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ASSET OR TALKING SHOP? MAKING THE MOST OF THE ESABCC

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European civil society and the European Parliament strongly advocated for establishing an independent advisory body during the EU Climate Law negotiations, building on successful national models. The EU must now promptly follow through with its commitment and ensure the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (ESABCC) delivers the expected benefits.

The Management Board of the European Environment Agency (EEA) will officially appoint the ESABCC's members on 24 March. In this briefing, we dive deep into what will be needed to make the most of this new body.

Benefits and a sense of urgency

Independent, science-based **advisory boards** are necessary to foster and maintain political leadership in driving ambitious climate action. If properly mandated, such institutions can provide the evidence base to politicians and citizens to promote action. They can also contribute to holding policymakers accountable for their political decisions, especially when actions fall short. Finally, advisory bodies play a key role in ensuring policy consistency with climate commitments, and building international credibility and legitimacy for climate action.



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The **IPCC report**¹ highlights the need for independent advisory bodies that enhance knowledge on climate risks and impact – as well as for better institutional frameworks and policies. This provides for a scientific basis of the highest authority for the crucial importance of strong governance frameworks to successfully manage the energy transition and the impacts of climate change.

Being an enabler for the Green Deal, the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (ESABCC) requires a swift and qualitative implementation. In order to effectively deliver the anticipated benefits of the ESABCC – and make the most of this new body – the implementation should be built around a set of ambitious as well as realistic requirements.

The ESABCC: What's in a name?

The European Climate Law recognises the need for scientific expertise and data as the precondition for effective and accountable climate action. For this reason, **policymakers agreed** that “an ESABCC should be established to serve as a point of reference on scientific knowledge relating to climate change by virtue of its independence and scientific and technical expertise”.

The independence of the Advisory Board is one of the necessary hallmarks to effectively carry out the work. Still, the ESABCC will be supported by the European Environmental Agency (EEA), which will host its Secretariat and is responsible for appointing its members. On 24 March, the EEA Management Board will appoint the 15 senior scientific experts, with no more than two coming from the same member state, for a 4-year term (renewable once).

According to the European Climate Law, the expert panel of the ESABCC is tasked with:

- > Understanding the impacts of latest scientific developments on EU climate policy.
- > Providing advice on the effectiveness of existing and proposed EU policies.
- > Identifying actions and opportunities needed to successfully achieve the climate targets.

¹ According to the summary for policymakers of the IPCC report, one of the limits of successful climate adaptation is the “Lack of climate literacy at all levels and limited availability of information and data pose further constraints to adaptation planning and implementation”. Moreover, one of the identified enabling conditions for climate adaptation is “Enhancing knowledge on risks, impacts, and their consequences, and available adaptation options promotes societal and policy responses.”

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- > Contributing to sharing scientific knowledge across the EU and increasing broader awareness of climate science and its impacts.

The panel's composition will have to represent a broad range of skills to ensure these tasks are fulfilled (see box below).

Panel composition

The EEA Management Board is required to ensure an appropriate balance of expertise across the range of relevant disciplines, with a strong scientific background being the underpinning criteria for the selection.

Considerations should include:

- > Expertise must cover mitigation and adaptation, with an emphasis on mitigation.
- > Expertise is required in different sectors (energy, buildings, agriculture, mobility).
- > A range of disciplinary skills will be required, including climatologists, economists, and social sciences (using Working Group 3 of IPCC as a model).
- > There should be a balance across geographies and in gender.
- > Soft skills will be important, including communications and teamwork.

How to deliver the ESABCC's potential

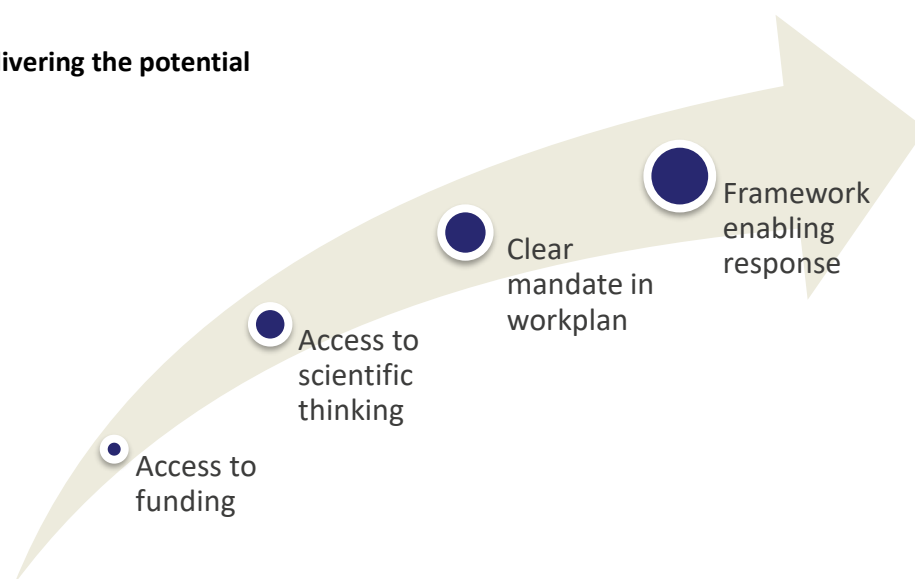
The delivery of the ESABCC's potential will strongly depend on its practical implementation. In particular, the following factors will be critical for its success:

- > Access to funding.
- > Access to the latest scientific cross-disciplinary thinking.
- > A clear mandate, mirrored in its workplan.
- > A clear framework for response to and visibility of its work



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Delivering the potential



Access to funding

To effectively carry out its mandate, the ESABCC will require the appropriate access to funding. The activities of the ESABCC will be funded through the EEA budget, which is part of the overall EU budget. This is proposed annually by the European Commission and must be approved by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. The annual EU budget must remain within the ceilings of the Multiannual Financial Framework.

