Framework Partnership Agreement concerning the European Topic Centre on Biodiversity and Ecosystems 2022-2026

Reference: Open call for proposals OCP/EEA/CAS/21/001-ETC BE

Closing date: 29.4.2021

Terms of reference's purposes:

1. Specify what actions the EEA is to finance under the framework partnership agreement resulting from this call for proposals (technical specifications);

2. Announce the criteria which the EEA will apply to determine the successful consortium among the applications received (evaluation of applications);

3. Provide information on how to apply, and the expected timeline.

These terms of reference will form Annex I to the framework partnership agreement resulting from this call for proposals and will be binding during the agreement.

Contents

1 Technical Specifications

1.1 Background information

1.1.1 The European Environment Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network

The European Environment Agency (EEA[1]) is a main source of information of the European Union and its Member States (MS) in developing, implementing, and evaluating European environment policies. 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.

Institutionally, the EEA is one of the Agencies of the European Union and is the hub of the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet[2]), a network of around 350 organisations across Europe through which environmental-related data and information are collected and disseminated. The functioning of the EEA and Eionet are described in the EEA regulation[3]. The Agency has 32 member countries. These are the 27 EU Member States (MS), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.

The EEA Regulation identifies three elements of Eionet: main component elements of national networks, National Focal Points (NFPs), and European Topic Centres (ETCs). The Regulation[4] sets out that ETCs are formed with institutions (within the Network) who conclude agreements with the Agency. They are designated by the Management Board and entrusted to cooperate with the Agency on specific tasks, set out in the multiannual work programme. These partnerships, implemented through multi-annual framework partnership agreements, are also foreseen to be an important element of the modernisation of Eionet that will be a key on-going process for the coming years.

European Topic Centres (ETCs) are consortia of organisations in EEA member countries with expertise in specific environmental areas, contracted by the EEA through framework agreements to carry out specific tasks to support the implementation of EEA and Copernicus work programmes. Each ETC consists of a coordinator organisation and specialist partner organisations from the environmental research and information community, which combine their resources in their areas of expertise.

This call for proposals aims to identify a new ETC that will take up the work in the following topic area from 1 January 2022: Biodiversity and ecosystems.

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[1] https://eea.europa.eu

[2] http://www.eionet.europa.eu

[3] Regulation (EC) No. 401/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the EEA and Eionet (codified version, OJ L126 of 21 May 2009, p13

[4] (i.e. articles 4 and 5).

1.1.2 The EEA-Eionet Strategy 2030[5]

The EEA-Eionet common vision for 2030 is to "…together constitute the leading network for policy-relevant environment and climate knowledge at European Union and country levels…". The Strategy – Delivering data and knowledge to achieve Europe's environment and climate ambitions clarifies how the network intends to achieve this vision and sets out the strategic directions for the network during the next decade, articulated in five Strategic Objectives (SO):

- SO1 Produce evidence-based knowledge to support policy implementation and development of new initiatives to accelerate and scale up the transition to sustainability;

- SO2 Deliver targeted inputs to inform policy and public discussions, by organising and communicating knowledge on responses, including innovative solutions to societal challenges;

- SO3 Strengthen our network through more active engagement at the country level and work with other leading organisations in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise;

- SO4 Embrace digitalisation, including new technologies, big data, artificial intelligence and earth observation that will complement and potentially replace established information sources to better support decision making; and

- SO5 Develop structures, expertise and capacity across our network to meet evolving knowledge needs, securing and diversifying the resources needed to achieve our joint vision.

The EEA-Eionet Strategy 2030 outlines five areas of work that strongly relate to European policy priorities and form the overall structure for the broad division of ETC support roles. The five areas of work identified in the strategy are:

1. Biodiversity and ecosystems;
2. Climate change mitigation and adaptation;
3. Human health and the environment;
4. Circular economy and resource use; and
5. Sustainability trends, prospects and responses.

Europe's production sectors (including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and industry) as well as consumption and production systems (energy, mobility, food, and buildings) will be addressed through the five interlinked work areas.

The EEA-Eionet Strategy underlines the role of data and understanding for the pivotal decade to come. It sets out how EEA and Eionet will work together with other knowledge providers at European level and with Eionet countries in support of Europe's environment and climate ambitions.

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[5] EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030: delivering data and knowledge to achieve Europe's climate and environment ambitions — European Environment Agency (europa.eu).

1.1.3 Role of European Topic Centres

Under the overall leadership of EEA, ETCs provide expertise and capacity to support the EEA and its member countries with implementing the EEA-Eionet Strategy. ETCs, working together with Eionet countries, facilitate the provision of data and information from the countries and deliver assessments, reports and other services to the EEA and Eionet. ETCs are extensively involved in acquiring, processing and quality assuring data for EEA. However, the nature of the data, the sources and challenges vary significantly between topics of work.

ETC work on indicator analysis and assessments involves both the development of new indicators in response to policy requirements as well as the regular processing and updating of indicators which requires networking with experts in member countries.

The role of ETCs in supporting implementation of EU legislation and policies is also a key element of EEA activities towards Member States and the European Commission. ETCs gather expertise to cover the knowledge needs for EU policies, to handle and analyse data, to assess the European state and trends of the environment occurring in EEA member countries.

In addition to expertise on specific topics, ETCs have, to differing extents, competency in digitalisation, social sciences, systemic analysis, modelling literacy, knowledge of prospective tools, co-creation methods and capacity-building in order to fulfil their roles.

Despite the different areas of expertise, ETCs need to cooperate extensively with each other and it is expected that cross-cutting cooperation will be reinforced and an important element of all ETC work for the coming years. ETCs cooperate to both respond to cross-cutting policy requirements and in relation to dependencies in their work to other ETCs.

In the past the Monitoring, Data, Information, Assessments, Knowledge (MDIAK) chain was the core EEA business model. The new EEA-Eionet Strategy sees MDIAK as a value adding chain within a wider set of business models. This change reflects an appreciation by EEA and its stakeholders that EEA can frequently add value in individual components, for example, only managing data or, instead by only providing expert assessment on data or information provided directly to EEA. This change in emphasis means that ETCs in different topic areas may work in more focused ways, or even exclusively on certain parts of the chain.

Integration across traditional topic domains to respond to specific environmental challenges is becoming a key feature of the European environmental policy support landscape. Integration and associated cross-cutting cooperation are intrinsic features in EEA work such as on SOER, indicators, LULUCF, Copernicus, Urban/city sustainability, etc. In order to achieve the necessary level of integration, good practice, including on data, within and across topics is needed.

1.1.4 Agreements

ETC activities are based on framework partnership agreements (FPAs) and specific agreements (SAs) concluded with the EEA to implement the former. Specific (usually annual) action plans (APs) agreed between the EEA and the consortium will form the basis for the SAs.

The organisation and commissioning of work will be based on an annual budget allocation cycle (grants). All grants are subject to co-financing by the consortium concerned (minimum 10% of the total eligible costs[6]). Action plans will be jointly agreed, based on proposals from the ETC in response to EEA requirements.

