SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL AND EMERGING RISKS (SCHEER)

Request for a scientific advice on "Emerging issues at the environment-social interface"

Commission Department requesting the Opinion: Directorate-General for Environment

1. Background

Responding to the need identified in Priority Objective 5[1] of the 7th Environmental Action Programme, ENV and its partners of the Environment Knowledge Community (EKC)[2] have established a foresight system for the systematic identification of emerging environmental issues (FORENV). This is also in line with the importance attributed to foresight and other forward looking tools in the Better Regulation guidelines,[3] which stress that those tools "complement quantitative modelling with a system thinking and long-term approach".[4]

The EKC foresight system, FORENV, has the overall aim:

> To identify, characterise and assess emerging issues that may represent risks or opportunities to Europe's environment, and to communicate these results to policy-makers and other stakeholders, encouraging appropriate and timely actions to be taken. Ultimately the aim is to enable policy makers and other stakeholders to prevent or effectively manage emerging risks, and to ensure that opportunities are identified and exploited.

FORENV is bringing together existing EU knowledge, expertise and practice on foresight and identification of emerging environmental issues. It shall provide regular and timely update to EU senior and middle management on issues which may represent opportunities and/or risks for the environment.

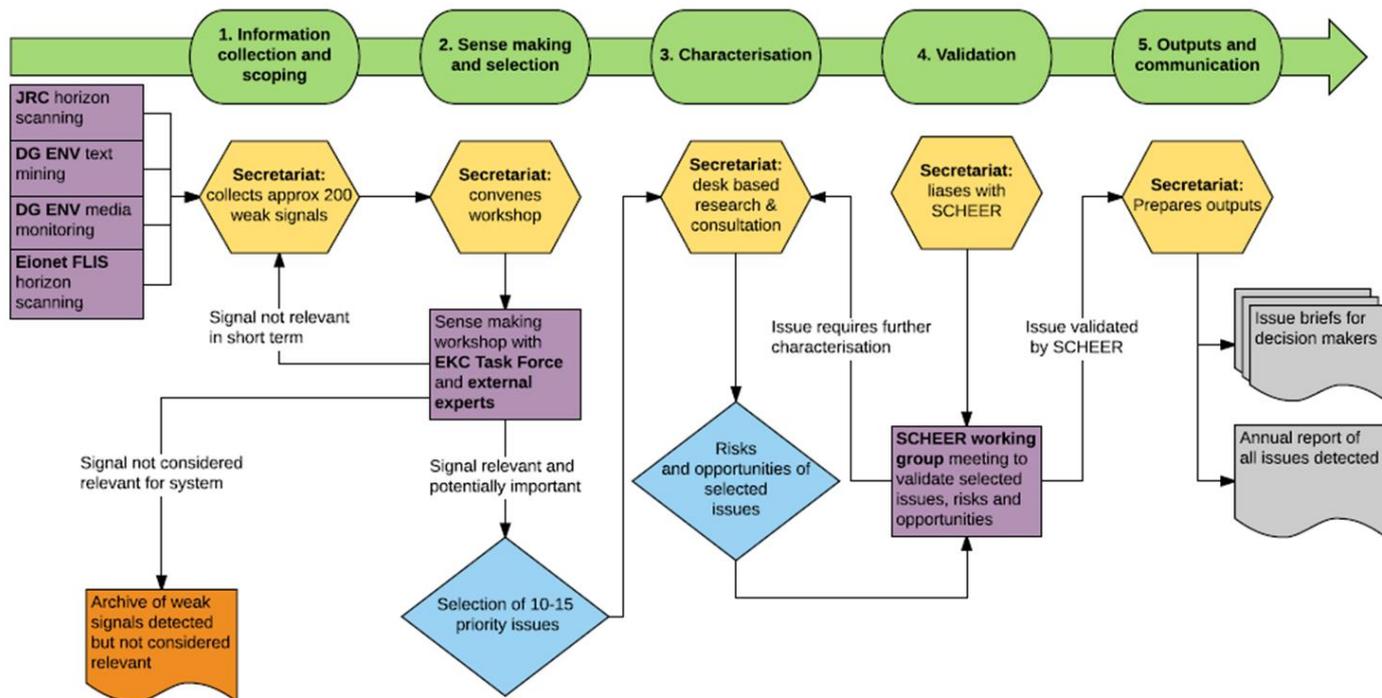FORENV is based on a 5 step approach, as detailed in the image below:

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[1] Priority Objective 5 requests *'that (by 2020) the understanding of, and the ability to evaluate and manage, emerging environmental and climate risks are greatly improved'.* See http://ec.europa.eu/environment/action-programme/

[2] The EKC is an informal platform set up in 2015 by ENV, CLIMA, RTD, ESTAT, JRC and EEA to improve the generation and sharing of EU environmental knowledge.

