

Network Steering Committee meeting

15th June 2006, Paris, France

Attendees

Aad Sedee (VROM)
Agnieszka Mierzynsk (MSHE)
Eric Vindimian (MEDD)
Erik Fellenius (SwEPA)
Gerard O'Leary (IEPA)
Giuliana Gasparrini (MATT)
John Seager (EA)
Karine Hertzberg (RCN)

Keela Shackell (EA)
Lorraine Hutt (EA)
Martine Vanderstraeten (BELSPO)
Pekka Harju-Autti (FiMoE)
Sebastien Treyer (MEDD)
Simon Gardner (EA)
Stefan Vetter (BMFLUW)
Steve Killeen (EA) - **Chair**

Meeting opening

- Steve Killeen (Head of Science) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Network Steering Committee meeting.

Project progression overview

- Simon Gardner gave a summary of the project work to date to the Committee. The consortium were asked to provide their organisations background information as requested by SYKE for work package 3. **Action: All**
- It was suggested that we should use the experience from other ERA-NETs to feed into the planning of work package 5. **Action: Gerard O'Leary**
- Aad Sedee asked to what extent it is possible to use the information gathered in WP2 to choose a subject for work package 5. Simon Gardner agreed to bring the gap analysis deadline forward so that it can be used when determining a topic for the pilot call. **Action: Simon Gardner**

Strategic placement of SKEP

- Simon Gardner presented his views on where the project sits now and fed back the Advisory Board's thoughts and recommendations. This included developing links with 'Science meets Policy' and 'Bridging the Gap' initiatives, other environmental ERA-NETs, interfaces between EEA and SKEP Work Packages. He also suggested continued Consortium expansion, strengthening links with North America, and the potential for further developing the SKEP ERA-NET under FP7.
- Martine Vanderstraten suggested that SKEP should consider existing research projects and results that had not been translated into policy with a view to facilitating this process. Eric Vindimian viewed this as a potentially useful role for SKEP, but reminded us that one of the original roles suggested for SKEP was that it focus on an orphan subject and act as a nursery for new projects in the future.
- Stefan Vetter questioned whether our role was to (re)interpret existing information or develop new scientific information for policy?
- Erik Fellenius recognised the overlap issue for SKEP with other [environmental] ERA-NETs and suggested that SKEP could potentially take on a supporting role for other ERA-NETs, e.g. sharing information on research-sharing, providing sub-contracting guidance and approach DG

Research for money to support this. However, Eric Vindimian didn't agree we should share all our work, just share best practice for specific issues if requested.

- Karine Hertzberg was keen to see some co-ordination of ERA-NET work to avoid duplication of work for organisations involved in more than one (RCN are involved in 32). She thought that our research classification work under WP2 was good but may not suit the needs or purposes of other ERA-NET projects. Giuliana Gasparrini agreed with this point. The architecture of the WP2 database is designed to allow us to identify what has been considered scientifically to policy makers. This method differs from other ERA-NETs that have a different focus and aim.
- Aad Sedee suggested that we don't waste time considering overlaps with other ERA-NETs which could be time-consuming. We should focus instead considering what are the needs of policy-makers.
- Gerard O'Leary expressed concern that the project needed to maintain its focus. He felt that it was important to make linkages with other initiatives where there was strategic value in doing so, but not for the sake of doing it or with the wrong people. **Action: Simon Gardner to provide a draft 'mission statement' to the ERA-NET consortium for comment**
- John Seager conveyed the advice of the Advisory Board, that we should focus foremost on our own work, but can offer tools where useful, and try to avoid unprofitable overlaps with other ERA-NETs.