The FPA will be concluded for a maximum period of up to 60 months starting from the date of signature and not exceeding 31 December 2026. The FPA will be signed between the EEA and the appointed coordinator of the consortium to whom the other consortium partners confer powers of attorney (see annex 7) for the purposes of submission of the proposal and signature of the FPA and SAs in case the proposal is selected. For further details, reference is made to the draft FPA and draft SA attached as annex 5.

1.1.5   Estimated value (Budget)

The total annual budget for SAs to be concluded based on the FPA will be subject to available funds from the General Budget of the EU and priorities set in the EEA Single Programming Document (SPD). During the period 2022 – 2026, the indicative total budget allocated to ETC BE is 15,5M[7] Euros excluding contributions from assigned revenues and other contracts.

1.2   Future demands on EEA work in the area of biodiversity and ecosystems 2022-2026

1.2.1   General policy context

In December 2019, shortly before the corona virus crisis struck Europe, the EEA presented its report *The European Environment – State and Outlook 2020* (SOER) which detailed the unprecedented scale and urgency of Europe's current environmental, climate and sustainability challenges.

Many persistent challenges rooted back in the past are coupled and amplified by emerging and systemic issues, associated with uncertainty, ambiguity and conflicts of interests. Issues range from exceeding planetary boundaries and tipping points, through global drivers of change, the functioning of complex systems of production and consumption and establishing fair, society-wide transformational outcomes.

The European Green Deal[8], proposed by the new European Commission in December 2019, endorsed in Council and European Parliament conclusions, is the European response to these systemic challenges. It provides a framework for ambitious actions and measures to position Europe firmly onto a path towards sustainability. It places the EU as a world leader in the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrating that sustainability and prosperity could be achieved together.

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[6] The 10%-rule of minimum co-financing is applied towards the ETC as a whole. To what extent partners contribute to this co-financing is an internal ETC matter.

[7] This figure may vary depending on actual budgets allocated to EEA and inflation.

[8] The European Green Deal COM(2019) 640 final

The European Green Deal proposal acknowledges the work of the EEA in highlighting the extent and urgency of the challenges and sets out a roadmap of around 50 key policies and measures needed to address the challenges. It sets out several long-term strategic objectives transforming the EU's economy for a sustainable future:

- Increasing the EU's Climate ambition for 2030 and 2050;
- Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy;
- Mobilizing industry for a clean and circular economy;
- Building and renovating in an energy and resource efficient way;
- A zero-pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment;
- Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity;
- From Farm to Fork: a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system;
- Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility.

Amongst the measures proposed, the European Green Deal also proposed the adoption of an 8th Environment Action Programme in 2020. This is to help ensure implementation, enforcement and effective delivery of environmental and climate policies and legislation and also introduces a new monitoring framework.

As set out in the EEA-Eionet Strategy, EEA and the Eionet will play a key role in supporting actions under the European Green Deal, the implementation of the proposed 8th Environment Action Programme, as well as Europe's global commitments.

1.2.2   Topic-specific policy context

The EU has legal frameworks, strategies, and action plans to protect nature and restore habitats and species. Key policies for addressing the continued biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation under the European Green Deal are the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy. The Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Chemical Strategy, and the EU Climate Law are important policies to regulate pollution and climate change impacts on ecosystems. The understanding and link to other sectoral policies such as the Common Agriculture Policy, the Integrated Maritime Policy, the Common Fishery Policy, the European Forest Strategy, as well as the Bioeconomy strategy are key to help mainstreaming biodiversity into economic activities.

- The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by: Establishing and effectively managing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, building upon existing Natura 2000 areas.

- Developing an EU Nature Restoration Plan to restore and manage degraded ecosystems across the EU by 2030, addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss.

- Strengthened governance and implementation of the environmental acquis e.g. Water Framework Directive (WFD), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), Nature Directives.

- Developing a set of measures to enable the transformative change, including a new governance and monitoring framework, better implementation and enforcement, and a systemic approach to action including financing and investments.

- Mobilising EU efforts and ambitions to meet the global biodiversity challenge.

The Biodiversity strategy comes in a tandem approach with the Farm to Fork strategy, providing a new approach to address systemic solutions to agricultural pressures, coupled with a new Forest strategy which, in connection with the Bioeconomy strategy, can also help to provide sustainable approaches in biomass production and use.

These policies can help to tackle the main problems, i.e. main threats/pressures ecosystems are exposed to and that cause the decline of ecosystem health and loss of biodiversity. These threats, called HIPOC, are:

- **H**abitat change meaning the change in structure, quality, extent and functionality of ecosystems. Any type of land/sea use change, more sustainable management practice or establishment of better management effectiveness, be it in agriculture, forestry or fisheries/aquaculture, can help to reduce this kind of pressures;
- **I**nvasive alien species are entering native ecosystems and changing the population dynamic of native species, eventually leading to their extinction. Management of the relevant pathways, abatement measures, implemented on the right scale can help to prevent this pressure;
- **P**ollution is crucial for the qualitative deterioration of many ecosystems and habitats, threatening not only flora and fauna, but also effecting human health via relevant consumption pathways. The zero-pollution action plan and related policies are focusing on tackling the different pollution pathways, not only for chemicals, but also nutrients;
- **O**verexploitation is the excessive use of biotic and abiotic natural resources. Water scarcity, regulated by several pieces of water legislation, driven by e.g. excessive irrigation, is an overexploitation that, via decreasing ground water tables, also leads to negative impacts on ecosystems and decline of vulnerable habitats incl. their species. Direct overexploitation comes in the form of hunting and fishing, for which several pieces of community legislation define clear limitations in the interest of ecosystem health;

Climate change affects ecosystems directly via the change of various habitat conditions. It however also affects the policy setting itself, by changing in many cases the baseline of what is defined as a healthy ecosystem. The close link between climate change and biodiversity policies is therefore paramount, also with respect to synergies and trade-offs e.g. in climate change mitigation and its ecosystem impacts.

1.2.3   EEA role in support of policy[9]

The EEA's role with respect to the above-mentioned policies is to provide information, knowledge and evidence regarding the trends in ecosystem condition and the drivers, pressures and impacts that affect these conditions. The EEA also supports the Commission and Member States in

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[9] Within the scope of this FPA.

monitoring the progress in meeting the obligations under a range of EU directives covering the nature, freshwater, marine and maritime domains (see Table 3 in EEA SPD 2021 - 2023). Four of the five objectives contain aspects which are of particular relevance for biodiversity and ecosystems as outlined below:

SO1: Supporting policy implementation and sustainability transitions. This includes producing evidence-based knowledge to support the implementation of existing policies and the development of new policies to accelerate and scale up the transition to sustainability. It involves improved knowledge on the impacts of human activities and climate change, as the key drivers of change identified in the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and their consequent pressures on the condition of biodiversity and ecosystems (species, habitats, ecosystem health).

S02: Providing timely input to solutions for sustainability challenges. This includes delivering targeted inputs to policy and public discussions by mobilising and communicating knowledge and increasingly engaging in ongoing debates on innovative and coherent solutions. For example, through the provision of timely information, the EEA could help support the development of actionable (nature-based) solutions for protecting and restoring terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity, and ecosystem services.

