



FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION: SOER 2020 AND THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

High-level dinner organised by the EEA in Brussels on 4 December 2019
Summary points relevant to EEA/Eionet Strategy 2021-2030

This high-level dinner aimed to reflect on what 'The European environment – state and outlook 2020' (SOER 2020) means for the forthcoming EU policy agenda and the European Green Deal (EGD). It was one of a series of events organised by the European Environment Agency (EEA) to reflect on the knowledge underpinning SOER 2020 and its implications for society-wide actions towards a sustainable Europe.

The dinner was attended by 44 participants, including the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, representatives from the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, 9 Directorates-General of the European Commission (AGRI, CLIMA, ECFIN, ENV, EPSC, MOVE, REGIO, RTD, SANTE), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), national environment ministries, environmental NGOs (Bird Life, European Environmental Bureau, IUCN), European Youth Parliament, members of the EEA Scientific Committee, EEA Management Board, and Eionet National Focal Points.

The discussion focused around two questions:

- How can EU policy induce transformative change at the needed pace and scale?
- How can the SOER 2020 and the EEA best support the EU policy agenda in the next five years?

How can EU policy induce transformative change at the needed pace and scale?

Political ambition is crucial and this ambition is reflected in the agenda of the current European Commission, through its European Green Deal (EGD). To realise this ambition, short, medium and long-term targets are needed. Ambitious targets spark investment in innovation. Nevertheless, targets may not be so easy to define in areas such as biodiversity or wellbeing. Only by joining-up policy instruments, investments, taxation, across all policy areas and across systems can policies start to move our societies and systems (including the economic system) in the direction of prosperity and sustainability. There is no silver bullet. This is clearly demonstrated in the SOER 2020 and the EGD will show it politically.

What characterises effective policies?

- Example of climate policy:
 - **Clear goals** and **quantifiable and consensual targets**
 - **Comprehensive road map** mobilising different types of measures (legislative, non-legislative) and funding, cross-sectoral focus, offering credible pathways and milestones, complemented by a centralised monitoring system, and international interactions.

What is needed to induce transformative change at the needed pace a scale?

- To induce transformative change, policies need to be adopt a **systems perspective** and all available policy instruments and tools need to be mobilised. A much deeper and profound change is needed to achieve the political targets of the EGD, which should be called European **Green and Social Deal**. **Small efficiency gains and greenwashing won't take us there.**
- **Political targets** are essential to provide the necessary guidance for upcoming policies. Legislation needs to be consistent with political targets and policies. **Financing**

and public support need to be in place. It is important to create such pyramid of action.

- Strengthen **policy implementation** and ensure **policy coherence** (example of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), which has had a devastating effect on the environment and biodiversity). **Robust legal and policy frameworks** are need to ensure it is either **extremely expensive or illegal to do the wrong thing** when it comes to sustainability. **Political will** is essential. The "one in, one out" principle aimed at reducing regulatory burden when introducing a new law should not come with an environmental cost or environmental deregulation.
- Policies need to **enable innovation** and the emergence of **new technologies**.
- The role of sustainable **finance** is critical to promote green investments and finance the transition. The EGD should integrate and level the playing field for **natural capital accounting**.
- The EGD should include **legally binding habitat restoration targets** for Members States (e.g. restore 15% of land to natural habitats by 2030), using **nature-based solution principles**.



How can the SOER 2020 and the EEA best support the EU policy agenda in the next five years?

There has never been such momentum for change. We will never have a year for nature as 2020, if we make it happen.

Knowledge needed to implement the European Green Deal

- **We know enough to act now.**
- **Research and innovation (R&I) can support better policy-making**, through knowledge creation, technological development and experimentation in society.
- **Horizon Europe** was prepared across the Commission by looking at what policy framework Europe will need by 2030, the stock of knowledge in science and technology available today, and how to bridge the gap between the two.
- For the benefits of R&I to be realised at the Member State level, **knowledge needs to be mobilised to provide regional and local decision-making hubs with solutions.**
- Develop and implement a (legally binding) **monitoring system for the just transition** that identifies how it will be monitored and who, within the EU system, is responsible for it.
- Ensure ongoing **long-term monitoring of biodiversity** (appropriately funded).
- Develop **predictive models** to inform policies in complex areas, such as biodiversity, forests, agriculture, the food system.

SOER

- The SOER 2020 primes politicians and institutions to think about **sustainability**, when historically they have been primed to deliver on jobs and growth. And provides a strong analytical basis to incorporate sustainability into the discussion.
- It promotes **systems thinking**, identifies **knowledge needs for transitions** and points towards the urgent need for **transformational change.**
- Consumption is mentioned heavily in SOER 2020 pointing out to an uncomfortable truth: that it is all about **reducing.**
- Perhaps in the next SOER, a greater focus could be put on **natural capital.**
- We have known about the current environmental and climate problems for years. The question is why we can't tackle them. The answer is **vested interests. The next SOER should reflect on this.**

The EEA and where to focus in the next 5 years

- The EEA plays **key role in evaluating** the success of **EU policies** in a timely and robust manner and thus is a key asset in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation.
- The EEA needs to work more closely with researchers to **develop actionable knowledge** which can help with the identification of **responses.** Horizon Europe 2030, and its missions, can be a vehicle for that. It is essential to look closely at SOER 2020 and identify what research should **be taken further.**
- Develop a credible and reliable **knowledge base for** the type of solutions/responses for **system change**, as well as, knowledge about the problems the world faces, to allow for the monitoring of sustainability transitions at the European scale.
- More focus is need on identifying opportunities for **protecting and restoring nature** itself, on how to **reduce the drivers** of environmental degradation, but also on how that translates into **benefits**, including economically.
- Maximise the **use of Copernicus data** on land-use.
- Invest resources into **connecting the best available science and information, translating it into actionable knowledge and linking it to the policy agenda** (e.g. EGD). The EEA, alongside other EU Agencies, can play an important role in better connecting existing knowledge and packaging it in way that can inform policy needs.
- Contribute to develop and implementation of a **monitoring system for the just transition.**
- **Reflect on whether the EEA Regulations are still fit for purpose, in light of the EGD, or whether they should be reopen** to ensure we have an Agency that provides the knowledge for all these systemic approaches that come together in the EGD?
- The EEA could **support Member States in exploring transition scenarios** towards delivering the goals of the EGD and **promote European cooperation.**