



OPINION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EEA ANNUAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2013

Final

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

On August 1st, 2012, the Scientific Committee has been invited to contribute to the consultation process on the Annual Management Plan (AMP) 2013.

Following discussions at the 54th SC meeting on 3 October 2012, the Scientific Committee agrees on the points of the opinion presented hereafter which will be forwarded to the 64th EEA Management Board in advance of its meeting on 12 December 2012 when the EEA AMP 2013 shall be adopted.

The Scientific Committee of the European Environment Agency offers the following comments and suggestions - in addition to the suggestions offered by individual members during the consultation:

Overall content and structure

The AMP 2013 is an overall good and well-structured work programme. In its complexity it reflects the broad range of activities undertaken by the EEA and its staff, in cooperation with other agencies in EEA Member Countries and beyond. The four major priorities highlighted for 2013 are appropriate.

The presentation in a table format is appropriate and fulfils its aim for the purpose of political review of the plan, yet it does not allow for detailed scientific review of individual activities. This is more appropriately done through the regular work of the SC and in the context of the SC opinions on multi-annual work programmes (MAWP). At the end of this opinion, a series of comments in relation to the future MAWP are proposed.

As stated in the SC opinion on the AMP 2012, the document would benefit from a general introduction which would place the AMP in the perspective of the MAWP 2009-2013 and draw attention to what is new. In particular, as this is the last year of a five-year cycle, it would be useful to have an indication of those activities that may have had to be increased due to new priorities or emerging issues; those that have been particularly successful; those that may lag behind or where inflections have been made; those that will have to be continued or postponed to the next MAWP; and strategic insights for the next MAWP.

Adding an extra column indicating where there are cross-linkages to work in other areas would be very useful for the reader.

The list of planned publications could be added to the plan.

The question of ensuring a regional balance in EEA activities across Europe remains a challenge (e.g. apparent emphasis of the Arctic over the Mediterranean in the document).

Environment and Health

Environment and health ranks the last in the list of the EEA budgetary items. Even if a number of other EU agencies are devoted exclusively to human health issues, there remain gaps in terms of integration of environmental monitoring data with health monitoring and the link with SEIS and GMES. There is also a need for more background work on how health issues relate to other environmental issues (e.g. biodiversity and health; health indicators amongst indicators of well-being). The EEA should increase its work on this topic in anticipation of MAWP 2014-2018, in collaboration with partners such as the Group of 4+ and DG SANCO, WHO, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

As dramatically illustrated most recently by the nuclear accident in Fukushima (Japan), many gaps still exist in the study, reporting, and assessment of environment and health impacts of radioactive contamination. This is a major issue of concern for Europe. The EEA should start activities on this topic in 2013 in collaboration with the relevant partners. This could be kicked off by a SC seminar on the topic in October 2013.

Activities on endocrine disruptors should be included in the health rather than the decision support section.

Freshwater

To support the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, it is important to continue evaluating results from the first reporting cycle and focus on 2020. However, moving from an analysis of "what is wrong" to "how to fix it", more and more focus will be placed on restoration. It would be interesting to have some idea of how work is progressing with restoration efforts, and if environmental targets (e.g. good ecological quality) will be achieved in the near future.

Energy

As exploitation of shale gas is increasing around the world and the issue is high on the agenda in Europe, the AMP2013 should include work to evaluate environment and health impacts of shale gas extraction through fracking technologies as well as climate implications of use of this fossil fuel resource.

Eye on Earth (EoE)

Eye on Earth activities would benefit from being presented also in an integrated way, for instance in the introductory section, to stress its strategic importance and potential. Also it is important to ensure that EoE is known, understood, and user-friendly.

Communications

The communication budget - being the second highest budget item in the AMP - could include elements on ways to assess the effectiveness of communications. The EEA may consider presenting communication activities per theme and area of work

Work could be done specifically on ways to communicate risk, uncertainty and responsibility to the broader public.

It may also be appropriate for the communication team to contribute to efforts to improve communication skills of scientists and science journalists by way of training.

The EEA webpage could link to exhibitions on environmental issues done not only at the EEA but also in member countries, especially if they feature information from EEA. For instance EEA documentaries are currently featured in a Greenland exhibition of ETH Zurich.

Decision support

The decision support theme could include cross-cutting actions on strengthening science-policy interfaces. In this regard, the AMP does link very strongly with DG RTD at the strategic level. Yet this is key for the preparation and the implementation of Horizon 2020, and the year 2013 is an important moment in terms as far as the content of Horizon 2020 is concerned.

The prospective analyses planned as a follow up to Late Lessons 2 are important especially in relation to EEA strategic objective 4. It may be appropriate to predefine themes to work on in the coming years in relation to some EEA themes.

Citizen science activities could link with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) as inclusion of other forms of knowledge is a key issue for IPBES.