SO3: Building stronger networks and partnerships. This includes strengthening the EEA's network through more active engagement at different levels of governance and work with other leading organisations to quickly tap into the knowledge and expertise held in EEA member countries and beyond. Elements of this work will include how to optimise existing networks as well as contributing to new partnerships that will help to mobilise the EU efforts for global action.

SO4: Making full use of the potential of data, technology, and digitalisation. This includes embracing new technologies, digitalisation, big data, artificial intelligence, and earth observation, such as Copernicus, to support decision-making. This could include exploring innovative monitoring and observation systems as well as advancing foresight and data capacities together with other ETCs (DI, ST).

1.3 Specific tasks of the European Topic Centre on Biodiversity and Ecosystems (ETC BE)

The European Topic Centre on Biodiversity and Ecosystems (ETC BE) will support work of the EEA in the period 2022-26. The EEA Single Programming Document will serve as the basis for the identification of priorities and work packages set out in the ETC action plans.

Three key features of EEA and ETC work in 2022 – 2026 will be:

1. Support to the implementation of the range of EU directives, strategies and policies constituting the environmental acquis. To mainstream biodiversity into other policies requires integrating this data into cross-cutting areas, e.g. climate change, sustainable finance, health and circular economy. The integration throughout different scales of policies requires also to link them to related regional and global policies and conventions e.g. OSPAR Convention, Helsinki Convention, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention, EU Neighbourhood Policy, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), SDGs, and UNCLOS.

2. Designing and providing support for monitoring requirements for the implementation of the 8th EAP and European Green Deal, including EEA's input to mid-term reviews of underlying policies, particularly the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Farm to Fork Strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and the various sector policies.

3. Contributing to the EEA State and Outlook of Europe's Environment Report 2025 (SOER2025), which will be prepared in 2022 and 2023 and will continue to focus on systemic challenges and solutions. This includes integrated assessments of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems under climate change and the various pressures and impacts.

These features will be embedded in annual action plans structured into the following 5 work packages:

1.3.1 Work package 1 – Monitoring, reporting and data assessments

In accordance with the environmental acquis, the ETC will be expected to support the monitoring and reporting of data under the relevant directives.

Beyond the data flows under the acquis, a key challenge for the EEA and ETC BE will be to provide timely, up-to-date information and innovative assessments to the mid-term reviews of EU policies and support the development of the SOER2025, which will be published in 2024.

1.3.1.1 WP1A – Common elements

This work package covers elements common to the monitoring and reporting, data handling and analysis under the relevant acquis:

- Freshwater legislation: Water Framework Directive (WFD), Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD), Bathing Water Directive (BWD), Environmental Quality Standards (EQS), Groundwater Directive (GWD), Floods Directive (FD), Drinking Water Directive (DWD), Water Re-use Regulation, Sewage Sludge Directive (SSD), Nitrates Directive (NiD) and EEA's annual WISE-SoE data call.

- Nature legislation: Natura 2000 and Emerald network, conservation status, trends and derogation (Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Invasive Alien Species Regulation) and EEA's dataflow on the Common Database of Nationally Designated Areas (CDDA).

- Marine legislation: Marine Strategy Framework directive (MSFD) and marine spatial planning directive (MSP).

- In close cooperation with EEA experts on data integration and digitalization and ETC DI, manage the data flows under the respective regular data reporting cycles. This includes data handling and quality assurance of reported data, representing the EEA in relevant working groups under the directives, communication of technical requirements, helpdesk function and member country support. The ETC will need to support a transition to optimization of workflows for increased data flow demands and support organizing the submission or harvesting of data.

- The ETC will need to be innovative in data and information sources, including Copernicus products (e.g. Copernicus Marine Environment Monitoring Service (CMEMS), Copernicus Land Monitoring Services (CLMS), and Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)), artificial intelligence, machine learning and advanced data harvesting, mining or automation. Whilst Copernicus data management is coordinated by the ETC DI, the ETC BE needs to facilitate the uptake and integration of Copernicus services products.

- Based on the knowledge and experience with the reporting data flows, support legislation review/impact assessment/fitness checks. Given the new knowledge needs under the European Green Deal, help to improve the scope and policy relevance of information collected on a range of environmental directives, framework directives and regulations.

- Support the EEA in streamlining environmental reporting across nature, freshwater and marine legislation, including technical alignment and comparison of reporting and statuses under the environmental directives, and other related environmental domains such as climate change and maritime policies.

- Support the EEA to integrate data and information into regular cross-cutting and integrated EEA assessments such as the State of Environment reports, cross-cutting ecosystem condition assessments, and monitoring framework to assess progress on key policy initiatives such as restoration under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

- Based on regular data flows and other data acquisition (Copernicus, sector statistics (WP3B)), support the delivery of policy-relevant indicators (see www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators) in the biodiversity, marine and freshwater domains at European and global levels.

- Support the EEA in designing and implementing integrated data and map viewers in connection with EEA platforms (e.g. WISE-Marine, WISE-Freshwater, BISE, FISE) across the reporting obligations of EU nature, freshwater and marine policies.

1.3.1.2   WP1B – Reporting flows under the nature directives and IAS regulation

This work package concerns support to the implementation of the nature directives and their reporting dataflows (Natura 2000, conservation status, derogations and invasive alien species). Specific thematic assessment work (including thematic quality assurance and statistics) includes:

- Conduct EU assessments of conservation status of habitats and species under the Birds (Art. 12) and Habitats (Art. 17) Directives. Analyse the national state and trends of individual species and habitats and their conservation status under existing community legislation.

- Maintain (including access to historical data) and assist the modernisation of the Natura 2000 databases, maintain and update related statistics, maps and tools (including viewers) following the Union Lists adoption. Update the Natura 2000 reference portal including key reference material.

- Maintain and upgrade the CDDA data flow and links with other directive data flows. Further develop the CDDA data flows towards e.g. other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), global requirements, and alignment with the Natura 2000 data flows. For all protected areas, support with development of map viewers.

- Support developing further a detailed knowledge on species, habitats and sites and their classifications as maintained in the EUNIS[10] knowledge base, based on crosswalks between different legal and institutional instruments.

- Assess results of past reporting cycles to deepen the use of knowledge on status, pressures and measures beyond the recent assessments, including the support to new reporting on e.g. pressures, measures or management effectiveness.

1.3.1.3 WP1C – Reporting flows under freshwater policies

This work package will consist of the following clusters of tasks:

- Support the data reporting flows under the freshwater policies and specifically the WFD, UWWTD, BWD, EQS, GWD, FD, DWD, water re-use Regulation, SSD and NiD to the level to which the EEA is obligated. Specifically, UWWTD work will be undertaken closely with EEA experts on EPRTR/EU Registry reporting and ETC HE.

- Support the EEA's input to the Working Groups (WG) established under the freshwater policies (e.g. WG Data and Information Sharing (DIS), WG Chemicals, WG Ecostat), some of which EEA co-chairs together with the European Commission and Member States.

- Support analyses of statuses of and pressures and measures on freshwater, specifically in connection with ecological, chemical and quantitative status of rivers, lakes, groundwater and transitional or coastal waters.

