficiently responsive to its needs, and that the Agency should place more emphasis on speedier progress in respect to improving the data base and reporting and providing for integrated analysis across different data sets and environmental themes. At the same time, the needs of the Commission, in respect to the data centres, are not very clearly articulated and there is no implementation plan guiding the process for SEIS. This calls for renewed dialogue with the Commission in order to clarify their needs and expectations and to facilitate a discussion in the Management Board in order to properly reflect needs into the future EEA strategy.

Member Countries feel that the EEA is, increasingly, focusing its attention on EU level matters and, in particular, the needs of the Commission. There is a sense, among Eionet partners, of being taken for granted and an underlying feeling that it is important to maintain a focus on the activities and outputs of the EEA, which represent a value for Member Countries. Member Countries would in particular like to see an increased focus on regional assessments (focusing on eco-regions as well as territorial regions within the EU/Member Country territory). This points to a need to further enhance the dialogue with Member Countries and the NFPs (see also below under efficiency).

There is an increased policy focus at EU level on implementation of environmental legislation and the Commission sees an important role for the EEA in advising Member States as well as regional/local authorities, providing examples and sharing of best practises in relation to modelling, inventories and other instruments relevant to monitoring. This has already been taken up and is clearly an area for consideration in relation to the forthcoming strategy. The evaluation finds, however, that it is important to maintain an independent and neutral role if the Agency to preserve its legitimacy and objectivity. This underlines the importance of finding the way forward, in common process, together with the Member States.

Members of the European Parliament emphasise their appreciation of the Agency but also consider that the outputs and services available from the EEA are not being sufficiently used by all MEPs. They underline the need for easily accessible and targeted information to facilitate the greater uptake by MEPs - especially the new MEPs.

6.1.2 Conclusions on efficiency

Value for money

Efficiency has been analysed in relation to internal aspects of the EEA and the Eionet partner structure. Consequently, relations and cooperation within the EEA network structure has been a focal topic for the evaluation - more than, for example, the detailed analysis of cost-benefit relations.

The analysis on findings regarding the efficiency dimension, documents the fact that the EEA network is efficient in the sense that cooperative relations are strong and solid and efforts have been made to optimise the functioning and work flows in relation to reporting of data. Stakeholders consider that the EEA and the Eionet provide value for money.

Possibilities for optimisation

The evaluation indicates that the EEA runs a modern and efficient network organisation, with limited potential for optimisation in regard to administrative tasks and key operational work flows. Administrative costs are lower than for similar agencies. Cooperation and working relations, between the different organisational units within the network are regarded as efficient and positive. There is a general consensus on this between stakeholders, and the EEA's performance is, in this respect, highly appreciated.

Performance within Eionet has improved consistently since 2009. Perceived effectiveness and efficiency of the Eionet is assessed in surveys as high or very high. Eionet partners consider Reportnet to be an extremely efficient reporting scheme and system.

Coordination and cooperation between EEA and ETCs is found to be effective and without any major problems. It is a particular challenge to 'cascade' the work programming from the overall AMP to the individual implementation plan for the ETC and also ensuring flexibility to accommodate new issues during the year,

while at the same time factoring in other procurement processes by the EEA and the Commission. However, interviewees in the EEA and the Commission generally consider these processes to work fairly smoothly.

NFPs express great satisfaction with the content of the cooperation especially regarding capacity development support for new NFPs. They do, however, also express some concerns as they have noted a slight onset of fatigue in working relations. There is an impression that the EEA does not really know how to utilise, or lacks appreciation of the necessity of NFPs.

Delivery according to objectives and plans

The EEA has developed, and applied, management systems for multi-annual and annual programming. These consensus-driven approaches are highly appreciated by stakeholders. They are, however, less efficient when it comes to clearly identifying specific objectives or targets for the EEA's work. Clearly described priorities are not set out in the Annual Management Plans, something which several stakeholders have requested.

The EEA planning framework as set out in the strategy and AMPs constitutes a complex hierarchy of objectives, priorities and actions, which are not entirely consistent and which are not specific or measurable. The strategy and AMPs do not distinguish between recurrent and ad hoc activities, which also contributes to imprecision in these key planning documents. The annual reports contain narrative descriptions of activities not always clearly linked to the planned objectives and activities contained in the AMPs. These factors make it difficult to establish the exact extent to which planned objectives and activities have been achieved.

In relation to delivery on objectives, the evaluation shows that the EEA has worked within the broad areas defined by the strategic objectives in the strategy and AMPs. The high level of satisfaction among stakeholders in relation to the EEA's response to their needs, and the quality of the outputs generated, indicates that there is a satisfactory level of objective achievement.

Data on planned and realised resource allocation from the EEA's internal management system shows that resources are allocated according to the objectives and activities described in the strategy and AMPs, and that there is, generally, also a fairly high level of consistency between committed resources and resources actually used on different areas, which, in turn, indicates that activities are implemented as planned.

