

A Virtual Library for Ecosystem Assessments in Europe

EEA- 17 May 2013

Draft terms of reference

Context

The idea of a virtual library, first proposed by EEA and endorsed at the [ecosystem assessment workshop in 2011](#) was further developed based on EEA previous investments (e.g. [Astana library](#), 2010 [workshop](#) and [review](#)), and the needs expressed by potential users (e.g. 2012 online [questionnaire](#), [MAES](#) working group).

The tools will be developed by the EEA, in interaction with expected users through a testing phase, which should also result in the first population of the library. In a second stage, it is proposed to nest (or plug-in) the virtual library within [BISE ecosystem assessment platform](#) and to advertise it to the broader expert community (e.g. through publication in the new journal "[Ecosystem services](#)", presentations at annual meetings of scientific networks, e.g. [SGA](#), [ESP](#), [ALTERNET](#), etc.) to allow its further population, use and improvement.

This Virtual Library can also be developed in the context of IPBES operations within the European context.

In fact recent policy developments call for increasing knowledge and awareness-raising on ecosystems, their degradation and the respective socio-economic impacts and the need to identify strategies to reverse this degradation. At EU level, the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services in Europe ([MAES](#)) is one of the key actions of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#) to 2020. It foresees (under action 5, target 2) that: *"Member States, with the assistance of the Commission, will map and assess the state of ecosystems and their services in their national territory by 2014, assess the economic value of such services, and promote the integration of these values into accounting and reporting systems at EU and national level by 2020"*. While the EEA is supporting this work in parallel it is also preparing its 5 year (SOER) assessment cycle. The SOER2015 is already underway and this virtual library can constitute a streamlined key resource to such key product while supporting other policy developments.

Objective and expected added values

The virtual library aims at supporting the development of a **knowledge base** for ecosystem assessments in Europe through providing a **public, long-term, and adaptive** repository of **fact-sheets**, describing available resources (documents, experts, organisations) relevant for ecosystem assessments in Europe. Other expected added values include (i) an increased access to available resources, in particular grey literature including those that may not be available in English; (ii) facilitated identification of specific material through targeted indexing in English from specific expert documentation, and adequate searching tools (the library goes beyond a repository with hierarchical classification of the documents); and (iii) statistical analysis of the resources documented.

Scope and facilities

Resources to be documented in the virtual library include resources that address key elements of ecosystem assessments, as described in the MA manual for ecosystem assessment practitioners (more info [here](#)), and in the [MAES analytical framework](#). Since the overall objective of ecosystem assessments is to contribute to the policy decisions and their implementation, including policies on nature and biodiversity, but also policies targeting socio-economic activities that depend on ecosystems and/or impact them (such as territorial cohesion, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, transport and energy, etc.), the scope of the library goes beyond the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. The information collected should nevertheless allow filtering relevant resources for specific targets and actions of the Strategy.

The virtual library will be populated through a **collaborative tool for uploading specific information** on documents of relevance for ecosystem assessments in Europe. It will provide a **searching tool** (to query for documents relevant for ecosystem assessment in Europe, experts who produced these documents and organisations involved) and a **processing instrument** (for the generation of simple statistics on the resources documented in the library).

Users and contributors

Targeted users are scientific and policy experts involved in planning or shaping ecosystem assessments at national, subnational or European scale.

An efficient and useful population of the virtual library is only possible through collaborative investment of a broad range of experts (across disciplines and geographic scope) directly involved in ecosystem assessment. Experts are invited to upload information on documents that they find relevant for ecosystem assessments in Europe, and on which they have a deep knowledge (uploading the required information should not require any additional investment, and should require only a limited time per document). Uploading information will require user identification. Unregistered users will be able to submit information for approval. The list of experts contributing to the virtual library will be visible and updated.

Testing phase

Objective and timing

The testing of the tools developed for the virtual library on ecosystem assessments can be divided in two steps.

Step 1 will be launched in May 2013 to end **by 18th June 2013** with the objective of testing the uploading tool (in terms of time required, usefulness and adequacy to the user's needs) through documenting a minimum of 100 documents in the virtual library.

Step 2 will aim at testing the searching tool, in terms of functionalities and performances. It will be organised, depending on the results of the first step and interest expressed by experts involved in the first step (a minimum of 100 documents first need to be referenced and documented in the virtual library for this second step to occur).

We will aim at sharing and discussing the first results of the testing at a one-day meeting bringing together IT developers and experts. This event may be synchronised with the MAES/BISE meeting organised by the Commission and foreseen in June 2013.

Experts to be invited

The EEA will invite experts from its informal country network on ecosystem assessments to take part in the testing of the virtual library. The EEA informal network on ecosystem assessments includes experts from a variety of countries, disciplines, and organisations, some of which are involved in MAES working group or MAES EU supporting contract (MESEU).

Expected workload

Each expert involved in the testing is expected to (i) document a minimum of 5 documents in the virtual library and (ii) provide feedback to the EEA on the tools and further developments needed.

Populating the virtual library

Experts are expected to upload information on documents that they find relevant for ecosystem assessments in Europe, and on which they have a deep knowledge. Any kind of document can be referenced and documented in the library (even if it is not available in English), including the following Media (support): (1) Literature (grey report, scientific paper...); (2) Maps (GIS, image...); (3) Tools (for analytical or communication purposes); (4) Websites (e.g. UK NEA...); and (5) Events (conferences, workshops...). Required information includes (i) Document identification, (ii) Availability and status, (iii) Spatial specificity and main purpose, and (iv) Ecosystem assessment elements. Uploading the required information is expected to require less than 10 minutes per document. The uploading tool is available here: <http://biodiversity.europa.eu/ecosystem-assessments/virtual-library/resources/add/literature>.

Providing feedback on the tools and further developments needed

Feedback will be provided to the EEA through voluntary participation to the meeting foreseen in June 2013.

Please express your willingness to participate – on a voluntary basis - in such testing meeting, to be organised either in Brussels or in Copenhagen – by 10 June to Valerie.Laporte@eea.europa.eu copy to Alina.Hossu@eea.europa.eu. EEA will short after call for the meeting attaching the list of volunteer testers.

A few examples of questions that the testing phase could document is provided below.

1. Is it possible to upload full information for one document within feasible time?
2. Is the information collected useful and adequate? (if not: what else is needed/what could be dropped?)
3. Do we need to develop additional module(s) for documenting in more details any issue/method (e.g. mapping, valuation, scenario...)?

4. Which statistics, to be derived from the library, could be of interest? (e.g. No. of documents per country; No. of documents per ecosystem; per issue, etc.)
5. Which additional functionalities would be useful? (e.g. See “my contributions” to the virtual library)
6. Other