



MANAGEMENT BOARD RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION EVALUATION OF EEA AND EIONET

The EEA Management Board 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).

The EEA Management Board welcomes the positive conclusions of the evaluation, which express a strong support to the EEA and Eionet network, not least that the EEA and Eionet fulfilled the main objectives set by the Founding Regulation, which continue to be relevant, as well as the recognition of the important EU value-added provided by the Agency, its effectiveness and efficiency.

While the Commission evaluation assessed the Founding Regulation to be fit-for-purpose, the EEA Management Board also notes that EEA activities have been developed across a wide range of new EU initiatives e.g. in relation to the governance of the energy union (and others).

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.

The Commission evaluation recognises the EEA/Eionet is a unique network of environment and climate expertise. Some functions of EEA/Eionet are thus entirely unique and not easily replicated. The EEA Management Board underlines that this strength of EEA/Eionet lies in the multiple actors in the creation of knowledge, including the members and cooperating countries (EU Member States, and non EU countries), the scientific community, and civil society; as well as the range of stakeholders that use the knowledge developed and provided by EEA/Eionet to assist in addressing strategic environmental challenges.

At the same time, the EEA Management Board underlines its commitment to ensure that lessons are learnt from the evaluation in order to lead further improvement processes where required. This would include, for example, integrating new technologies and processes into environmental policy-relevant knowledge or in expanding the involvement of stakeholders around assessments.

Against the background of this external ex-post evaluation of EEA/Eionet; in light of the proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027; and taking into account responses from the Eionet National Focal Points, the Scientific Committee and the EEA management; the EEA Management Board has reflected on the future of EEA and Eionet, and decided on the following forward-looking conclusions and recommendations.

Pan-European added-value of EEA/Eionet through knowledge creation to address key environmental challenges

The Commission's evaluation focuses on the added value of EEA/Eionet in supporting the development and implementation of policies at EU level, in particular activities on monitoring and data collection over indicators, assessments and communication.

While recognising that this scope is a consequence of the Better Regulation guidelines applied by the Commission for the evaluation of EEA and Eionet, the EEA Management Board underlines that the EEA/Eionet functions and activities:

- Affect a multitude of public and private stakeholders, which benefit from the EEA/Eionet work, including a wide range of EU bodies (e.g. diverse Commission services, the European Parliament and other decentralised agencies), as well as countries, cities, civil society and the general public;



- Involve cooperation with 39 Eionet countries across the continent of Europe in the Eionet network, helping to ensure environmental policies in other European countries are based on EU policies; and
- Lies in integrated investments across the monitoring-data-information-assessment-knowledge-communication (MDIAKC) chain, of which all elements are needed to inform decision makers, especially in those policy areas contributing most to underpinning environmental and climate change integrity, such as Circular Economy, Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Environment and health, and the future 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP).

The EEA Management Board recognises the importance of continuously adapting to the dynamic changing context. This involves the further integration of data into policy relevant knowledge, making best use of available ICT solutions including a further improvement and implementation of e-reporting and drawing out the benefits of Copernicus services for up-to-date information, indicators and assessments. The EEA Management Board commits to address the conclusions from the evaluation exercise as one of the key drivers for the EEA/Eionet strategy beyond 2020.

Modernisation of the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet)

The EEA Management Board supports the Commission's positive conclusion that *'the Eionet is a unique network of environment and climate expertise that provides essential expertise in many areas and contributes e.g. through the European Topic Centres to the efficiency of the EEA's work'*, and which also identifies *'margin for improvement in relation to the information on Eionet activities, the clarification of the role and better visibility of the added value of the various Eionet components and how these interact with the EEA and Commission services, notably in the area of reporting.'*

The EEA Management Board recognises the opportunity of reviewing the network, which lies at the core of the EEA/Eionet model, in light of the changing context in terms of emerging policy priorities and technologies. It also welcomes the joint interest expressed by the EEA management and the Eionet National Focal Points to engage in a collaborative modernisation exercise, with the goal of improving the value-added of EEA/Eionet to the developing policy agenda and knowledge needs.

The EEA Management Board will actively engage with the EEA and Eionet in a joint and progressive modernisation exercise, with the goal of improving the value-added of EEA/Eionet to the developing policy agenda and knowledge needs.

Organisational Governance

Management Board: The EEA Management Board recognises the Commission's conclusion that while the existing governance arrangements fulfilled their main functions and were perceived as broadly appropriate, the Board has not always played its role of strategic steer, including on resource prioritisation. With the aim of strengthening its oversight role, and increasing efficiency and effectiveness, the Board undertook an internal review in 2018. This resulted in a streamlining of Board and Bureau working methods and allowing increased focus for the Management Board on strategic items. The Board is committed to periodically review and improve its procedures as appropriate.

Scientific Committee: The EEA Management Board took note of the Commission evaluation being silent on the contribution of the Agency's Scientific Committee (SC) to the EEA and Eionet, underlines the relevance and value added of the SC's work to the EEA/Eionet knowledge creation, and assesses the SC to be well functioning.

EEA organisational management: The EEA Management Board supports the Commission's finding that the revision of the EEA internal organisational and management structure of 2018, ensures a



reinforcement of coordination between areas, and a substantial improvement in terms of knowledge integration.