Governance

Internal working relations within the EEA and its Management Board, Bureau and Scientific Committee are in general well functioning. The evaluation shows that performance with respect to perceived value added to managing the EEA is high for the Bureau, lower for the Management Board and lowest for the Scientific Committee. Given the large size of the Management Board combined with its vital role there is a need consider how the decision making processes can best be facilitated.

Fitness of the Agency - management systems and processes

The working relations between the EEA and the Scientific Committee are not entirely satisfactory. The evaluation has found that there is a lack of direction in what the Scientific Committee can, and should, be used for. More effort is needed to identify those areas where the Scientific Committee can meaningfully contribute.

The EEA is organised according to matrix principles for an organisation. Line or departmental organisations are normally considered less flexible than matrix organisations and, accordingly, the EEA is considered very flexible. This has also been shown in its ability to incorporate new programmes and respond to challenges quickly and effectively.

The EEA has developed and implemented appropriate management systems, as well as quality management systems, enhancing their ability respond successfully to new challenges. Internally, the EEA has initiated tasks to enhance corporate excellence, as per the EFQM approach.

As a network, the EEA and Eionet are considered stable and working under well coordinated and agreed principles. But the evaluation has identified a number of early warning signs or fatigue in the organisation.

The EEA is assessed as fit and able to respond competently to new requirements and challenges, given the flexible and stable structure of its organisational set-up.

6.2 Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of the evaluation give rise to five overall recommendations for the consideration of the EEA and its Management Board.

Recommendation 1: Continue and further strengthen dialogue with stakeholders

The evaluation has found that the EEA already has established a good dialogue at all working levels and that this dialogue is absolutely essential for the EEA to ensure the relevance of its activities and the best possible match with stakeholders' needs.

It is therefore recommended that the EEA continues this dialogue and incorporates it into its forthcoming strategy as part of the priorities and activities to be implemented. There are certain areas which deserve greater attention in this connection:

- The Commission has voiced concerns that the EEA is sometimes seen as reluctant to react to requests from the Commission. On the other hand, there are also areas where the needs of the Commission are not clearly articulated. Cases have been found where better communication between the Commission and the EEA at earlier stages could have helped. This indicates that there is

still scope for improving the dialogue. It is recommended that the EEA invites the Commission to explore ways in which dialogue and coordination can be further improved view a view to achieving greater coherence between the Commission's needs and EEA activities.

- > There is a need to strengthen and invigorate the relation to the Member Countries and the NFPs in particular. It is recommended that the EEA, with a point of departure in the NFP profile, discuss with Eionet partners the role of the NFPs and how their resources and knowledge can in the best possible way contribute to adding value to the EEA and the Eionet. Also, it is suggested to involve NFPs to a greater degree in planning of and setting the agenda for NFP meetings. These meetings, and dialogue in general, should focus more on strategic issues via two-way communication, rather than communication from the EEA to the NFPs.
- > The evaluation has found that the Commission would like the EEA to be more involved in assisting Member States in the implementation of legislation. The EEA has already followed up on this and it is clearly an area for consideration in the forthcoming strategy. It is important that the activities of the Agency are designed so as to not compromise its legitimacy as an independent body and also, in a way which adds value to the Member States as well as the Commission. It is recommended that the EEA, together with the Member States and the Commission, analyse the lessons learned from past experience and design a common process which allows the EEA to support the implementation of legislation.
- > In the context of developing the new strategy, it is relevant to raise the issue of the data centres and SEIS implementation in order to clarify the Commission's expectations to the EEA. There is a need to find a common ground for EEA activities on SEIS and data centres. In this context, a briefing from the EEA on the state of affairs with regard to the data centres could be appropriate as basis for discussion.
- > Members of the European Parliament have expressed that EEA products and services are not being utilised to their full potentials by Parliamentarians. More targeted and easily accessible information is considered appropriate and it is recommended that the EEA takes this into consideration in the development of the strategy and associated communication actions.

Recommendation 2: Maintain and further strengthen the focus on delivering outputs of high quality as this is basis for achieving impact

The evaluation has shown that the quality of the EEA's work is highly regarded. The high level of objectivity, legitimacy and credibility of EEA products and data services is a key parameter in relation to the usability of EEA outputs in policy development and in relation to assisting the implementation of legislation. It is

therefore important for the EEA to focus on delivering high quality outputs. This raises important issues in relation to the future strategy:

- > There is a risk that quality may be compromised if resources are spread too thinly across too many areas. The planning of outputs needs careful balancing against available resources, especially considering that the EEA is likely to experience budget cuts, similar to all EU institutions. This further underlines the importance of the dialogue on needs (ref. recommendation 1) to ensure that limited resources are spent in the most optimal way seeking the best possible fulfilment of the needs of the Commission, Member Countries and the European Parliament.
- > There is a need for an increased focus in relation to data recognition and meta-data descriptions. This is further underlined by the fact that new methods of data sharing and communication are becoming more prevalent and are being used on a larger scale (e.g. data from citizens, companies, etc. and on-line sharing of data and maps).
- > Interoperability of data systems and integrated analysis across different data sets are increasingly in demand to facilitate integrated assessments and to provide a more holistic understanding of problems and issues. The EEA needs to be able to deliver on this in order to maintain its position. This entails a continued focus on SEIS implementation.

