

To: The EEA Management Board

21 January 2019

## RESPONSE FROM EEA MANAGEMENT ON THE EEA/EIONET EVALUATION

The management of the EEA welcomes the Commission staff working document (471 final) of 19 November 2018 on the Better Regulation evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet). We note the positive conclusions that the EEA and Eionet fulfilled the main objectives of the founding Regulation, that these continue to be relevant, that EU value-added was secured and that implementation of agreed work programmes was achieved in a largely effective, efficient and coherent way. The conclusions on the reliability and the unique role of EEA/Eionet in supporting EU policy making are particularly appreciated as is the recognition that the Agency *“has adapted very well to new EU policy developments and has fulfilled its objectives in the context of decreasing staff resources and increasing expectations for further high-quality deliverables by the Agency”*.

At the same time, the management of the EEA underlines its commitment to draw lessons from the evaluation in order to lead further improvement processes where required in order to address the conclusions from the evaluation exercise, for example in integrating new technologies and processes into environmental policy-relevant knowledge or in expanding the involvement of stakeholders around assessments.

Against this background, and bearing in mind the forthcoming discussions on preparing for the next EEA-Eionet Strategy, EEA management has identified the following issues which we would like to highlight in order to inform further reflections and follow-up on the EEA/Eionet evaluation.

1. **Disconnect between the positive Better Regulation evaluation and the proposed budget cut for EEA under the proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF):** the European Commission proposal of 2 May 2018 for the MFF covering the period 2021-2027 sets out a cap for the EU subsidy for the EEA at €40 million per year, stable in nominal terms (i.e. nominal budget frozen at €0.5million *below* the 2020 level). This would result in a real-terms cut of at least 14% in the Agency budget over the 7-year period. Increasing the budget for EEA-Eionet activities would, by contrast, be consistent with the increased policy emphasis on climate and environment in the MFF proposal and the positive conclusions of the EEA/Eionet evaluation.
2. **Maximising EEA-Eionet value lies in making use of all available knowledge for EU policy:** the European Commission’s evaluation places greater emphasis on the value of monitoring and data collection over indicators, assessments and communication in support to EU policies. EEA management is of the opinion that all elements are needed to inform decision makers, especially in those policy areas that contribute most to undermining environmental and climate change integrity. In light of the increased focus on longer-term sustainability challenges in EU policies, we agree with the conclusion of the EEA Management Board seminar in 2016 that EEA-Eionet value-added lies in integrated investments across the monitoring-data-information-assessment-knowledge-communication (MDIAKC) chain.



3. **EEA will continue to take on further, budgeted, reporting responsibilities:** this is commensurate with our proven track record as an effective and efficient partner in this regard. Moreover, we will continue to work with Eionet and EU partners to modernise further monitoring and reporting processes, to make best use of available ICT solutions, and to draw out the benefits of Copernicus for up-to-date information, indicators and assessments, in line with EU policy developments.
4. **Flexible and effective contracting for assigned additional work by EEA/Eionet:** EEA is prepared to take on additional tasks when appropriately resourced. Ideally, these should be through core funding, although this may not always be possible within the constraints of the current Regulation. EEA management would therefore welcome a strategic discussion with Commission services on contracting modalities in the new MFF period. This should build on the recognition in the evaluation of our value-added as an EU body and the conclusion that *“EEA/EIONET is very cost effective, and the work they do would otherwise have to be done in the Member States or by consultants”*.
5. **Modernisation of EEA/Eionet:** EEA management agrees that we stand before an important opportunity to work together with the component organisations in the network to modernise EEA/Eionet. This should address the challenges of the coming decade, ensure strengthened alignment with other on-going country initiatives and the adequate resourcing of national Eionet structures. The network, which lies at the core of the EEA/Eionet model, has also indicated through the National Focal Points its motivation to engage in a modernisation exercise. This will be a collaborative exercise between the EEA and the network which, in combination with the preparation of the strategy for the coming decade, should lead to significant improvements in the value-added of EEA/Eionet to the developing policy agenda and knowledge needs.
6. **Clearer articulation of stakeholders’ demands on EEA and Eionet:** EEA management appreciates that the European Commission’s evaluation recognises the position of the Agency as the “go to” partner when it comes to environmental information needs. In light of increasing demands and diminishing resources, increased complexity and alongside increasing focus on sustainability aspects in EU policies, EEA sees the need for a clearer and more integrated articulation of stakeholders’ needs and priorities. While the EEA Management Board remains the key strategic body steering the work of the Agency, EEA management will work closely with the Environment Knowledge Community of Commission Directorates-General, or any other mechanism deemed appropriate, to ensure a clear articulation, prioritisation and distribution of responsibilities between knowledge providers.

SOER 2020 will affirm the progress that has been made in addressing some key environmental problems but will underline the extent, breadth and urgency of challenges Europe faces. With our Management Board, network in the countries and Scientific Committee, we will now start to reflect on a new strategy for the next decade to ensure the knowledge base to address these challenges, highlight what works and strive to do even better as an Agency and network in the coming period.