- Support the EEA in implementing its annual WISE-SoE data calls, which is a voluntary data call on water emissions, biological data, water quantity, water quality and related spatial data (WISE-1, WISE-2, WISE-3, WISE-5 and WISE-6), and publish the resulting database (WaterBase).

1.3.1.4 WP1D – Reporting flows under marine and maritime policies

This work package will consist of the following clusters of tasks:

- Support the data reporting flows under the marine and maritime policies, and particularly the MSFD.

- Support the EEA's input to the Working Groups (WG) established under the marine policies (e.g. WG DIKE, WG GES, WG POMESA, TG Data), some of which EEA co-chairs together with the European Commission and Member States.

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[10] https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/eunis

- Support analyses of status, pressures and measures on the marine environment, coastal areas and land-sea interactions through indicators and integrated assessments.

1.3.2 Work package 2 – Protection and Restoration of Ecosystems

The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 calls for putting biodiversity on the path of recovery. The two main objectives of the strategy are therefore, on the one hand, the protection and, on the other, the restoration of nature. Support to both elements is reflected in the following work packages.

1.3.2.1 WP2A – Protected areas on land and at sea

This work package is intended to monitor progress and assess effectiveness of protection in order to support the goal of improving and widening the EU network of protected areas and ensuring effective management of the protected sites. This includes developments on OECMs and key biodiversity areas, and different protected area developments under Natura 2000/Emerald, CDDA, and the MSFD directive at EU level, and CBD, SDGs and ocean governance at global level. The data management of Natura 2000/Emerald and CDDA data will build on WP1, whereas assessments and analyses developed under this WP will need to be fit and relevant for use in WP3 and WP5.

This work package will consist of the following tasks:

- To track progress of designation and effectiveness of protection and conservation objectives, calculate spatial coverage of protected areas on land and at sea in the EU and Eionet countries at various reporting units. This will be based on the databases on protected areas maintained and updated in WP1, and will include both Natura 2000 (incl. the Natura 2000 barometer for land and sea), Emerald and nationally protected areas data (CDDA), at different geographical levels (from EU to regional to local).

- Develop the above calculation.

- Support the strengthening of ecological coherence and connectivity to solve gaps in the current network (e.g. in different countries). The network design has to include analyses of transboundary protected areas in Europe, functionality of specific groups of species and their respective habitats (e.g. pollinators, mammals, birds), and both rare and vulnerable, and essential fish habitats for e.g. commercially exploited fish, related to WP3.

- Support the assessment of management effectiveness including, but not limited to, the following elements: a) formulate criteria and guidance for identifying and designating additional areas, b) definition of protection levels (e.g. strict protection), c) linked with WP1, establishing policy processes and reporting flows on management effectiveness.

- Analyse the role of protected areas in different ecosystems including urban protected areas in greening urban spaces.

- Based on detailed knowledge on species and habitats and their taxonomic classifications as maintained in EUNIS (https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/eunis), help developing

spatially explicit habitat mapping incl. broad habitat types as used under freshwater and marine legislation.

- Provide support to the assessment of coherence and sufficiency of Natura 2000 and to the Union List adoption process across terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats, taking into account specific analyses needed under marine legislation.

1.3.2.2 WP2B – Ecosystem condition and restoration

Assessing ecosystem condition, pressures and impact in an integrated way will support the tracking of progress under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, support the EU restoration plan as well as underpin the ambition of a coherent Trans-European Nature Network. It will require summary assessments of both formally reported status assessments and assessments of past and future trends, together with integrated spatial assessments and socio-economic analyses. This work package will consist of the following tasks:

- Assess pressures and impacts on terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems and ecosystem services from a wide range of socio-economic activities, including assessment of cumulative/combined pressures and impacts on e.g. hydro-morphology, marine litter.

- Use results from modelling, outlooks and scenarios to assess the multiple relationships between drivers, pressures and impacts.

- Support the monitoring framework under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and a new European biodiversity governance with a set of indicators across water, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, building on indicators as developed under WP1.

- Support the restoration of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems, specifically in view of identifying restoration needs, measures and the development of the EU restoration plan, including a legally binding proposal to be put forward by end of 2021.

- With respect to the above assessments, maximise use of existing data and spatial analysis techniques using Copernicus information (e.g. https://land.copernicus.eu/) and other relevant data sources.

1.3.3 Work package 3 – Sectors, systems and sustainability challenges

The European Green Deal calls for integrated, systemic and coherent solutions across ecosystems, economic sectors, e.g. agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, and socio-economic systems, e.g. food, housing or mobility to respond to the sustainability challenges that impact ecosystems and lead to biodiversity loss, such as pollution and climate change. This includes the following work packages:

1.3.3.1 WP3A – Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and the food system

The contribution of the ETC BE will focus specifically on agriculture, forest, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as the food system and their effects on biodiversity and ecosystem condition. In particular, this work package will contribute to the response to the Farm to Fork Strategy, and will need to take into account sector-specific policies which govern their respective management including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and EU Forest Strategy.

This work package consists of the following tasks:

- Develop assessments of sustainable management practices and their effects on environment and ecosystems, regarding agriculture and forestry.

- In support to EEA cross-cutting and integrated projects and in cooperation with other ETCs as needed, support the integrated assessment of the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors within a food system approach, i.e. assessing sustainability from production to consumption.

- Support the EEA in its contributions to the biodiversity-related reporting and assessment frameworks being established under the CAP or other working agreements with DG AGRI and other EC services like the agri-environmental indicators (see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/agriculture/agri-environmental-indicators), SEBI (see WP1) or CAP impact indicators.

- In collaboration with ETC CA, CM and DI, support assessments of sustainability and impacts on ecosystems and their services, including co-benefits and trade-offs with other policy domains, which arise from the LULUCF-regulation, as well as data integration based on land and soil data respectively.

1.3.3.2   WP3B – Economics of biodiversity and ecosystems

Economy and society are highly dependent on ecosystems and the biodiversity that they contain, because they generate essential ecosystem services and have an intrinsic value playing a fundamental role in human welfare. The benefits of certain services such as the supply of raw materials, energy or food have long been recognised. However, the benefits brought by most cultural and regulation services that are not traded on markets or considered by the accounting system need more attention within decision making. This work package includes the following:

- Support EEA in assessing the economic impacts of socio-economic activities on biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Support EEA in assessing the socio-economic aspects of restoration and ecosystem-based management. Support EEA's work on sustainable finance, ecological impacts and co-benefits of financing, tariffs and subsidies. E.g. assessments could demonstrate how green, nature-based solutions are interesting investment options.

- Assist in further developing the methodologies for natural capital accounting (including geospatial analysis) to support and connect macro-economic and corporate accounting.

- In support of the EEA contribution to the sustainable finance initiative, contribute to the development of technical screening criteria for investment into sustainable sector activities.

1.3.3.3   WP3C – Ecosystems under climate change

Terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems are under threat from climate change. Climate change has important implications for the baseline condition of health ecosystems and their biodiversity. The ETC will work in close collaboration with EEA climate experts and ETCs CM and CA. Using scenarios, modelling and outlooks, this work package will consist of the following tasks:

- Assess the drivers, pressures, impacts and vulnerability of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems under climate change. This includes assessments on water resources, scarcity and droughts.

