

## Reflection of the Belgian MAES working group on the KIP-INCA concept note

**Contribution to the scoping of the *Knowledge Innovation Project on an Integrated system for Natural Capital and ecosystem services Accounting (KIP-INCA)* in the EU, reflecting on the KIP-INCA scoping paper (public version – 22 June 2015) and an update provided by ESTAT during the international MAES WG meeting of Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, Brussels.**

The contribution of accounting and statistics is essential to take forward the practice and policy impact of ecosystem service assessments as we know it. The outstanding quality and conceptual rigour of the SEEA white paper was an impressive step forward and corresponds to several state-of-the-art frameworks applied in regional assessments today. Moreover, the explicit goal to distinguish assets from actual and sustainable flows directly points to the challenge to move from mapping to actual assessments, linked to the Aichi targets and sustainability goals.

KIP-INCA is a promising project, which could heavily impact the way Europe and its member states value and manage their natural capital. Especially promising is the initial 12 month scoping phase, where relevant stakeholders and experts will help determine the scope of the project. This reflection is coming from the local MAES working group of the Belgian Community of Practice on Ecosystem Services ([BEES<sup>1</sup>](http://www.beescommunity.be)).

KIP-INCA -as presented in the scoping document- seems to have very determined and focussed outcomes, which contrasts with the open scoping phase. Based on our experience with assessment data, mapping and policy implementation in Belgium, five questions on the process, policy goals, and methodological choices of KIP-INCA are put forward, as well as some general suggestions for debate. It is very well possible that these questions can be immediately answered and concerns relieved, as we based ourselves solely on the public scoping document. Therefore, we stress that the sole aim of this reflection is to open the debate and provide feedback from on-the-ground ES-assessment practice.

### 1. How does MAES and member state feedback contribute to **KIP-INCA decisions**?

It is not clear what the status of the scoping phase in the process is, and what will follow from it. It should be clarified how inputs from member states/ MAES will percolate to decisions -if at all-, and how this representation will be organised.

### 2. How will **KIP-INCA impact** the members states and nature assessments?

KIP-INCA will somehow 'set the scene' for on-going and yet-to-start assessments in member states, and as such potentially have a large impact in how these cope with assessment of nature. It should be clarified whether there will be an additional, stronger or legal incentive for member states to perform NCA's, alongside or beyond EU biodiversity target 2 action 5.

### 3. How will **KIP-INCA contribute to actual policies** on EU level?

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<sup>1</sup> [www.beescommunity.be](http://www.beescommunity.be)

The way the accounting deliverables are formulated in this document seems narrowed by (1) the limitations of data sources chosen (quantitative databases and ES-supply maps, see [reflection<sup>2</sup>](#) on the second MAES report) and (2) requirements of the accounting method envisaged (input-output type accounting). The effective contribution (or even strategy) of such an approach to attaining the **EU biodiversity target on green infrastructure** and to underlying **Aichi targets** should be verified, and – more importantly- its risk of moving away from these targets either directly (e.g. promote offsetting risks) or indirectly (over-allocation of scientific and administrative resources) should be estimated and contained.

#### 4. Will **KIP-INCA contribute to actual policies** on national level?

The scope of KIP-INCA seems not to correspond to the **member state policy questions** that MAES has inventoried earlier (see table below). Assessments need to serve national and regional (biodiversity) policy demand and provide a more explicit utility, in order to incentivise cooperation and data sharing from member state governments, administrations and scientists.

#### 5. Will **KIP-INCA capture differences** between regions and time steps?

Natural capital consists of more than just provisioning ecosystems. The ‘value’ of NC (the proposed object of the accounts), consists of multiple demands by various stakeholders, requiring combined and integrated valuation approaches. Moreover, supply as well as demand of many services consists of inter-state and inter-continent flows. It is -for now- unclear if and how KIP-INCA can deal with these complexities in a member state based quantitative input-output accounting. Ecosystem service data is often partial, mostly concerns biophysical potential and numerical uncertainty might well be larger than the variation which the account aims to register. It is unclear what the reliability of KIP-INCA will be (or needs to be, depending on the policy goals of KIP-INCA).