[3] See the Better Regulation Toolbox (pp. 14-16), complementing the Better Regulation Guideline, SWD(2015) 111.

[4] Ibid.

The primary sources of information for the collection of information (Step 1) will be through the horizon scanning activities currently in place in the JRC, RTD and EEA/Eionet FLIS[5]; the text mining developed by ENV[6]; and the Science for Environment Policy newsalert managed by ENV[7]. Commission and external experts will be involved in the sense making and prioritisation (Step 2) and in the characterisation of the priority issues (Step 3). The Scientific Committee on health, environmental and emerging risks (SCHEER) is asked to peer review and validate the process (Step 4), and the final findings will be communicated to other Commission services and senior managers for discussion and follow-up action, where appropriate (Step 5).

After an initial pilot of the system in 2017-18 focused on "Emerging environmental issues related to new technologies in the Urban environment" (where SCHEER participated and delivered a final opinion), FORENV will now run on an annual basis. Below are the title and a short description of the focus area chosen for the current exercise 2018-19:

Topic: Emerging issues at the environment-social interface

Description: Environmental and social issues are intrinsically linked. On the one hand, environmental risks and environmental policy measures may affect societal groups differently, e.g. through the unequal distribution of pollution (air, water, noise, chemicals), climate impacts and access to natural resources, but also through differing outcomes generated from environmental taxes, or the way rights to a healthy environment are guaranteed. On the other hand, social trends and movements may have a strong impact on the environment, e.g. through dietary changes, green jobs, consumer choices, the changing perception of nature, awareness raising (e.g. through social networks), demands for

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[5] European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) for Forward Looking information and Services (FLIS). See: https://forum.eionet.europa.eu/nrc-flis

[6] Using two JRC tools: Tools for Innovation Monitoring (TIM) and Europe Media Monitor (EMM).

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/index_en.htm

environmental/climate justice and environmental crimes. Which emerging trends should EU policy-makers be most aware of and act upon?

The following timing is expected:

- 200 relevant weak signals of change are collected in October and November 2018 (Step 1);

- In December 2018 and January 2019, internal (EU) and external experts will identify between 8 and 10 priority emerging issues at the environment/society interface by analysing and clustering the weak signals (Step 2);

- Between February and April 2019, the 8 (maximum) emerging issues are characterised by FORENV Secretariat on the basis of scientific literature, to highlight in particular associated opportunities and risks (Step 3);

- Between May 2019 and July 2019 SCHEER shall review the characterisation and produce its opinion (Step 4);

- In August and September 2019, a final report and related communication outputs will be produced (Step 5).

2. Terms of reference

In the system, SCHEER is requested to review and validate the outcomes of steps 1- 3.

For Step 4, SCHEER is asked to review the evidence provided through the characterisation (delivered by ENV), comment on and validate the outcomes, in particular the risks and opportunities identified and the levels of uncertainty and scientific consensus.

In doing so, SCHEER should consider a set of key questions, including:

- Is the emerging issue identified likely to have the risks and/or opportunities described, or others limited to human and environmental health?

- Is the described expected impact (positive or negative) on environment and human health plausible, including the expected time-frame?

- Can you assess and rank the relevance on the basis of environmental and human health impact of the identified emerging issues?

DG ENV will provide to SCHEER a characterisation of between 8 and 10 emerging issues at the environment/social interface by mid April 2019 as evidence for its validation. The validation is expected to require a broad range of expertise, including on: risk assessment, urban environment, environmental media (land, water, air and noise, climate, natural resources) and human health.

3. Deadline

SCHEER is expected to provide its opinion by mid July 2019.