Consortium development

- Simon Gardner presented a paper that proposed that we expand the consortium to include 2 new participants: German Umweltbundesamt (UBA) and Romanian Science and Education Ministry and 3 new Observer participants: Lithuanian EPA, Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water and UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- Martine Vanderstraeten wants to understand how we would tackle the finances if we expand the consortium. Simon Gardner explained our 3 main options: to re-balance existing budget that we are under-spending; to apply to DG-RTD for more funds; or to invite new participants to fund their own activities.
- Giuliana Gasparrini agreed that recruiting new participants is useful and important but questionable if money is a problem. Aad Sedee urged us to carry out an overview of expenditure by all participants so we could potentially transfer any under-spend to new participants. **Action: Keela Shackell**
- Karine Hertzberg was keen for us to consider if having new participants could delay our deliverables or progress. Steve Killeen asked if new participants would have to 'catch up' on the work that has already been started. Simon Gardner confirmed that the prospective organisations would have to play 'catch up'. However, they would not be able to review decisions already made by the consortium before they joined or Work Packages whose activities had concluded.
- Stefan Vetter, Eric Vindimian and Erik Fellenius supported the inclusion of both the German Umweltbundesamt and the Romanian Ministry of Science and Education in SKEP.
- Erik Fellenius argued that inclusion of as many organisations as possible would be good, even to include organisations outside Europe. The financial under spend should be able to cover the financial issues. New partners could also get involved in work package management. John

Seager agreed with this view, reminding the group that we agreed that we would create a network at the outset of SKEP (September 2004) regardless of whether we would be supported by the EC.

- Gerard O’Leary suggested that we must have criteria for introducing new organisations to the project, that we shouldn’t have an automatically open door. We need to define thresholds so we can understand the impact on the project and control future expansion of the network. Simon Gardner suggested that suitable organisations would be a Science Meets Policy or Bridging the Gap representative, an environmental regulator, or a funder of science and cover a broad range of environmental issues.
- Stefan Vetter suggested that we consider the time-scale of introducing new participants – would we expect them to start work at the point at which they join, contributing to current and future work packages or would we expect them to contribute to completed work packages, e.g. WP2, retrospectively? Would we have to renegotiate current decisions with them, e.g. joint calls? We need to clearly define what we would expect of them and what they can expect from us. It was agreed that a guidance note should be produced on this subject. **Action: SG/KS**
- Eric Vindimian asked if we should insist that new participants take part in joint calls? Simon Gardner responded that involvement in joint-calls was optional for all project participants.
- Erik Fellenius thought we should oblige new participants to input data into the WP2 research database. Simon Gardner agreed on this issue.
- Stefan Vetter explained that for each new participant we would need a new contract with the EC, which is time-consuming, and a substantial burden. He advised that we only do it once during the course of the project. Eric Vindimian suggested that we needed a deadline for the inclusion of new participants.
- Erik Fellenius enquired as to whether we would like to have a passive or active recruitment strategy. Simon Gardner responded that recruitment should be active, and strategic in nature.
- Stefan Vetter suggested that the project budget will be elucidated for the first financial report (due in December 2006) after which the co-ordinator can suggest a new financial breakdown. Lorraine Hutt suggested that we could review our budget, examine our current under spend and flexibility for re-balancing our current budget to include new participants in January 2007. The next tranche of EC funding could then be re-balanced and distributed.
- Conclusion: There was a **unanimous vote** that in principle we should include the 2 suggested participants in the project. This process should take place after the first audit at the 18 month stage of the project. Expansion of the consortium in the first half of its existence will minimise any delays to ongoing Work Package activities. This also will allow project finances to be assessed and budgets to be re-balanced if additional funding from DG-RTD is not forthcoming. At the same time, a strategic assessment of additional partners should be carried out in order that consortium expansion is conducted as a, ‘once only’, exercise. We can now proceed to investigating the legal and financial possibilities for doing so with applicant organisations, DG-RTD, and the SKEP consortium. **Action: Lorraine Hutt and Keela Shackell**

Strategic placement

- Simon Gardner presented a paper proposing how we should develop the project in the future through further developing links with 'Science meets Policy' and 'Bridging the Gap' initiatives, other environmental ERA-NETs, interfaces between EEA and SKEP Work Packages, continued Consortium expansion, strengthening links with North America and FP7 opportunities.
- Stefan Vetter commented on Pierre Valette's advice about ERA-NET+ projects. In his understanding there are certain criteria for ERA-NETs intending to convert to ERA-NET+. For example, they must have a minimum of 5 participants, include evaluation procedures, and commit 5m Euro in a common pot to joint calls. He was not aware of the need to change the project objective, or project membership. **Action: SKEP Co-ordination team to liaise with DG-RTD to clarify**
- Eric Vindimian suggested that if there may be money left over at the end of FP6 that the EC are keen to spend, we should act quickly to see if we can access this. **Action: Co-ordination team to investigate**
- Karine Hertzberg suggested that we need to make a balance between working on our current commitments and focusing on future issues and activities that might distract us.