- Support the development of the knowledge base for implementing ecosystem-based management. In view of climate change mitigation and adaptation, the concept of ecosystem-based management needs to be applied both to key sectors and by bioclimatic regions.

- Develop knowledge on trade-offs and synergies between climate change mitigation and adaptation measures with biodiversity and ecosystems along systemic dimensions, e.g. bioenergy, non-conventional water resources and the water/energy nexus.

1.3.3.4 WP3D – Pollution, chemicals, and pressures from sectors

This work package aims at supporting the Zero Pollution Action Plan with regard to pollution and chemicals impacting ecosystems condition and their biodiversity, to collect and analyse data on pressures stemming from sectors and helping to work on pollution-related restoration targets under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (WP3A). The ETC will work in close collaboration with EEA health experts and the ETC HE.

This work package will consist of the following tasks:

- Support data reporting, legislation review/impact assessment/fitness check and deliver up-to-date information on nature, marine, and freshwater-related directives (UWWTD, SSD, NiD, National Emissions Ceiling Directive, BWD) in relation to pollution and chemicals and their impacts on ecosystem condition. This will prominently include emissions to water, pesticides, mixtures and emerging contaminants/risks such as Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR).

- Support the monitoring framework of the Zero Pollution Action Plan with regard to water, marine and terrestrial (soil) pollution, and chemicals, including data, information and indicators on pollution and nutrients (e.g. pesticides, nutrient accounts, marine litter and microplastics).

- Collection and analysis of spatially-explicit data on pressures from sectors (agriculture, forestry, maritime activities), including on combined pressures and impacts.

- Support the integrated assessment of the impact of pollution and chemicals on ecosystem condition. This includes analysis of combined drivers and pressures, in relation with other sectoral developments (e.g. industry, tourism).

1.3.4 Work package 4 – Information systems

This work package aims to support the development of information systems on biodiversity, marine, water and forests (BISE, WISE-Marine, WISE-Freshwater, FISE) that provide access to integrated data, information and knowledge. This will need to be undertaken in close cooperation and coordination with the Commission's Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity (KCB), other information systems such as Climate-

ADAPT, and key data providers such as Copernicus services. The information systems are the entry point and exchange platform on EEA's data and spatial analysis information with EEA's stakeholders.

This work package will consist of the following tasks:

- Help EEA to ensure thematic inter-operability between existing information systems hosted by the EEA (BISE, WISE-Freshwater, WISE-Marine, FISE, and Climate-ADAPT) into the KCB as established under the European Knowledge Community (EKC).

- Maintain and update WISE-Marine as the European entry point to marine information.

- Support WISE-Freshwater with regard to freshwater information, indicators and data and map visualization tools.

- Maintain and update the Biodiversity Information Systems (BISE) and support the Knowledge Center for Biodiversity, operating as part of the European knowledge Community (EKC).

- Upgrading the EUNIS web application integrated into BISE for integrated ecosystem analysis using species habitat and site information from the EUNIS database.

- Support the development of FISE with maintenance, updates and upgrades as entry point for information on forest ecosystems and agroforestry. Integrate relevant elements in inter-operability between FISE and BISE.

- Support the ecosystem-related contents of the Land Information System based on the Copernicus land monitoring service portal.

- In close cooperation with ETC DI, work on data analysis and artificial intelligence/machine learning to provide improved information services.

1.3.5   Work package 5 – ETC management, networking and outreach

This work package includes the activities and tasks necessary for the management of the ETC, outreach and capacity building. The work package includes the following tasks:

ETC Management

- ETC consortium designates a manager who is the primary contact in the ETC for the EEA, NFPs from member countries and other relevant organizations.

The manager:

- Represents the interests of those planning and delivering ETC tasks across the consortium. They assume overall accountability for ETC deliverables and services provided, including adherence to EEA corporate standards.

- Sets up and maintains procedures for quality assurance undertaken with reference to EEA standards, including documentation and language-checking of all its deliverables.

- Ensures the ETC is in compliance with legal requirements, such as in relation to data protection.

- Reports to EEA on overall progress of ETC activities against the objectives of the annual action and communication plans as well as on risks.

- Ensures that structured work plans are prepared in sufficient time by project managers within the consortia.

- Maintains oversight on state of preparation of deliverables, including critical dependencies leading to potential delays, where needed escalating needs for preventative measures or corrective actions.

- Manages change request process in relation to deliverables agreed by ETC and EEA.

- Maintains financial records in accordance with requirements.

- May be supported by core management team that may include a deputy and administrative manager.

ETC Networking and Outreach

Under the supervision, guidance, and agreement of EEA, the ETC shall support the modernisation of Eionet and maintain close links with the Eionet (EEA member countries and other ETCs) as well as support dissemination of EEA and ETC products. Main tasks are to:

- Support EEA in organizing Eionet workshops and seminars to discuss the outcomes of work and plan future activities with the member countries; build upon the discussion results of relevant Eionet groups (i.e. National Reference Centres).

- Support EEA in dialogue with countries to identify barriers to optimally performing their tasks (e.g. monitoring and reporting capacities, flows of data, knowledge gaps, indicator development, responsiveness), developing proposals for improvements to solve any issues that emerge.

- Engage in communication efforts with the countries, including networking and country visits within defined processes.

- Contribute to Eionet modernisation initiatives.

- Provide training and capacity building in the countries in response to identified and agreed priorities and needs, including where relevant on solutions to support meeting EU policy targets.

- Engage actively in co-operation with other ETCs to strengthen the coherence of data and information, based on priorities of EEA work programme.

- Undertake publishing and outreach, including through social media, in alignment with EEA communication framework and based on agreed annual priorities.

- Maintain and regularly update the consortium website (including brief description of ETC consortia, list of members of the consortia, overview of work plans) as well as an inventory and access point to ETC knowledge products (indicating any relation between the ETC product and supported EEA products).

- Make use of ETC graphical design elements and guidance on products.

- Where possible, publish deliverables and results of ETC work, accepted by EEA, in open access repositories with a public copyright license, such as creative commons.

1.4   General guidance on the organisation of European Topic Centres

The present and earlier ETCs are consortia, typically comprised of government organisations, private non-profit organisations, and commercial firms. Based upon EEA experience some general guidance can be given for a successful ETC.

The ETC shall comprise one coordinating organisation and several partners. The organisation and functioning of this grouping shall be documented in a consortium agreement. The following points shall be considered when establishing the consortium:

- EEA member country coverage is 32 countries. The consortium should be constructed in a way that gives access to partners with experience in EU and regional level work, international networks etc. without necessarily representing all EEA member countries.
- It is important that some leadership roles within the consortium are from organisations which either have experience in participating in Eionet or in working closely with and supporting EU Institutions and that their organisations are actively engaged in the policy area. The number of partners shall be balanced against the need to cover the required field of expertise and to ensure good geographical coverage.
- The consortium needs the following administrative functions:
    - a coordinator (ETC manager), having appropriate management and networking capabilities;
    - administrative support, able to work in English and organise European meetings and consultations; and,
    - accounting support, in order to ensure proper financial management and reporting.
- Effective practice has been that at least the manager and some of a designated core team work for the ETC 100%, with a group of key experts, working mainly for the ETC (i.e.>50%) supported by a broader group of experts available to provide specific expertise or work on specific tasks.

