



Minutes Alternet Council meeting

Virtual – 26 February 2021

Host

INBO, Belgium

Contact

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Council Participants

1. Maurice Hoffmann, Council Chair, INBO
2. Ana Lillebo, Council Vice-Chair, CESAM
3. Jiska van Dijk, MB Chair, NINA
4. Alison Hester, James Hutton Institute
5. Ben Delbaere, DC
6. Davide Geneletti, DICAM
7. Hans-Peter Grossart, IGB
8. Eeva Primmer, SYKE
9. Eszter Kelemen, ESSRG
10. Joan Pino, CREAM
11. Johannes Peterseil, EAA
12. Jørgen Rosvold, NINA
13. Mihai Adamescu, UNIBUC
14. Nicolas Dendoncker, ILEE
15. Reinier Hille Ris Lambers, WENR
16. Rob Alkemade, PBL
17. Robert Kanka, ILE-SAS
18. Stefan Klotz, UFZ
19. Thierry Caquet, INRAE
20. Ulf Grandin, SLU

Also present

21. Tyler Kulfan, Alternet Secretariat
22. Adriana Cliville Morato, CREAM
23. Floris Van den Broeck, INBO
24. Juliette Young, UK-CEH
25. Petteri Vihervaara, SYKE

1. INFO: Welcome and start meeting – info (Maurice) no docs

The meeting commenced at **9:00 on Friday, 26 February 2021**. Chair Maurice Hoffmann welcomed all those present. The participants were asked if they agreed to the recording of the council meeting; approval was unanimous.

The discussion of the prior Council meeting was inconclusive in terms of budget approval and finalization. Consequently, an activity to prioritize Alternet activities and reassess the budget was organized by the Management Board. The second major topic for discussion that has emerged is the prospective call to be launched by Horizon Europe in April 2021 on a Science Service Mechanism, which may be of high interest to Alternet.

2. DECI: Council Minutes, approval (Maurice) DOC01

Maurice questioned whether the Council agrees to approve and publish the minutes of the previous meeting (distributed by Secretariat Tyler Kulfan) on the website.

Decision: Approval of the 2020 Council Meeting minutes was unanimous.

3. INFO: Budget projections for 2021-2025 - “Alternet Budget plus projections 2021-2025_Baseline and Minimum” (Reinier) DOC02

Reinier Hille Ris Lambers organized a meeting with Maurice and Jiska to discuss future budget projections. Chair Maurice Hoffmann invited Reinier to present a summary of his financial assessment to the Council presently. Reinier shared his spreadsheet and provided an overview of types of costs (e.g. operating costs) and the balance of income received with costs. Different financial scenarios (e.g. Eclipse not achieving self-sufficiency, etc.) were produced by Reinier to better understand the risks that are being taken and make sure Council actions are more informed as budget decisions are made.

Alison Hester asked if the spreadsheet is to be filled in live today throughout the meeting; MB Chair Jiska van Dijk noted that the MB will handle this work following the official approval of activities by the Council. Ben Delbaere questioned the static nature of the cost projections; Reinier noted that the projections were not indexed and that such an exercise could be conducted. Maurice noted that the costs and income should not be stable in the future and that the Secretariat is looking proactively into new membership. Reinier noted that another means of increasing income would be increasing fees for certain activities, such as non-Alternet member participation in the Summer School.

The Alternet Council will commence with reviewing and deciding on the Alternet budget now and in the future taking current and future costs, incomes, and projections into account.

4. INFO: Results prioritization exercise (Jiska) DOC03

The next item of discussion was the prioritization of activities and decisions on the activities that were selected for 2021 and beyond.

The Council members were asked prior to the present meeting to share their activity/budget priorities on behalf of their institutes. Jiska van Dijk shared the results of this prioritization activity from those partners who participated. Fourteen partners submitted their priorities within the timeframe given, and their responses are the basis of the average ranking shown in the priorities spreadsheet. Stefan Klotz noted that certain activities could be merged (such as SPI items). In terms of infrastructures, Stefan noted that the role of Alternet should be promotion and lobbying; as such, funding infrastructure within Alternet is not important but developing a strategy for promotion would be. Generally, he agreed with the mean ranking. INRAE's rankings were not received in time, but Thierry confirmed that its priorities are closely aligned with the mean priorities presented by Jiska. Ana Lillebo on behalf of CESAM and Eeva Primmer on behalf of SYKE also expressed agreement.

Maurice stated that he feels comfort with Stefan's idea of no longer serving as a funding body for infrastructure and instead emphasizing promotion, and addressed whether it would make sense to organize relevant items (SPIs) into single spreadsheet lines. Alison stated that it was helpful to vote on the individual items, as that level of detail from the Council in terms of support for activities is valuable. The importance of distinction between the broad role of the Council and the specific role of the MB in activity oversight was noted. Spending flexibility was stressed as of importance by Jiska and it was observed that Alternet always functions under budget. Subdivision methods will be taken into consideration moving forward.

5. DECI: Budget allocation 2021 and beyond (Maurice, Jiska) DOC04

Jiska van Dijk shared and reviewed the revised budget proposals of the Alternet MB.

Communications proposal as revised by Adriana with more specific figures (see DOC04). Jiska noted that the total sum of €6,0000 is only necessary and likely to be used in the case that the conference is held.

Summer school costs, income, and cost projections were reviewed. As Alternet is now an NGO, students will be required to pay a VAT. Whether or not the Summer School is to be held is still inconclusive; it is possible the school will be held but with far fewer students. The discussion with the Biodiversity Partnership could result in more funding for the Summer School, but this likewise remains inconclusive to date.