Therefore, it appears that there is budget provision to cover the operations of the ESABCC and the support staff, but not necessarily one that allows the Advisory Board to undertake much-needed additional work, such as research and outreach to the broader scientific community.

There must be budgetary possibilities for this as well. Formal links of the ESABCC and other EU processes, such as the Horizon Europe Framework, could fill this gap. The ESABCC could recommend the high priority research and other investigative work that should be undertaken and, in return, receive complimentary funding through this vehicle.

Access to “state of the art” of scientific thinking

The 15 appointed scientists, however big their expertise, cannot tackle alone all the tasks that have been given to the ESABCC. One of the most challenging tasks of the Advisory Board is to be able to rapidly assimilate complex scientific information and to translate that into a form that policymakers can use to make decisions.



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An early challenge for the ESABCC will be to set the process for receiving the latest scientific insights. This might involve setting up formal sub-groups, focusing on certain key issues (e.g. climate science), or establishing a cross-disciplinary network of experts who can be called upon to provide input when required. This network should provide general input, but it could also be used for commissioned in-depth research.

This outreach by the ESABCC might include the following groups:



Next to this, the policy side should not be snowed under by the advisory function of the institution. Producing sound advice, after all, will not always be enough to influence the policy process. The panel's Chairperson will have a particularly challenging role in this sense. They must have the ability to access, understand and advise key decision-makers, while being an effective public advocate for the work of the panel (see box below).

Chairperson's role and skills

The Panel Chairperson can significantly contribute to an effective follow-up from the ESABCC's work. Producing sound advice will not always be enough to influence the policy process.

The Chairperson must:

- > Have the ability to access, understand and advise key decision-makers;
- > Be an effective public advocate for the work of the panel.



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Whilst the Climate Law prescribes that the Chairperson be selected from within the ranks of panel members, the EEA Board should ensure that it selects one or more panel members who could undertake this demanding task.

Clear mandate, mirrored in the workplan

The definition of the first workplan will be a make or break moment for the real political impact that the ESABCC will have. Clarity and ambition will be key to giving the advisory body the necessary weight and authority, which creates space to focus on the tasks it has been appointed to carry out. The first workplan will set the bar – not only for the 2022 work but also for the future ones.

It is critical that the initial workplan strikes a balance between creating impact and ensuring it can deliver high-quality advice. That balance should build upon realistic perceptions of what the body is responsible for doing. This will require prioritisation and wide consultation on the initial tasks it needs to undertake.

The European Climate Law does not define the timescale for the workplan, which could, therefore, cover one or more years. Whilst a single year would fit better with the budgetary process, a multi-year plan would enable setting a longer-term strategic direction. **The best possibility would therefore be to establish a hybrid approach, with an identification of big priorities to cover four years, combined with a more detailed annual plan.**

The ESABCC can build on lessons learned from existing national advisory bodies. Best-practices exchanges between the two levels should be incentivised as much as possible in this initial phase. The following suggestions for the 2022 workplan are a combination of **what is seen** in the national advisory bodies—including independent checking and monitoring of governmental climate action; consulting, evaluating, recommending climate policy development; and facilitating input into the climate governance system.

The 2022 workplan should at least include:

- > Monitoring effective and timely implementation of the ‘Fit for 55’ package.
- > Assessing the ambition of FF55. Exploring options to increase this ambition and to respond to unexpected shocks/events where needed. This includes guidance to ensure short-term responses to crisis will not undermine the medium/long term commitments



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- > Providing the scientific basis for setting the next stage of policy targets covering the period between 2030 and 2050, including the EU's GHG budget before mid-2024 as required by the EU Climate Law.
 - > Assessing policy consistency with climate objectives. The Commission needs to publish its review by 30 September 2023.

It is important that the ESABCC establishes itself within the policy process. This means that it must be prepared to engage in potentially controversial or complicated topics where political constraints could lead to inconsistent outcomes with the climate neutrality goal. Such topics might include the gas package, the energy market reform, and the need to accelerate the digital engagement of consumers in zero emissions products and services.

A clear framework for response

The political impact of the ESABCC work will crucially depend on the political response that it will trigger, particularly from the Commission. However, the European Climate Law does not include any obligation to respond to the advice provided. In the absence of a legislative requirement, the relevant institutions must adopt a strict process for publicly responding to, or asking for, advice from the ESABCC. The exchange with existing national advisory bodies is a suitable way to learn best practice examples on how to establish a clear framework for response.

As its key ally for the delivery of EU climate actions, the European Commission should support an increased impact of the ESABCC by starting the habit of publicly explaining how the ESABCC advice is being taken forward (or not) in its future legislative proposals. The European Parliament should also be included in the process. It can play a role in reviewing advice from the ESABCC and taking this on Board in its assessments of Commission proposals/initiatives.

Where to go from here?

The stakes are clear, as are the critical success factors. The fact that this institution will take up its activities during a major geopolitical crisis raises the stakes even more.

The delivery of the ESABCC potential will, however, require strong collaboration right at the start of its activities. Existing national advisory bodies can provide technical support with full respect for its independence. In the longer term, these bodies should mutually reinforce their work and outreach to make the most out of their mandates in the respective constituency.



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About E3G

E3G is an independent climate change think tank with a global outlook. We work on the frontier of the climate landscape, tackling the barriers and advancing the solutions to a safe climate. Our goal is to translate climate politics, economics and policies into action.

E3G builds broad-based coalitions to deliver a safe climate, working closely with like-minded partners in government, politics, civil society, science, the media, public interest foundations and elsewhere to leverage change.

More information is available at www.e3g.org

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