1.5   Mandatory requirements

In order to deliver high quality products and services, ETCs shall comply with the following mandatory requirements:

1.5.1   General requirements

- The ETC shall report to the EEA, the primary contact points being the ETC manager and the assigned EEA lead for the ETC.
- The ETC coordinator shall put in place and maintain an agreed internal ETC management structure that ensures delivery of outputs and services requested as well as efficient communication and coordination with all partners.
- The ETC shall be structured in a way which ensures proper linkages with other ETCs in order to respond to cross-sectoral and cross-thematic cooperation and integration needs and to avoid duplication or disintegration of tasks across partners.

- The ETC needs to be structured in a way to ensure flexibility to be able to adapt to changing needs and to be able to provide experts for specific projects.
- The ETC needs the capability to network and communicate with stakeholders in national or regional environmental administrations, European wide environmental networks, and international organisations, including regional cooperation bodies and conferences. The ETC needs to have proven links to wider European knowledge and expertise.
- The working language of the FPA and SAs is English. More particularly, the ETC is expected to deliver management documents and results ready for use or publication in English.
- ETC management must have in place procedures for quality assurance undertaken with reference to EEA standards, including documentation and language-checking of its deliverables.
- Subject to guidance from the EEA, the ETC coordinator shall ensure coherence and integration of ETC work with the work carried out by the EEA.
- ETCs shall, unless otherwise agreed with the EEA, publish the results of ETC work, accepted by EEA, in open access repositories with a public copyright license, such as creative commons.
- As a contribution to the overall EEA continuous improvement framework, ETC management shall, support EEA by identifying opportunities for innovation and improvements in specific working areas and in agreement with EEA, support their implementation.
- The EEA operates an environmental management system framed around minimizing its environmental footprint and is EMAS certified[11]. EEA offsets travel related greenhouse gas emissions, procures green energy and aims to reduce its electricity consumption as well as being active in waste minimisation. The environmental performance of contractors and partners is nested within EEA's environmental performance, which is part of the overall EEA continuous improvement framework. Thus, it is a requirement that the ETC has, or develops specific environmental policies and can document and report on steps taken to reduce environmental impact during the life of the FPA.

1.5.2   Technical and scientific expertise requirements

The consortium is expected to have demonstrated excellent technical and scientific knowledge, expertise and experience to be able to fulfil the tasks set out in the work packages mentioned in 1.3 above and to provide the necessary science-policy support as follows:

- Knowledge and understanding of relevant international, EU and national policy implementation regarding nature and biodiversity, such as Habitats, Birds, Water Framework, Marine Strategy and Marine Spatial Planning Directives, including further specific directives and regulations e.g. on water quality (water industry directives) or invasive alien species.

- Experience in supporting the data monitoring and reporting under the above policies and directives.

- Knowledge of and networks with regional conventions (e.g. regional seas, alpine) and regional processes (e.g. Biogeographical process under the Habitats Directive).

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[11] https://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/emas

- Knowledge of the ecology and taxonomy of European species (incl. e.g. bird species) and habitats, e.g. the EEA's EUNIS habitats classification, for the ecological assessments and reporting processes under several directives. Knowledge of the EU Red List of Habitats would be an asset.

- Knowledge of data acquisition and mining, handling and processing methods ensuring timely delivery of quality-assured reported data, including analytical skills regarding statistical and geo-spatial analysis of environmental data. This includes a general requirement to ensure alignment with EEA corporate standards, in particular use the EEA common workspace as central infrastructure for data management and data analytics and to manage technical documentation in a central collaborative environment in accordance with EEA data steward and data custodian roles.

- Knowledge and experience in spatial data handling and analysis, based on requirements laid down by the INSPIRE Directive (2007/2/EC) and its implementing rules as well as expertise in Copernicus services and uptake of their products. This includes the requirement to secure transparent use of approved EEA reference data sets from the EEA spatial data infrastructure and centralised data cubes applications.

- For policy-relevant thematic assessment work, knowledge of biodiversity and ecosystem-related concepts and policy tools, such as ecosystem-based management, green and blue infrastructure, ecosystem service assessments and natural capital accounting.

- Expertise and proven experience in conducting integrated assessments along the DPSIR (Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response) cause-effect conceptual chain, both within and across different policy areas, including the use of forward-looking analyses, such as outlooks and scenarios.

- Experience in indicator development, maintenance and updating, as well as analysing trends in support of policy (including distance to target analysis).

- Experience in socio-economic analysis specifically to engage in the assessment of impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity and sustainable management practices.

- Knowledge of and experience in analyzing chemicals and pollution impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems.

- Experience and knowledge of trade-offs and synergies between climate change and biodiversity and ecosystems.

- Experience and knowledge of food system analysis value-chains in sustainable production and consumption, and relevant sectoral expertise.

- Experience in preparing, facilitating and documenting workshops and meetings including increasing use of advanced communication techniques for participatory processes and facilitation.

2 Evaluation of the proposals

2.1 Participation in the award procedure

2.1.1 Eligibility

Consortia consisting of at least two partners (natural/legal persons, private or public), these partners being established in different EEA member countries[12], are eligible to submit proposals, subject to 2.1.2 and 2.2.1 below. Consortia must identify one of their partners as the coordinator who will interface with the EEA.

Entities which do not have legal personality under the applicable national law of one of the EEA member countries are also eligible under the same conditions, provided that their representatives have and can prove their capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and assume financial liability.

Partners not established in one of the EEA member countries referred to above may exceptionally participate in a consortium, provided that the other eligibility requirement is respected, and they complied with exclusion and selection criteria listed under sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below. A maximum of two partners from non-EEA member countries may be involved in a consortium submitting a proposal under this call for proposals.

With a view to assess the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria, the consortium's coordinator is required to submit a proposal submission form (see annex 1) duly filled out, dated and signed.

2.1.2 Ne bis in Idem

No partner may participate **in more than one** consortium aiming at the FPA **concerning this ETC**, i.e. the ETC on Biodiversity and Ecosystems. Similarly, it is prohibited for proposed staff to sign letters of intent to participate in more than one consortium aiming at the FPA concerning the ETC on Biodiversity and Ecosystems. Disregard of these rules will lead to exclusion of all consortia concerned.

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[12] i.e. the 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.

2.2 Criteria

2.2.1 Exclusion criteria

Apart from the situations under 2.1.2, consortia shall be excluded from participation in this procedure if any of its partners is in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136 and 141 of the Financial Rules applicable to the general budget of the European Union[13].

When submitting their application, each partner of the consortium (including any subcontractor) must provide a declaration on their honour in accordance with the form attached as annex 2, duly signed and dated, stating that they are not in any of the situations specified in the above-mentioned provisions.

The initial verification of non-exclusion of partners will be done based on the submitted declarations and consultation of the European Union's Early Detection and Exclusion System. The partners of the consortium with whom the EEA will enter into an FPA will be required, prior to the signature of the agreement, to provide the evidence specified in the penultimate paragraph of the declaration of honour mentioned above (see paragraph VI of annex 2).

