



OPINION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EEA SINGLE PROGRAMMING DOCUMENT 2024-2026

Article 8, paragraph 4-5 of the Regulation (EC) No 401/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the European Environment Agency (EEA), requires the Agency's Scientific Committee (SC) to be consulted on the Multi Annual Work Programme (MAWP) and on the Annual Work Programme (AWP), respectively, before their submission by the Executive Director to the Management Board for adoption.

On 8 February 2023 (Doc. EEA/SC/84/02.2), the Scientific Committee was invited to provide its opinion on the draft Single Programming Document (SPD) for the multi-annual period 2024-2026, which includes the 2024 AWP.

Following discussions at the 85th SC meeting on 24 May 2023, we agreed the following:

General comments

1. We welcome the draft SPD 2024-26, and the feedback received on the Committee's Opinion on the SPD 2023-25. The SPD has a clear structure, and it covers the EEA's mission, the dynamic context in which the Agency operates, new tasks in 2023 and onwards, and how service level and contribution agreements are developing. The Programming Document describes the strategic objectives and concrete activities, including the annual work programme, structured around the five work areas of the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. Overall, the document is an interesting read and provides the essential information. Nevertheless, the Committee would like to submit the following comments and recommendations.
2. The Committee would appreciate a clearer explanation from the EEA in cases where our recommendations are not accepted, to avoid repeating the same recommendations in future opinions of SPDs for the coming periods.
3. How the overall and specific work of the EEA evolves, could be presented in a clearer way. Information on new or downsized tasks is now scattered throughout the document. For example, in Table 2, the linkages between the SOs could be better explained, such as in terms of how much resource is dedicated to each SO, and which SOs are under-resourced and at higher risk of not delivering. Table 10 (p. 37) could also be presented against SOs.
4. The SPD gives the impression that a lot of work is still being planned and executed in silos. Consideration of integration across objectives and activities would be useful. If such an integration is difficult to achieve, this would merit an explanation.
5. Descriptions of the EEA's international collaborations are also spread out and do not provide an overall understanding of their scope, importance, and how they align with the International Strategy (Annex 12).
6. We reiterate our earlier recommendation that the EEA should intensify its collaboration with relevant international organizations, such as UNEP. A stronger link to UN organizations is important, considering the environmental footprint of Europe outside the continent due to production chains, and working towards achieving the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

7. It would be good if the SPD reflected more the efforts the EEA has already undertaken to adapt its working structure, to overcome siloism and strengthen international collaboration.
8. The Scientific Committee reiterates its concerns that the Agency's capacity to engage and deliver on the European Green Deal (EGD) continues to suffer from inadequate budgetary allocations by the EU institutions, among others with respect to taking into account staff costs increase, inflation increases and other cost increases.

Specific comments

1) EEA multi-annual strategic objectives & EEA multi-annual activities

9. The Annual Work Programme is the appropriate mechanism for planning and making specific commitments on the EEA reports for which resources will be committed. We reiterate our recommendation from the past two years that all the planned reports (and, where relevant, other output type beyond reports) for the coming year are not only listed with a preliminary title, but also with an indication of their timing and the policy processes to which they are relevant for.
10. Annex 9 summarises the evaluation of the EEA and EIONET carried out in 2016-18. It is recommended to mention also the currently ongoing evaluation, and the EEA role in this context.
11. The EEA's mission statement (p.6) mentions that the EEA aims not only to help achieving significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment but also to support sustainable development. As sustainable development (relates to the interlinkages between its three dimensions. This could be more mainstreamed throughout the SPD, and not only concentrated into one of the five work areas. While some linkages between environment and economy are addressed (e.g., circular economy), linkages with the social dimension including health seem relatively underrepresented in the SPD. Negative spill-over effects¹ from European consumption, trade etc., on developing countries are also an important aspect of these interlinkages, but they are not mentioned.
12. The interlinkages of themes and bridging of silos in terms of organisational cooperation are an integral part of the SDGs, The EEA could put more emphasis on the sustainability aspects of the EGD, including the EU's environmental footprint beyond Europe.
13. There are specific places in the SPD which the EEA's role is not described, although resources are dedicated to some effort. For example, second bullet under section 2.2.2; and under "grants" on page 12 (EEA's role in 2022 is described, but not for the period that the draft SPD concerns).
14. As regards the multi-annual activities (page 17 ff), we recommend that the specific role of the EEA in each activity is clearly defined. Where is EEA leading, assessing,

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/understanding-the-spillovers-and-transboundary-impacts-of-public-policies-862c0db7-en.htm>

and/or monitoring? Who are the key partners for each Strategic Objective? What are the intended outputs and outcomes for each one of the 5 Activities?