In addition to these questions, and based on experiences with scientific as well as policy aspects of on-going assessments in Belgium, we suggest:

- Clarity on KIP-INCA goals, strategy and actual contribution (“how?”) towards Aichi targets, EU green infrastructure targets and local policy needs concerning biodiversity policy.
- Clarity on KIP-INCA connection with member state policies and vice versa, both in terms of participation and decision making process (e.g. role of MAES) as in terms of potential impact of the KIP-INCA project on future members state obligations.
- Consideration by KIP-INCA of a broader type of accounting (e.g. indicator/performance accounting using sound indicators of ecosystem service state), setting a reliability level based on policy goals and risks/opportunities of methodological options.
- Application by KIP-INCA of a dual strategy, with trial and evaluation of ‘input-output’ accounts for these services with adequate quantitative information, alongside development of guidelines for national ecosystem *assessments* or ‘indicator accounts’, in order to render these reliable, repeatable and comparable across scales. Both approaches can be compared and integrated.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.beescommunity.be/media/filer\\_public/6d/9e/6d9ed2da-22b5-483a-a9e6-b6ad0624a1b1/bees\\_reflection\\_maesreportii\\_final.pdf](http://www.beescommunity.be/media/filer_public/6d/9e/6d9ed2da-22b5-483a-a9e6-b6ad0624a1b1/bees_reflection_maesreportii_final.pdf)

The local MAES working group of the Belgian Community of Practice on Ecosystem Services ([BEES](#)) hopes that this reflection contributes to realistic and useful scoping of KIP-INCA and to the role of MAES.

Table 1: Policy questions derived by MAES in their 2013 guidance document

<p><b>According to the MAES 2013 guidance document:</b></p> <p>An Ecosystem Service Assessment <i>needs to provide both an analysis of the natural environment by looking at the state of biodiversity and ecosystems (ecosystem assessment in sensu stricto) and by evaluating the level of ecosystem services provided to people (ecosystem service assessment). It needs to consider both the ecosystems from which the services are derived and also the people who depend on and are affected by changes in the supply of services, thereby connecting environmental and development sectors”</i> (p36)</p> <p><i>The broad policy questions to be addressed are (page 14):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>What are the current state and trends of the EU’s ecosystems and the services they provide to society? What are emerging trends and projected future state of the EU’s ecosystems and the services they provide to society? How is this currently affecting human well-being and what are the projected, future effects to society?</i></li><li>- <i>What are the key drivers causing changes in the EU’s ecosystems and their services?</i></li><li>- <i>How does the EU depend on ecosystem services that are provided outside the EU?</i></li><li>- <i>How can we secure and improve the continued and sustainable delivery of ecosystem services?</i></li><li>- <i>How do ecosystem services affect human well-being, who and where are the beneficiaries, and how does this affect how they are valued and managed?</i></li><li>- <i>What is the current public understanding of ecosystem services and the benefits they provide?</i></li><li>- <i>How should we incorporate the economic and non-economic values of ecosystem services into decision making and what are the benefits of doing so (question to be addressed 2020)? And what kind of information (e.g. what kind of values) is relevant to influence decision-making?</i></li><li>- <i>How might ecosystems and their services change in the EU under plausible future scenarios - What would be needed in terms of review/revision of financing instruments?</i></li><li>- <i>What are the economic, social (e.g. employment) and environmental implications of different plausible futures? What policies are needed to achieve desirable future states?</i></li><li>- <i>How have we advanced our understanding of the links between ecosystems, ecosystem functions and ecosystem services? More broadly, what is the influence of ecosystem services on long-term human well-being and what are the knowledge constraints on more informed decision making</i></li></ul>
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