EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 6.6.2024
SEC(2024) 218 final

REGULATORY SCRUTINY BOARD OPINION

Commission Staff Working Document - Evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) for the period 2017-2021

{SWD(2024) 204 final}
{SWD(2024) 205 final}

Brussels,
Ares(2024)

Opinion

Title: Five-year evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA)

Overall 2nd opinion: POSITIVE WITH RESERVATIONS

(A) Policy context

This is the five-year evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) covering the period 2017-2021.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the 1990 Founding Regulation is still fit for purpose in view of the changed EU policy priorities, including the European Green Deal.

(B) Key issues

The Board notes the improvements to the text responding to the Board's first opinion.

However, the report still contains significant shortcomings. The Board gives a positive opinion with reservations because it expects the lead Service to rectify the following aspects:

(1) The factual evidence base is too narrow and the stakeholder consultation is too limited. The adequacy and suitability of the monitoring system for the management and evaluation of the agency's activities is not sufficiently assessed.

(2) The conclusions and lessons learned section do not fully reflect all the findings of the analysis.

(3) The potential for efficiency gains and for digitalisation in reducing operating costs is not sufficiently explored.

(C) What to improve

(1) The evaluation predominantly relies on opinion-based evidence from a limited number of stakeholders, the majority of whom are the Agency's staff. The report should be more transparent about this limitation throughout the analysis avoiding general reference to "(some) stakeholders" or "(some) interviewees". The report should clearly indicate how much relative weight is given to factual evidence collected and which groups of stakeholders support which statement. Consequently, the conclusions on the effectiveness, coherence and relevance should be more nuanced as currently not sufficiently based on robust evidence.

This opinion concerns a draft evaluation which may differ from the final version.

(2) The report should assess in greater depth the adequacy and suitability of the existing monitoring system for the management of its activities and evaluating the Agency's functioning. Whereas the revised report has made better use of the available evidence, it does not investigate it more thoroughly.

(3) The report should better reflect in its conclusion and lessons learned section all the findings of the analysis section, in particular the need (i) to develop a comprehensive monitoring system which would provide robust data base for evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency and relevance, and not only for the KPIs, (ii) to improve the prioritisation process, and (iii) to measure resource allocation.

(4) The report should make a further effort to uncover what the critical issues are – apart from staff shortage – that impacted the Agency's performance in the period under evaluation. It should better develop the potential for further efficiency gains, in particular the potential to reduce operating costs through digitalisation. It should also better distinguish the roles and responsibilities of the Agency and the JRC and EUROSTAT to avoid overlaps and maximise synergies, among other things, also in data interoperability and management.

(5) The report should be more specific on what data and evidence was used, and how, in the efficiency and effectiveness analysis. It should further apply the value for money concept and present in more structured way outputs and resources allocated.

Some more technical comments have been sent directly to the author DG.

(D) Conclusion

The lead Service should revise the report before launching the interservice consultation.

Full title	Evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) for the period 2017-2021
Reference number	PLAN/2021/13163
Submitted to RSB on	21 May 2024
Date of RSB meeting	Written procedure

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Regulatory Scrutiny Board

Brussels,
Ares(2023)

Opinion

Title: Five-year evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA)

Overall opinion: NEGATIVE

(A) Policy context

This is the five-year evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) covering the period 2017-2021.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the Founding Regulation is still fit for purpose in view of the changed environmental ambitions of the European Commission for the EU to become the first climate neutral continent in the world by 2050.

(B) Summary of findings

The Board notes the additional information provided and commitments to make changes to the report.

However, the Board gives a negative opinion because the report contains the following significant shortcomings:

(1) The intervention logic is not coherent and not specific enough. Its relevance is not discussed according to the evolving policy requirements. The underpinning factual evidence is lacking while the analysis relies heavily on the few opinions collected through an unbalanced stakeholder consultation.

(2) The report does not thoroughly analyse the governance, the internal control systems, as well as the resource allocation and the risk of overlap of tasks with Commission's services.

(3) The conclusions and lessons learned are not coherent with the main analysis and findings hence they do not inform possible future actions.

The Board considers that in its present form this report does not sufficiently respond to the mandate of the evaluation.

(C) What to improve

(6) The report should better assess the continued relevance of the Agency's logic of intervention in view of the European Green Deal policy framework. As many other Commission services contribute to its objectives, the intervention logic should include more specific objectives, as SMART as possible, for the Agency. The report should specify to what

extent the EEA's objectives and mandate provided for in the Founding Regulation are still relevant.

(7) The report should better explain what purpose the evaluation serves and what points of comparison were used to assess expected outputs and results against actual ones during the evaluation period 2017-2021. The report should be more critical on the robustness of its data collection supporting the analysis of the actual functioning of the Agency. The report should better explain in how far the objectives of EEA and EIONET have been met with the delivery of the outputs mentioned, and to what extent these outputs generated the expected results.

(8) The evaluation predominantly relies on opinion-based evidence from a limited number of stakeholders, the majority of whom are the Agency's staff. The report should be more transparent about data limitations, including the reasons for the limited interest on the part of stakeholders to participate. The report should indicate how much relative weight is given to factual evidence collected, for example, from the Agency's own KPI data, desk research, workshops, in-depth interviews and case-studies.

(9) The report should make a better effort to identify and describe what the critical issues are that impact the Agency's performance in the period under evaluation. It should thoroughly evaluate how governance, strategic steering and functioning of the Management Board, internal control and monitoring systems and resource allocation of the Agency have evolved from the shortcomings identified in the previous evaluation. The report should also address issues of potential overlap and duplication of tasks with Commission services and, in particular, the JRC. The report should clarify to what extent the projections of EEA additional staff due to new or upcoming legislation are in line with the estimates of the corresponding financial fiches. The report should clarify how digitalisation could drive potential simplification and burden reduction and how this would be taken into consideration in a future efficiency analysis.

(10) The report should indicate more clearly how the evaluation applies the value for money concept. It should specify what data and evidence was used, and how, in the efficiency and effectiveness analysis. The report should define what is meant by "direct benefits", "synergies", and "gains" and should indicate how these are applied in the cost-benefit analysis.

(11) The report should strengthen the validity of its conclusions and should significantly strengthen the alignment of the conclusions with the evidence, analyses and evaluation findings earlier in the report. The report should be more l substantiated in its conclusions on the performance of the Agency in the period 2017-2021. The conclusions should also better reflect the learnings from the preceding five-year evaluation of the Agency covering the period 2012-2016. The report should draw a list of lessons learned that should serve as meaningful inputs to future decisions.

Some more technical comments have been sent directly to the author DG.

<u>(D) Conclusion</u> **The Board advises the DG not to launch the interservice consultation before substantially revising the report.** **The lead DG may resubmit to the Board a revised version of this report.**	
Full title	Evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) for the period 2017-2021
Reference number	PLAN/2021/13163
Submitted to RSB on	15 November 2023
Date of RSB meeting	13 December 2023