15. Under 3.2.6 (EEA International engagement, p. 26), a roadmap would be useful with the issues for each UNEP convention that EEA will support. Most of the UNEP conventions (e.g., Triple COP (Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm), Biodiversity) could be included in the EEA Activities 1-5 of EEA. The information in page 99 (Cluster I: Provide technical advice/support to EU bodies in international processes) could be distributed over the activities 1-5. The international section could then be renamed into *international developments and expected engagement*.
16. On data and indicators (p. 11), we would be interested to hear whether the EEA aims to be engaged in the development, implementation, and review of sustainability indicators, against the backdrop of the announced full review of all SDG indicators by UNStats and UN member states in 2025.
17. In the expected results on SO 1-5 (Table 2, p.15), specific questions should be presented by EEA to the Horizon Europe clusters and missions to facilitate the access to the relevant information.
18. In activity 3 (Human health and the environment, p.21) the actions do not really describe what is the intention. From the text it seems that Action 1 will be: *Assess the impact of environmental stressors in human health*; For Action 2, a specification might be *Identify the environment role on human health and well-being*.
19. As regards the section on Communication for Impact (3.2.3, p. 23), knowledge produced and/or put available should target a broader community, avoiding silos (e.g., only environment agencies and stakeholders) and thinking in stakeholders from other sectors such as public health and urbanism. Such groups need to make decisions every day and much of the information available could support their decisions. It seems that these groups are not aware of the existence of the data and information; rather, it seems that normally the stakeholders that contribute to produce the data are the ones that have access to the data. Therefore, it should be considered to include an action dedicated to increase the audience and aim for broader sectors of the society, particularly audiences that can use these data to take effective decisions concerning population health such as public health officers and Agencies.
20. Concerning the multi-annual strategic objectives (Table 2), the linkages between the SOs should be better explained, such as in terms of how much resource is dedicated to each SO, and which SOs are under-resourced and at higher risk of not delivering Table 10 (p. 37) should be presented against SOs. The table could be more informative about how objectives will be achieved and explain how they relate to the digital transformation.

2) Funding and critical objectives

21. In its Opinion on the SPD 2023-25, the Scientific Committee recommended that the Topic Centre activities should be described and reflected directly in the MAWP/AWP by indicating key outputs that can be expected from their activities, because they are an essential component of the networked structure EEA operates within. As this has not happened, and the budget outsourced to the Topic Centres of around 8.8 M/year is 47% of the 18.7 M operational expenditure to deliver the EEA work programme (Table A2, p. 76-77) and not explained broken down into specific deliverables in the AWP, the Committee reiterates its recommendation. The same applies to Copernicus, where deliverables and the related funding are not explained clearly.
22. The Scientific Committee would appreciate to be informed about several other issues around funding and critical objectives; not all the following may require changes in the text of the draft SPD:
- How does EEA see the benefit of service level agreements (light administrative burden) versus the challenge of contribution agreements to fund long-term activities (high admin burden)?
 - What are the implications of the delay of funding linked to the Nature Restoration Law?
 - Is there a risk that EEA will be nudged towards a reporting role and could this have an impact on the EEA's role to assess and to provide solutions?
 - Regarding Communicating for impact (Section 3.2.2) and Digitalisation framework (Section 3.2.4), shouldn't EEA reframe its focus? The digital world is not just about writing reports, but about developing tools for analysis, insight and decision-making, infographics, etc.
 - The text on digitalisation says very little about the how, and who the key partners are for digitalisation. What have been the impact and lessons learnt from "enhanced enterprise platforms design" (p. 38)?
 - Like in the SPD 2023-25, a difference between budget increase and inflation is indicated in the draft SPD 2024-26. However, the implications of this, or how it is reflected in the planned work is not explained. Impact, as well as if there is no impact, should be explained.
 - As in the previous SPD, the environmental management (section 3.1) is again covered in very general terms. As information is available in Annex 6, a reference should be made from section 3.1 would be useful.
 - Finally, we would appreciate seeing the Scientific Committee mentioned in the chart presenting the EEA's organization (Annex 1), as it is an official body under the EEA.

Overall, we congratulate the EEA for its planning and ambitions for the SPD2024-2026 with AWP2024 and look forward to supporting the EEA during its implementation.

Copenhagen, 24 May 2023

Claire Dupont, Chair of the Scientific Committee