2.2.2 Selection criteria

The selection criteria will be assessed as a first step by the evaluation committee. Failure to comply with these criteria will result in the proposal not being evaluated further by the evaluation committee. Applicants may be asked to provide additional proof, or to clarify the supporting documents, related to the selection criteria within a specific time frame.

2.2.2.1 Legal capacity

o **Requirement:**

Any consortium is required to prove that all its members are authorised to perform the FPA under national law.

o **Evidence to be provided:**

Each consortium partner shall submit a legal entity form (see annex 3 for the link to the form and instructions) dully filled out and signed, accompanied by either a copy of inscription in a trade register and/or VAT register, or a sworn declaration, or a certificate, or membership of a specific organisation, or express authorisation, or any other statutory document allowing verification of the partner's legal status.

2.2.2.2 Economic and financial capacity

o **Requirements:**

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[13] Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18.7.2018, OJEU L 193/1 of 30.7.2018.

- The consortium must be in a stable financial position and have the economic and financial capacity to perform the FPA.

- In accordance with Article 190 of the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the European Union, implementation of the FPA shall involve co-financing from the consortium.

o **Evidence to be provided:**
- The partner assuming the role of coordinator of the consortium shall provide a financial identification form (see annex 4 for link to the form and instructions) duly filled out and signed.

- Each consortium partner shall provide a duly completed and signed simplified Financial Statement in accordance with the template provided as annex 6;

- For private partners: profit and loss accounts, balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts were closed (and audit reports by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last available financial year[14]);

- Letters of intent of all consortium partners to participate and provide co-financing up to at least 10% of the total eligible cost of the jointly agreed annual action plans[15];

2.2.2.3 Technical and professional capacity

o **Requirements:**

1. Relevant experience in terms of human resources;
2. Relevant experience in the provision of similar services;
3. Application of adequate quality standard;
4. Application of environmental management measures.

o **Evidence to be provided:**

1. Human resources:

a) CVs detailing the educational and professional qualifications of the partner's managerial staff as well as those of the staff designated to perform the tasks listed under section 1.3, indicating language skills and the required professional experience as follows:

- Managerial staff: Minimum 3 CVs, each documenting a minimum of 10 years' relevant experience
- Experts responsible for performing the tasks:

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[14] Having regard to Article 196(1)(d) FR and the fact that all consortium partners will assume joint and several liability in accordance with the FPA, such audit reports are not required if *consortia* include any public bodies.

[15] The 10%-rule of minimum co-financing is applied towards the ETC as a whole. To what extent partners contribute to this co-financing is an internal ETC matter.

- Minimum 12 CVs of senior experts, each documenting at least 8 years' relevant experience
- Minimum 20 CVs of Junior experts, each documenting at least 3 years' relevant experience

b) Signed letters of intent of:

- the ETC Manager and core staff of the consortium's coordinator; as well as

- all the key experts[16] of each consortium partner

proving that the consortium as a whole has sufficient technical, scientific and management (including financial) experience to assume the role of an ETC;

2. Past experience:

   A list and brief account of work considered relevant and carried out by the partners forming the consortium in the past five years, with the sums, dates and recipients (public or private);

3. Quality standards:

   For each consortium partner, proof and description of their quality assurance and quality control systems;

4. Environmental management measures:

   For each consortium partner, proof and description of their environmental policy specifying the status of implementation.

2.2.3 Award criteria

The Framework Partnership Agreement will be concluded with the consortium whose proposal guarantees best that the EEA requirements as described above are met. Proposals will be evaluated based on the award criteria and allocation of points as outlined below, producing a maximum total score of 100 points:

No	Award criteria	Max. points
1	General understanding Demonstrated knowledge of:	20

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[16] i.e. experts from the partners in the consortium who would be entrusted with the performance of activities in the main work areas should anticipate allocating between 50 to 75% of their time for that purpose.

	• EEA's role in supporting policy implementation and developing knowledge to support Europe's sustainability objectives. • the stakeholders that the EEA and the Eionet are supporting and cooperating with within the topic area. • the tasks requested across all work packages, the respective roles of data, indicators and assessment/information products and systems in delivering these, and the technical methodologies and frameworks necessary for their development. • how the different dimensions of the topic area are interconnected, and how they relate to thematic and cross-cutting issues outside the topic area of this ETC. • how different dimensions of the topic area differ or connect across global, EU, national, and sub-national scales. • EU environment and climate policy initiatives and objectives in the topic area, as well as impacts and variability of their implementation in countries.	
2	**Data and information systems** Demonstrated technical and thematic knowledge of European data and information reporting requirements relevant to the topic area and including INSPIRE requirements where relevant. Knowledge of other relevant official and non-official data sources, such as statistics, expert surveys, research, earth observation (Copernicus) and citizen science, and the different processing requirements associated with these. Experience and expertise in supporting the design, quality control and evaluation, analytics, and content management of data and information systems, including proposals for internal quality control procedures to support data product development and assessment activities. Demonstrated experience working with expert communities that employ different data flow approaches. Provision of support to users through data helpdesk type functions. Demonstrated experience applying appropriate methods for data analysis including geospatial analysis and modelling to support assessments, summarising complex data and information, use of data near-casting techniques etc to inform policy makers and other stakeholders.	20
3	**Assessments** Demonstrated experience and expertise in:	20

		• supporting the preparation, production, and management of assessment knowledge products (i.e. reports, policy briefings, indicators, web-based products, etc) in the specific topic areas to be addressed by the ETC.	
		• preparing and contributing to cross-thematic and cross-sectoral assessments, including preparation of integrated assessments that capture dimensions of policy integration, socio-economic dependencies and links across relevant economic production systems and sectors.	
		• developing thematic assessments that combine new/ innovative data sources with traditional sources of data.	
4	**Policy support**	Demonstrated experience and expertise in providing knowledge to inform the development and implementation of local, national, EU and relevant international policy processes. Experience in ex-ante and ex-post analysis of the effectiveness of strategies and policies in the topic area and understanding of the links with other policies in other relevant topic areas.	15
5	**Cooperation and networking**	• Sound and innovative approaches to cooperating, sharing knowledge and supporting Eionet member organisations in member countries. • Proposals for approaches and opportunities for collaborating with other ETCs on joint activities and how these will add value to the work of this ETC. • Experience and expertise in accessing and working together with relevant expert networks and institutes external to the Eionet, including relevant communities of practice and the scientific community.	15
6	**Consortium management**	• Sound arrangements for implementing transparent, effective, and quality-assured management of the ETC consortium, including financial management. • Sound approach to managing different thematic and regional dimensions of the topic area individually and as a coherent whole. • Adequate level of manpower, resources and output corresponding to the indicative budget. • Arrangements to allow the consortium to respond to specific requests at short notice.	10

Total	100

Proposals which do not obtain at least 50% of the maximum score for each award criterion and at least 70% of the overall score for all criteria, will be deemed of insufficient quality and therefore not considered for the award of the FPA.

