

Summary Report of the Joint EPA / ENCA online Workshop
“Supporting urgent transformative sustainable changes in society and the economy”

6 November 2023

13.00 - 15.00 CET

About 30 Directors and experts of the ENCA¹ and EPA² networks explored collaboration potentials. They discussed in a two-hour joint online event mutual interests and as a topical case how a nature- and environmentally friendly energy transition in synergy with nature restoration can be implemented in practice and which research approaches could support the necessary sustainability transformation for that purpose. The online event was organized in two parts:

- Part I: Setting the scene for EPA/ENCA research collaboration
- Part II: Deep dive on the topical case: Energy and nature transitions in an ever-changing environment

Moderator Helmut Gaugitsch and Managing Director Georg Rebernik (both Environment Agency Austria) and Ronan Uhel (Scientific Advisor of the Executive Director of the European Environment Agency EEA) paved the way in their introductory remarks by highlighting the potential for synergies by pooling resources around shared interests and complementary objectives of the EPA and ENCA networks. This should lead to connecting the dots and bridge knowledge and research gaps.

Stephan Bartke, Coordinator of CASRI and Co-Coordinator of IG-EPAS, German Environment Agency, provided as **first insight** information on relevant work in the EPA Network, referring to IG EPAS, Research Project CASRI (see enclosed PPT).

Guiding Question 1: Means for collaboration for sustainability transformation

It became clear that with sustainability research we start from a shared aim and problem formulation. We build on shared values, such as the belief that democracy and EU legislation is key to what we do. We understand the individual role and the joint potential. Identifying specific objectives along our impact pathway allows us to make simple steps and move on, instead of losing time while searching for the perfect solution.

Eeva Primmer, Research Director at SYKE, presented as **second insight** the NEFET (Nature and Environmentally Friendly Energy Transition) paper, which had been provided in advance to workshop participants (see enclosed). Building on an IG EPAS facilitated expert consultation including both networks, the paper looks at nature- and environmentally friendly energy transition and associated problems. There are a number of potential conflicts stemming from energy transition and biodiversity conservation. The regulatory framework and the Green Deal advances energy transition but is not up to date with local level impacts and how that impacts national planning.

Guiding Question 2: Current research gaps considering human, nature and environment points of views

It became clear that replicability and learning is key: we learn about the reaction of the stakeholders, on both positive and negative impacts. We should create understandable narratives and the NEFET paper presents a number of scenarios. In the future territorial planning models would be a priority to optimise the integration of energy objectives with

¹ <https://www.encanetwork.eu/>

² <https://epanet.eea.europa.eu/>

those of sectoral and environmental policies. It is important how to create good practice of reconciliation, this requires research and innovation.

Ceri Davies, Executive Director for Evidence, Policy & Permitting, Natural Resources Wales provided as **third insight** relevant work in the ENCA Network: Nature protection in perspective (see enclosed PPT). ENCA has 6 priority areas and several Interest Groups, the EPA network has 10 Interest Groups, some of them similar to the ENCA priorities. ENCA and EPA are set very similarly, there is a lot of cross-fertilisation of ideas. Three good examples (wind farm developer funds, peat restoration, forest – heathland restoration, marine renewable energy development) from Wales show how transformative change can be implemented in practice.

Guiding Question 3: Benefits of collaboration

It became clear that we must aim for cleaner energy, secure, equitably accessible, and not harming biodiversity.

Ronan Uhel, Co-Coordinator of IG-EPAS and scientific advisor EEA, provided as **fourth insight** how science can be transformed into action. The EEA scientific committee is a hub for sharing sustainability transitions. Fundamental change in understanding policy and new knowledge is ongoing. The Green Deal is the port of call: we need evidence-based policy-making. It is science-based policy that will allow energy transition. A fundamental change is needed.

Guiding Question 4 “How to enhance joint knowledge exchange and application”

The focus was put on foresight. We must be more creative and pool all our knowledge, also in the businesses sector and in communities. There should be trade-offs between energy transition and biodiversity conservation, which must be reflected by European legislation.

The **Discussion** focused on how can EPA and ENCA join forces for a common enterprise. What are the means and Research gaps? Benefits of collaboration? How to network and collaborate and how to join the dots, taking into account that we share so many common goals?

Participants shared practical examples from their countries and constituencies (see accompanying document with links shared in the chat of the online discussions). These inputs emphasized the strong interest in the topic and that research and practice are closely interlinked. It will be crucial how we can collectively benefit from these positive case studies. Energy transition and biodiversity conservation can live in harmony. Landuse and land management is at the core of the solutions.

Summary Reflections for a way forward

Leena Ylä-Mononen, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and Moderator **Helmut Gaugitsch** (Environment Agency Austria) shared the following reflections and suggestions for a way forward:

- This workshop is a starting point and shows that there is strong interest in joining the dots between the two networks EPA and ENCA, working on nature conservation and energy transition, as well as nature restoration.
- Knowledge gaps can be filled by the two networks. Evidently there are tradeoffs and co-benefits, we should learn from best cases.
- EEA is very supportive to work with both networks and create links to policy making.
- Interest Groups of both networks should be linked closer together
- Let us explore further joint meetings and joint position papers.