Coherence and synergies in structural coordination between EEA and Commission Services

The Commission's evaluation concludes that good cooperation and synergies between the Environment and Climate Action Directorate Generals (DGs) of the European Commission and the EEA have been established in most policy areas. In relation to the structural coordination between EEA and Commission services, it identifies the further need of a single framework for the internal Commission discussions between different DGs on priorities for EEA support to EU environment and climate policy development, the benefit offered by a full participation of the policy-relevant Commission services in the Management Board, and the importance of coordination within the Environment Knowledge Community (EKC).

The EEA Management Board agrees to these conclusions. The Management Board identifies that structural coordination between the EEA and Commission services is an area for improvement, in particular in relation to engaging and agreeing on overall Commission priorities for EEA/Eionet, in light of increasing demands, diminishing resources, and increasing focus on sustainability aspects in EU policies.

The EEA Management Board recommends the EEA Executive Director and European Commission work closely together in the context of the Environment Knowledge Community of Commission Directorates-General, or any other mechanism deemed appropriate, to help ensure a clear articulation, prioritisation and distribution of responsibilities between knowledge providers.

Challenges of administrative burden and organisational inefficiencies resulting from the increasing practise of non-core funding from Commission services

The EEA Management Board supports the Commission's conclusion that EEA activities financed by different Commission DGs such as DG NEAR and DG GROW, outside of the Agency's EU subvention, are leading to duplication of administrative work and organisational inefficiencies, beyond the control of the Agency.

While recognising the opportunities offered by these non-core funded activities, in particular regarding the flexibility to assign additional work to EEA/Eionet; the EEA Management Board underlines with concern that these fall outside the discharge of the Agency.

The EEA Management Board recommends the Budgetary Authorities investigate an administrative simplification of funding mechanisms for additional EEA/Eionet activities, ideally by replacing them with core funding.

Alignment of future EEA/Eionet resource base with expectations on the Agency and its network

The EEA Management Board supports the Commission's conclusions that EEA/Eionet is very cost effective and EEA has optimised task efficiency where possible; as well as the conclusion that the Agency has adapted very well to new EU policy developments, and has fulfilled its objectives in a context of decreasing staff resources, a nominal freezing of EU core subsidy and increasing expectations for further high-quality deliverables.

The EEA Management Board recognises the Commission's conclusion that *'In some cases, this freezing hampered the full implementation of the EEA work programme, including work on support to EU legislation (e.g. reporting).'* The Management Board further underlines the Commission's conclusion that *'the continuation of the nominal freezing of the EU core subsidy for 2021–2027 proposed by the Commission would require further prioritisation and eventual deselection of activities and tasks currently undertaken.'*



The EEA Management Board underlines that although the EEA has implemented the budget austerity measures under the current MFF 2014–2020 without disrupting any major activity in support of policy development and implementation at EU and national levels, it is the view of the Management Board that the EEA is now in the position that it would not be able to fulfil adequately any new task without additional resources; which is in line with the above mentioned Commission conclusions.

The Management Board notes with concern that the European Commission proposal of 2 May 2018 for the MFF covering the period 2021–2027 has classified the EEA in the group of agencies with a budget stability in nominal terms⁽¹⁾, and without a resource envelope for new tasks/growing activities. The proposal sets out a cap for the EU subsidy to the EEA of € 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 15% in the Agency's core budget between 2020 and 2027⁽²⁾.

The EEA Management Board concludes with concern that the proposed resource allocation constitutes a high risk for the Agency and its network, regarding the ability:

- To further ensure adequately business continuity regarding the Agency's current core activities, as well as the future quality of deliveries;
- To adjust to new EU policy priorities and initiatives put forward by the Commission since 2014, that found the full support of the European Parliament and the Council, such as Circular Economy, Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Environment and health, and the future 8th EAP; and
- To increase public awareness, in light of environment policies being increasingly mainstreamed across the countries, resulting in a growing demand for information from the public.

The EEA Management Board highlights that if such cuts were to materialise that this will require discussion and agreement from all key stakeholders on negative priorities for EEA/Eionet.

The EEA Management Board requests the Commission and the Budgetary Authority, consisting of the European Parliament and Council, to ensure a future resource base for EEA/Eionet, consistent with the positive conclusions of the Better Regulation evaluation and increased policy mainstreaming of environment and climate in the proposed MFF for the period 2021–2027.

The EEA Management Board requests:

- The European Commission ensure that legislative proposals, which propose assigning new tasks to or increasing the scope of existing tasks of EEA/Eionet, also include a proposal for additional allocation of core resources to cover these additional activities.
- The co-legislators, the European Parliament and European Council, ensure that adopted initiatives and legislation engaging EEA/Eionet, are accompanied with a decision on adequate allocation of additional core EEA/Eionet resources.

Adopted by the EEA Management Board on 20 June 2019

[Signed]

Laura Burke
Chair, EEA Management Board

¹ The four groups of agencies in the Commission proposal for the MFF 2021–2027 are :
1) Agencies with budget stability in nominal terms, 2) Agencies with budget stability in real terms (2% deflator) ;
3) Fee-based agencies, and 4) Agencies covered by recent legislative proposals foreseeing new activities

² An average inflation of 2%/ year over the period 2021–2027 is assumed (in line with the MFF proposal).