



OPINION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EEA ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2018

Article 8, paragraph 5 of the Regulation (EC) No 401/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the European Environment Agency (EEA), requires the Agency's Scientific Committee (SC) to be consulted on the Annual Work Programme (AWP) before its submission by the Executive Director to the Management Board for adoption.

On 2nd February 2017, the Scientific Committee was invited to provide its opinion on the draft Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2018.

Following discussions at the 67th SC meeting on 18 May 2017, the Scientific Committee agreed on the opinion presented hereafter. It will be forwarded to the EEA Management Board in advance of its 79th meeting on 6 December 2017 when the EEA AWP 2016 shall be adopted.

The Scientific Committee offers the following comments and suggestions.

Strategic matters

The Scientific Committee welcomes the draft EEA Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2018. The AWP 2018 is well-structured and effectively identifies key strategic and operational priorities for 2018. It aligns them with the current and forthcoming challenges associated with environmental and sustainability transitions. This annual plan sits under the extended Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) 2014-2020 and will ensure its continuing relevance within current financial and administrative circumstances.

The Scientific Committee observes that austerity measures adopted by the EU are having undesirable implications for EEA activities. In view of the recent reduction in core staff, which effectively exceeds 10 per cent, the Scientific Committee would like to express its deep concern about the continuing ability of the EEA to discharge its formal obligations and maintain the high standards that the EU rightly expects of all its regulatory agencies. The addition of tasks in new areas, most of which appear to be underfunded, combined with the prospect of further cuts in funding, will further deplete the agency's resources and undermine its capacity to successfully manage its current portfolio of responsibilities. Such cuts will compromise its ability to discharge the functions outlined in its founding Regulation.

The Agency as a knowledge and information provider has proven to be a vital European body to accomplish a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment and a more sustainable development (TFEU art. 3). The conclusion from the most recent evaluation that "The EEA continues to be the most effective and efficient solution to providing credible information on the state of the European environment" has been acknowledged by the Management Board as well as the European Parliament. Not all EU agencies have responsibilities that so directly impinge upon the fulfilment of Treaty obligations. The EEA is exceptional too, in providing a forum for extended collaboration between EU Member States and other countries in the European region. These important activities call for more, not less activity.

Preparations for SOER-2020 will be a crucial activity in 2018. The Scientific Committee expects the report to frame the understanding on accomplishments and challenges in relation to the 7th EAP and the EU's 2020 goals. Systemic challenges were introduced in SOER-2015, and the Scientific Committee encourages the Agency to develop its reporting and analysis on the social, technological and economic nature of sustainability transitions, and critically reflect on their immediate and long term implications, and impacts on the different social groups.

Specific matters

- The AWP-2018 maintains and continues a high and excellent EEA profile in the area of air pollution, transport and noise, with delivery of data sets, indicators and reports. The level of activity with regard to water management, especially clean drinking water, deserves greater attention considering its prominence agreed under SDG goals. Safe water and sanitation as well as a lessening of the chemical loads are the primary vehicles for reducing environmental burdens on children and other vulnerable individuals, while reflecting the social and pro-poor dimensions of sustainability.
- A recent WHO report on the impact of environment on children's health documents how vulnerable the youngest citizens are to chemicals and other pollutants. Children under five years of age in Europe's low and middle income countries are four times as affected as in high income countries, with even higher burdens in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which is calling for continued attention to be devoted to inequities and disadvantaged children.
- Existing reporting and data flows from Member States allows EEA to compile and publish available data sets on drinking water quality. Citizens and water managers should be supplied relevant data for the priority and emerging chemical parameters down to the regional water supply zone level, while indicators and reports could place these in context. This would support an informed basis for improving drinking water quality in tandem with ecological water quality in line with SDG goals and the EU directives' requirements.
- For EEA to provide information and data to decision-makers in a format useful it becomes important to develop capacity to document in both physical and economic terms the emission flows and changes in resource stocks, as well as the erosion of amenity values

and life-support functions of the environment. In relation to SA4 it is recommended to focus some competence development and recruitment of staff with social science background.

- AWP makes reference to the high social costs of implementation shortfalls in relation to EU environmental legislation. Cost figures as provided in previous EEA reports are overall critical in providing a case for the environmental acquis and its possible extension, and a breakdown on MS and regions etc. will be required for meaningful application. A proper liaising with Copernicus and other data set providers could help provision of regularly updated figures that are robust and more firmly anchored in the authoritative data streams for which EEA and its partners has responsibility.
- The predominantly thematic structure of existing collaborative EEA/EIONET/ETC arrangements is not well suited for promoting a more horizontal and systemic focus. As the present structure seems biased towards SA1, more flexibility could be introduced by use of webinars and other virtual meeting types, freeing resources for novel EIONET networks in more targeted support of SA2 activities. The planned EIONET workshops on 'Circular economy' and 'Environment, health and well-being' provide a good start and could be complemented by further workshops on integrated assessment across thematic areas, e.g. on water quality and quantity challenges with climate change in support of WFD objectives for integrated management.
- The Scientific Committee endorses the EEA's continuing efforts to improve its capacity to produce ex-post evaluation analyses to improve scientific understanding of what constitutes effective measures and on how to curb implementation deficits. In relation to Green Economy EEA should resume its reporting on environmental taxes and charges; whereas Eurostat has responsibility for the fiscal aspects, EEA should report on environmental effectiveness. Effective dissemination would benefit greatly from crosscutting network meetings involving the relevant specialists from national administrations in an EIONET format.
- While embracing Copernicus both as an implementation actor and as a pivotal user for disseminating consolidated information and knowledge to wider audiences, the Scientific Committee is concerned about the uptake of new data products coming out of Copernicus into the Agency's and EIONET's regular activities with the limited core funds available.

The Scientific Committee congratulates the EEA for the AWP 2018 and looks forward to supporting the EEA and its partners in the implementation of this work plan. With planned seminars for 2018 on the topics of the SOER, environmental justice, communication and environmental behavior, the Scientific Committee is eager to mobilize its own expertise as well as that of external experts to support the knowledge generation and sharing activities of the Agency.

Copenhagen, 11 October 2017

SIGNED

Prof Per Mickwitz,
Chair EEA Scientific Committee