Strategic Futures

This theme appears to be severely underfunded considering the importance of developing foresight and visioning capacity to support societal transformation towards sustainability.

Priority data flows

The plan should include indications on how the EEA could further encourage relevant member countries to improve their reporting performance and address in particular the persistently low performance by some member countries.

Uncertainty and quality assessments

The AMP does not make explicit reference to specific work on quality assessment (including dealing with uncertainty and weighing evidence in assessments). This is an important issue in the preparation of SOER 2015, but also for many EEA products. Work has started in an uncertainty group involving SC members and EEA Staff, but it would need explicit endorsement in the AMP if it is to have the priority it deserves. The Scientific Committee, jointly with some EEA staff, is considering the option of focusing its February 2013 seminar on uncertainty.

SCP

Work with business and other stakeholders on new business models towards more sustainable life-styles is mentioned but no indication of the type of work planned is given.

Integrated environmental assessments

This theme includes work to support EU policy development such as the 7th Environment Action Programme currently in interservice consultation. The EEA, thanks to its integrated assessment work, is in a position to contribute significantly to the development of the visions underlying such programmes and consequent policies (e.g. relevance of the work on megatrends to define a strong vision in 7EAP), but also to strategic aspects relating to improving integration and policy coherence and improving the evidence base for environment policy.

There are still many knowledge gaps around ecosystem resilience, and socio-ecological system resilience. Work on resilience planned under this and other themes (health, biodiversity, agriculture and forest) including development of indicators of ecosystem resilience should be given high priority in 2013.

SOER 2015: The phrasing gives the impression that the SOER 2015 strategy is already finalised and it is just a matter of implementing it.

Training

It would be good to have more detail on the balance between different types of training for the staff (scientific and technical vs. management and other types of training) as well as evaluation of training programmes by the staff.

Short-term visits to research centres and participation in scientific meetings and workshops should be encouraged to ensure that the staff has knowledge on new results and on-going research.

Comments relevant to the future MAWP

The following comments reflect items reaching farther than the AMP2013 and should be of relevance in planning the future MAWP. Our comments are neither exhaustive, nor do they appear in any particular order of priority.

- Transport, mobility and the environment constitutes a theme on which EEA could work more intensively in the future. Such work should promote a more holistic approach to these issues to support policy integration and coherence. This includes reflection on technological, behavioural, institutional and organisational innovations, land-use, ecosystem and health aspects (through "health cycle analysis"), distributional, tax and employment issues, etc. (see forthcoming summary of Oct 2012 SC seminar).
- In Strategic objective 6, "Anticipate new ideas and thinking especially about ecosystem services, resource use and emerging technologies and innovations and behavioural changes", the wording could be "resources" and not just "resource uses".
- Monitoring recycling and re-use of waste and its economic value could be included in future activities.
- Urban issues will become even more pressing in the coming years and the EEA may need to reinforce its work on this theme. For instance, the forthcoming Cities and Biodiversity Outlook indicates that out of the total projected urban areas for 2030 in the world, 60% are yet to be built. This represents a huge potential for transformation. Green and blue areas in the city will have increasing focus in connection with climate change adaptation as well as in urban biodiversity.
- Forest fires should be considered beyond the climate change adaptation and impacts context. Forest fire prevention through mapping and local support would require evaluation also in terms of their contribution to the overall CO₂ and PM10 input into the atmosphere. Empowerment of the people affected by forest fires to be able to implement better prevention measures and to know how to react during a fire without being told by police or firemen is a must. Progresses made in that respect could be analysed.
- In many areas, the potential and actual effects of multiple pressures and stressors are still poorly understood. Research is increasingly looking at these aspects, as illustrated e.g. by the last environment call of FP7. In the case of freshwater for instance, little is known about how pressures interact and how this results in environmental stressors and biotic responses. Interactions between pressures and how climate change will affect multiple pressure-stressor interactions is crucial so as not to waste resources "fixing the wrong problem". Similarly for the question of how multiple stressors affect ecosystem services and biodiversity, more knowledge is needed to identify the major drivers of changes in biota (stressors) and understand how pressures interact to exacerbate or ameliorate these stressors. Also, understanding the importance of connectivity between ecosystems and how this connectivity affects resilience and resistance to human-induced stress is urgently needed for management of many systems. In the coming years, it is important that the EEA closely follows scientific developments on multiple stressors and integrate them in its work.
- Urban waste, dioxin emissions, and population health around dumping sites should be considered and cross linked to Environment and Health activities.
- Hay fever is an increasing problem in the European population, there are strong scientific indications that this illness is directly linked to asthma, pollen loads will increase in the future as a result of climate change as will be invasive species with rising temperatures. The EEA should take up these topics.

Done on 5 November 2012

SIGNED

Detlef Sprinz, PhD

Chair, EEA Scientific Committee