Should proposals obtain the same final score and tie for first place, the wining proposal will be decided based on the highest score achieved for award criterion No 1 (general understanding of the tasks), and if these scores are equal, on the highest score achieved for award criterion No 3 (assessment). If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on the highest score achieved for award criterion No 6 (ETC management), then the remaining award criteria taken in numerical order.

3 Submission of proposals and additional information

3.1 Submission of proposals

Proposals must be submitted through the electronic submission system ETHICS at European Environment Agency (the Contracting authority page), in one of the official languages of the European Union, preferably in English (supporting evidence does not need to be translated). Proposals submitted in any other way (e.g. by e-mail or mail) will be disregarded.

Make sure you submit your proposal on time: the time limit for submission of proposals is **Thursday 29 April 2021 at 14:00** (UTC + 1). You are advised to start completing your proposal early. To avoid any complications with regard to late receipt/non-receipt of proposals within the deadline, please ensure that you submit your proposal several hours before the deadline. A proposal received after the deadline indicated in the call for proposal documents will be rejected.

For detailed instructions on how to submit a proposal, please consult ETHICS for economic operators (see section 7 for English).

The submission report provided by ETHICS with the official date and time of receipt of the submission (timestamp) constitutes proof of compliance with the time limit of proposals.

In case of technical problems, please contact the ETHICS Technical support (button available on the main page of the platform).

3.2 Legal effects of the call for proposals

This call for proposals is in no way binding on the EEA. The EEA's contractual obligation commences only when the FPA with the successful consortium is signed by both parties. Up to the signature of the FPA, the EEA may cancel the award procedure without applicants being entitled to claim any compensation. Any such decision must be substantiated, and applicants notified.

The period of validity of the proposal, during which the consortium partners may not modify the terms of their proposals in any respect, is 6 months from the deadline for the submission of proposals.

Submitting a proposal implies acceptance by the consortium of all terms and conditions of the standard FPA and its Annexes, attached as annex 5 to these terms of reference, in particular those on performance of the agreement, confidentiality, eligible costs, justification of costs, cost statements, payments, checks and audits, and processing of personal data. Any limitation, amendment, or denial of the terms of the agreement will lead to the automatic exclusion from the award procedure. The submitted proposal is binding on the consortium to whom the agreement is awarded for the duration of the FPA.

3.3 Contacts during the award procedure

Contacts between the EEA and interested applicants (consortia/partners) are prohibited throughout the award procedure save in exceptional circumstances and under the following conditions only:

3.3.1 Submission phase (before the time limit for submission of proposals)

Upon request, the EEA may provide additional information solely for the purpose of clarifying the call for proposals documents.

Any request for additional information must be made in writing only through the above-mentioned ETHICS website in the "Communication" tab by clicking "Send question". The EEA is not bound to reply to requests for additional information received less than 6 working days before the time limit for submission of proposals.

The EEA may, on its own initiative, inform interested parties of any error, inaccuracy, omission or any other type of clerical error in the context of the call for proposals documents. Any additional information will be published on the above-mentioned ETHICS website. The website will be updated regularly, and it is the applicants' responsibility to check for updates and notifications during the submission period.

3.3.2 Opening of proposals

Proposals will be opened in public, remotely, at the time and place indicated in paragraph 3.4 below. A maximum of one representative per applicant may attend the remote opening session. For organisational

reasons, applicants are requested to inform the EEA in advance (at least 2 working days before the date of the opening session) by e-mail to procurement@eea.europa.eu.

The public part of the opening session will be strictly limited to the following aspects:

- Verification that each proposal has been submitted in accordance with the submission requirements of this call for proposals;
- Announcement of the proposals received: the names of the consortium partners will be announced.

Applicants not present at the opening session may be informed of the outcome of the process by visiting the EEA website (https://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/tenders).

3.3.3 Evaluation phase (after opening of the proposals)

Except in duly justified cases, applicants who have failed to submit evidence or to make statements as required in the call for proposals documents, shall be contacted by the EEA to provide the missing information or clarify supporting documents.

The EEA may correct obvious clerical errors in the proposal after confirmation of the correction by the applicant.

Such information, clarification or correction shall not substantially alter the proposal.

3.3.4 Award phase

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the award procedure by e-mail. The notification will be sent to the e-mail address of the consortium's coordinator provided in the proposal submission form. The same e-mail address will be used by the EEA for all other communications with the applicant. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide a valid e-mail address and check it regularly.

3.4 Timetable

	Date	Comments
Call for proposals launch date	1 February 2021	On the EEA website
Last date for submission of clarifications to which the EEA is bound to reply	23 April 2021	
Time limit for submission of proposals	29 April 2021	At 14:00 (UTC+1)
Opening session	3 May 2021	At 10:00 (UTC+1)

Evaluation of proposals	From 5 May to 28 May 2021	Estimated
Designation by the EEA Management Board of the successful consortium	17 June 2021	Estimated
Award decision and notification of evaluation results	24 June 2021	Estimated
Framework partnership agreement signature	30 September 2021	Estimated
Approval of the annual action plan for the 1st specific grant agreement	15 November 2021	At the latest
Signature and implementation of the 1st specific agreement	January 2022	

3.5 Protection of personal data

Processing replies to this call for proposals will involve the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV). Such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725[17] on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, applicants' replies to the questions and any personal data requested are required to evaluate their proposal in accordance with the specifications of the call for proposals and will be processed solely for that purposes by the EEA. Under Regulation (EU) 2018/1725, applicants are entitled to obtain access to their personal data on request and to rectify any such data that is inaccurate or incomplete. Further details concerning the processing of personal data can be found in the privacy statement available on the EEA website: https://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/tenders.

Applicants have the right of recourse at any time to the European Data Protection Supervisor (https://edps.europa.eu; edps@edps.europa.eu) for matters relating to the processing of their personal data by the EEA.

Applicants' personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES), if they are in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation. For more information, see the privacy statement at privacy_statement_edes_en.pdf (europa.eu).

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[17] OJEU L 295 of 21.11.2018, p. 39-98.

3.6   Means of redress

Applicants may submit any observations concerning the award procedure to the EEA using the e-mail address procurement@eea.europa.eu. If applicants believe that there is maladministration, they may lodge a complaint to the European Ombudsman within two years of the date from which they become aware of the facts which form the basis for the complaint (see https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu; eo@ombudsman.europa.eu).

Within two months of notification of the outcome of the procedure (award decision), applicants may launch an action for its annulment. Any request applicants may have and any reply from the EEA, or any complaint for maladministration, will have neither the purpose nor the effect of suspending the time limit for launching an action for annulment nor open a new period for launching an action for annulment. The body responsible for hearing annulment procedures is the General Court of the European Union (https://curia.europa.eu; generalcourt.registry@curia.europa.eu).

3.7   Annexes

Annex 1 – Proposal submission form

Annex 2 – Declaration on exclusion criteria

Annex 3 – Legal entity form

Annex 4 – Financial Identification Form

Annex 5 – Draft Framework Partnership Agreement (including annexes)

Annex 6 – Simplified financial statement

Annex 7 – Power of attorney template

Annex 8 – Corporate standards

Annex 9 – List of abbreviations and acronyms

Annex 10 – Proposal executive summary template