Joint Calls

- Gerard O'Leary presented some slides outlining the aim of the joint calls and suggesting various topics for discussion on how the call would work. He suggested that the pilot call under WP5 would most usefully be an unchallenging one just to test the process.
- Simon Gardner proposed to bring the analysis of research programme information in WP2 forward to feed into the WP5 joint call. **Action: Simon Gardner**
- Stefan Vetter urged the Committee to consider the experience of other ERA-NETs in launching joint calls to inform its own. It is better to use existing experience rather than start from scratch.
- Giuliana Gasparrini suggested that the joint call could address a new subject (innovative) in a way that suits policy makers (high quality).
- Agnieszka Mierzynsk has concerns for joint calls for those organisations involved in many ERA-NETs (MSIST are involved in 20). Organisations have limited budgets to contribute to joint calls and must prioritise these against organisational priorities. She stressed the importance of not duplicating topics.
- Gerard was keen that the launch meeting for WP5 in December should not focus on deciding which issue we would work on. John Seager agreed that we decide the topic of the joint call before December or it will dominate the meeting. We must find a way to do so. **Action: IEPA to consider**
- Eric Vindimian agreed that the questions Gerard posed in his presentation need to be covered at the WP5 workshop. He suggested that those already involved in joint calls could be included in the meeting to share their expertise on how best to do it. **Action: IEPA**
- Stefan Vetter advised that it wasn't enough to facilitate the process in December, we should have papers to vote on. This approach would ensure we get results rather than just a discussion

of the issues. He explained that the 'think tank' workshop held for SNOWMAN covered all the issues raised in Gerard's presentation. He advised that Jon Greaves, the EA representative for SNOWMAN and Claire-Louise Palmer (also EA) had developed a series of useful documents that we could share, e.g. decision-making paper (yes/no) for the joint call workshop, letter of research intent including how much money willing to add and common application form that helped the process. **Action: IEPA**

- Giuliana Gasparrini suggested that some of the questions and issues raised could be considered in each organisation in advance of the meeting, e.g. finances available and the answers brought to the meeting. **Action: IEPA**
- Karine Hertzberg suggested that there are many linkages between the questions and issues raised that need to be considered. She suggested that expert groups within each participating organisation could be included in the December meeting to help with this, e.g. legal staff, dissemination experts.
- Eric Vindimian suggested that there may be some problems with some countries being able to fund experts outside their country and others not. He wondered if it would be useful to have a European lawyer at the joint call meeting to advise on what we can and can't do.
- Martine Vanderstraeten enquired how we would like to deal with issues before the meeting. For example, the topic for the joint call. She suggested that we could have an intermediate meeting to discuss these. **Action: Simon Gardner and Gerard O'Leary to liaise concerning an intermediate Work Package Leaders meeting in mid/late September.**
- Gerard O'Leary suggested that IEPA would like to generate a 'neutral road map' for the joint call by month 24 of the project (June 2007) **Action: IEPA**

Feedback on the meeting

- Eric Vindimian suggested that a 4-day meeting was quite hard and that it may be better to condense this into fewer days. **Action: SG**

Project finances

- Keela Shackell presented a session on project finances, guidance and the upcoming periodic report and audit.
- Keela reinforced the fact that we need both retrospective and prospective estimates for our budgets including time records and that 30th November is the cut-off date for audits in order to feed into the project-wide audit in January 2007. **Action: All participants**
- Keela will send out a plan to guide us through this process. **Action: Keela Shackell**

Legal documents

- Lorraine Hutt presented a session on legal documents to acquaint everyone with the legal documents that we are bound by, consider the issues of gaining assistance to participate in the project and approve several changes we would like to make to the Description of Work (Annex-I).
- There was a unanimous vote that we should proceed with making the 3 changes to the Description of Work. We can now proceed to formalising this with the EC. **Action: Lorraine Hutt**