

EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION  
Directorate B - Healthy Planet  
The Director, Mr John Bell  
Directorate C – Clean Planet  
The Director, Mrs Rosalinde van der Vlies

22 February 2022

Your Ref.: Ares(2021)5205900

Sent by email only

Dear Directors, dear Rosalinde VAN DER VLIES, dear John BELL,

Further to your invitation to continue discussions on the support that Member States' national Environment Protection Agencies (EPAs) could bring to strengthening the European Research Area, we set out herein an actionable knowledge proposal.

In your letter of July 2021, you emphasised that the EPAs could be useful in the context of the Horizon Europe Missions and several topical areas that urgently need to be transformed to achieve the European Green Deal – in terms of knowledge sharing, and also in the exchange and connection between European, national and local knowledge levels. In this regard, we have been taking the time to envision the roles and activities that EPAs would engage in.

In a workshop on February 1<sup>st</sup>, entitled 'Towards a European Partnership for Actionable Sustainability Knowledge and Solutions (EPAS)', we sought and converged at a common understanding of how Environment Agencies cooperation can be used in order to address needed sustainability transitions that can be characterised as being:

1. Systemic – trans- and interdisciplinary, cross-sector, cross cluster and missions,
2. Transversal – multi-actor, multi-level governance linking science and policy, and
3. Actionable – research and science that is solution-oriented and facilitates action.

Concrete examples discussed in the workshop included the interaction between various sectoral challenges such as between exploring new renewable energy resources and biodiversity challenges, the tension between single issue programmes and the transitional changes needed, the role of a transnational circular economy linked to the decarbonisation and biodiversity agendas, and the potential of sustainable consumption patterns.

EPAs could contribute to the European Research Area levers for sustainability knowledge and solutions, in particular addressing possible knowledge gaps in governing sustainability transitions and its related actionable knowledge infrastructure. Building on its established, stable and action-oriented knowledge and policy-implementation infrastructures, EPAs ensure continuity and a focus on governance for sustainability and transitions at the systemic level. EPAs have connections to the policy making arena and understand the political, societal and economic challenges at a national level.

However, at the moment, EPAs do not have a strategic link to the EU research community. To support the urgently required implementation of the European Green Deal, EPAs see the creation of a cooperative policy-supporting and actionable knowledge platform as an added value for the European Research Area. It would help tackle implementation challenges and enhance transformation changes at (trans-)national and European levels, supporting the integrated assessments for, and implementation of, sustainability transitions, thus utilizing the EPAs' direct link between science and the policy environment and capitalizing on the established (inter-)national infrastructures and relevant national projects.

The current draft of the Horizon Europe WP2023/24 Cluster 6 Destination “Innovative governance, environmental observations and digital solutions in support of the Green Deal” does not have a topic that would address systemic, multi-level sustainability transition. We propose to consider adding a topic for a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), for which a successful proposal shall close the gaps between (cross-)national and EU environment research agendas. This would trigger systemic knowledge co-creation and getting it into policy, and enhance common practice by facilitating a strategic link and deeper collaboration of research-oriented EPAs of Member States and Associated Countries with the European Research Area actors.

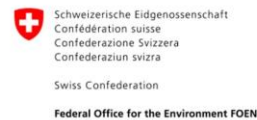
With this, we intend to explore convergent (trans-)national and European research needs, actions and implementation pathways on systemic approaches towards sustainable transition, including new future-oriented methods for actionable sustainability knowledge and solutions, funding opportunities, capacity building, utilization of joint knowledge and policy-support infrastructures (incl. environmental data collected by the EPAs).

In consideration of the above, we would like to continue the dialogue with EC-DG RTD, as indicated in your letter. We would be pleased to have an opportunity to meet with yourselves in late March or early April to discuss our value proposal. This could be followed up with your participation in the forthcoming meeting of Heads of EPAs in May, where EPAS will be operationally articulated. Then, presenting in a meeting with Director General J.E. Paquet, in the fall, the engagement and activities to be undertaken by EPAs, in collaboration with EEA.

We trust that the practicalities and concreteness of our proposal will meet your interests in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Group of Directors



Cc: Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director