Recommendation 3: The Management Board of the EEA should consider how it can best exercise its strategic governance function

The Management Board now has close to 40 members. Effectiveness and efficiency, in a Board of this size, becomes critical. The Management Board includes key stakeholders of the EEA and the dialogue with these stakeholders is absolutely vital for the Agency and underpins its legitimacy and accountability.

The Management Board members are challenged in different ways. There are resource constraints on all public administrations in Europe and they have limited time and resources available for the work related to the EEA. At the same time, the EEA covers a multitude of themes, sectors and functions and often with a high degree of complexity, which requires considerable effort on the part of the Management Board members to understand and provide feed-back to the EEA.

There is a need to ensure the active involvement of the key stakeholders in the main decision process pertaining to the EEA. It is therefore recommended that the Management Board and the EEA senior management consider how processes and procedures can be enhanced to facilitate the strategic governance function of the Management Board. The following options could form part of these considerations:

- > More focus and prioritisation of agendas and information to be treated in the Management Board. Increasing the focus on reporting according to strategic objectives and key performance indicators and lessening the focus on detailed activity reporting.
- > Establishment of working groups under the Management Board to deal with specific subjects. Working groups could be both permanent and temporary given the nature of the subject to be dealt with. This practise is already followed to some extent (e.g. Steering Committee for this evaluation, Committee overseeing the ETC Review). The advantage of further working in this direction could be to activate some Management Board members, who do not have the resources to follow all subjects in depth but can better provide a targeted input in specific areas. A possible pitfall could be that such working groups would still be populated by the same members who would be active in the plenary, thus not leading to a real change in the situation. It is recommended that the Management Board discuss the possibility and how working groups may be set up in a way which generates real added value.

Recommendation 4: Review and upgrade the planning system and approaches in order to provide transparency of prioritisations and greater accountability.

The evaluation has found that the EEA strategy and AMPs are complex with many nested, but unspecific objectives. Simplifying the structure, specifying objectives and deliverables and adding more information on resource allocations to priorities would increase transparency and the accountability of the Agency vis-à-vis its main stakeholders and would also provide a better basis for Eionet partners to plan their work processes. The EEA already has a well-functioning internal management planning system using activity based budgeting and accounting principles, which is a good starting point. It is recommended that this exercise encompass the following considerations:

- > In order to facilitate sound and realistic discussions of priorities and budgets, the EEA should provide more information on resource allocations to priorities and activities. The activity based budgeting accounting principles already applied by the EEA should therefore be continued and be used not only for internal management but also to show resource allocations in the public documents. It is important that the structure of objectives and activities, which is applied across the strategy/MAWP/AMPs is mirrored in the activity based budgeting as is the current practise. A structure which is fairly simple and clear, and which to the largest extent possible reflect the kinds of breakdowns that stakeholders would be interested to see, should be aimed for. It would therefore be beneficial to agree on this structure with the main stakeholders in context of development of the forthcoming strategy.
- > The EEA should give more focus to identifying measurable (SMART) objectives and tangible outputs in the new strategy, MAWP and in the AMPs.

The level of detail and specificity would of course be expected to be greater for the MAWP and, especially, the AMPs. The EEA should develop relevant and appropriate indicators for performance and outputs as part of the planning documents, and ensure relevant follow-up on key indicators in the annual reports.

- > The EEA should consider integrating the publication plan as part of the AMP
- > The EEA should consider which indicators from the current Balanced Scorecard system could be integrated in the system of objectives and indicators underpinning the strategy and AMPs
- > The EEA should consider distinguishing clearly between 'recurrent tasks' and other 'ad hoc' tasks in the planning documents.

Recommendation 5: Reassess the use of the Scientific Committee with the purpose of ensuring enhanced value added to the work of the EEA.

The evaluation has shown that the EEA does not fully exploit the potential benefits of a Scientific Committee. Considering that the Scientific Committee has limited resources, a strategic approach on how these resources may best be put to use is even more important.

It is recommended that the EEA senior management and the Scientific Committee make a joint assessment of current use and modalities for cooperation with a view to establishing a clear framework for the cooperation. This could be integrated with considerations for the future strategy and identify key areas (and products), where the input and guidance from Scientific Committee members could be particularly valuable. It could also consider the appropriate timing of input from the Scientific Committee in relation to the phases in the production of particular products. The potential value added of Scientific Committee input could, in many cases, be higher if involved in the earlier phases where methodologies and approaches are defined.