The 2019 **conference** cost €22,000; as such, a fee of €125 for Alternet partners and €175 for non-partners is proposed for the 2021 conference is proposed. As far as possible, the conference will be organized to be self-sustaining financially. It is anticipated that the conference will be held in person but delayed until the Autumn.

A proposal for alternating funding between **MSR and AHIA** was presented. The annual AHIA call for proposals was not launched due to the suspension of funding following the prior Council meeting; and the previous MSR and AHIA projects are still ongoing, due to complications and delays resulting from the pandemic. It was noted that the MSR call needs to be rewritten, as it presently costs €60,000 for three years; and, if it is to alternate with AHIA, a one year €15,000 project will be more appropriate.

Eclipse was extended as a project thanks to a COVID request. This provides operating money, in addition to income from an established DG MARE request; and another French request appears highly promising. The Eclipse mechanism's first call for requests of the year has recently been launched and it appears more requests will be forthcoming. The request income is contingent upon deliverables; as such, the proposal for a €35k buffer will serve as a loan and will remain to ensure salaries in the case of issue with deliverables. Marie's Eclipse document including costs and projections (based on assumptions of at least two requests per year) was shared and reviewed.

A website development **SPI** project to design a one-stop-shop for SPI was separately proposed; the anticipated SPI seminar streaming costs are no longer expected, as this can be done freely via Zoom. A website development for the new **Call Sharing** clearinghouse mechanism has also been proposed, as a one-time cost project.

Maurice shared his opinion that both higher activity fees and higher income from more partners is needed. Simon Smart, who is replacing Bridget Emmett as the UK-CEH representative, presented an update on the current AHIA project. Alison raised her support for the alternating MSR/AHIA proposal. She also suggested the possibility of alternating Conference/Summer School years, if needed.

Maurice questioned whether there is a general agreement concerning the new suggestions for 2021 (column G on the suggestions of the MB for 2021 activities). Reinier noted that if we agree to these proposals, we will be operating on a deficit for 2021. Specific questions concerning the Eclipse costs document were raised and addressed; it was clarified that the investment in Eclipse is ultimately net-zero. It was also clarified that Alternet iNGO could reinvest surplus money returns that were invested in Eclipse. There is a great deal of confidence at the moment that Eclipse will be self-sustaining (at a minimum). A positive balance from Eclipse will be principally allocated to Alternet.

Decision: The Council accepts the proposals of the MB for the 2021 budget and activities. It was additionally agreed that a meeting would be held in the future to discuss the strategic future of Alternet for the next 4-5 years. Discussions of Eclipse will be included within this meeting.

6. INFO: Overview replies received back on the questions around the Science Service Mechanism call (Maurice) DOC5

The next item of discussion centered around the Alternet initiative to look into the interest among members to participate in preparing a proposal on the expected (not yet decided) call on the Science Service Mechanism from Horizon Europe.

The proposed call on a science service mechanism by Horizon Europe closely aligns with the work and mission of Alternet. As such, Maurice launched a questionnaire on interest in the participation of Alternet and its individual partner institutes in this science service, including willingness to contribute with cash, in-kind, willingness to lead a proposal, and willingness to allow non-Alternet partners to be involved (e.g. OPPLA). 19 reactions to the questionnaire were submitted. SYKE has responded with willingness to take lead in coordinating a proposal and, ultimately, the project.

Alison suggested that non-Alternet members engaged with Alternet in the project could be encouraged to become members.

7. DISC: Presentation by SYKE on their preliminary ideas on coordinating the SSM (Eeva)

DOC06: presentation Eeva Primmer

Eeva Primmer presented on the preliminary ideas of SYKE for coordinating the Science Service Mechanism. This call is highly important for safeguarding biodiversity, ensuring high impact contribution from member states, and for Alternet to advance in terms of its ambition, position, and visibility. A successful project would build on existing networks and SPI mechanisms (Eclipse, OPPLA, MAIA), EC mechanism, and organizations beyond Europe, such as Ipbes and CBD. Eeva presented SYKE's profile, emphasizing that its portfolio firmly meets the needs of such a project. Eeva Furman would serve as the coordinator. If Alternet consortium as such were to lead proposal building, SYKE would suggest hiring someone to serve as coordinator. Maurice thanked Eeva for her presentation and the willingness of SYKE to lead.

Maurice noted that the launch for the call is expected in April and that there is a high degree of certainty that the call will be launched. Alison Hester noted the value in having Alternet lead and questioned if it would be possible for SYKE to coordinate the project while Alternet is presented as its leader. The pros and cons of SYKE versus Alternet leadership were discussed and weighed. Maurice stated that he thinks it is too early for Alternet to serve as the true lead in this proposal, particularly as there was very little interest to support the proposal with cash contributions from partners (only in-kind).

Dialogues between Alternet and the Biodiversity Knowledge Centre and the Biodiversity Partnership are ongoing. Maurice stated that the Biodiversity Knowledge Centre is anticipated to be the major client of the science service. Ben Delbaere expressed willingness to engage and no intent to compete with Alternet on behalf of OPPLA. Eeva similarly expects similarly positive sentiments and no issues from PEER.

Decision: The Council accepts SYKE's leadership in proposal preparation and project coordination of the proposed Science Service Mechanism, with a clearly recognizable role of Alternet and its other partner institutes.

Formulation of the text outlining the specific nature and role of the partnership, coordination, and engagement between Alternet, SYKE, and the other Alternet partners concerning this call will continue. Maurice requested that partners elaborate on their responses given concerning the Science Service Mechanism.

8. Any Other Business:

No other items were suggested

A meeting on further cooperation between Alternet and PEER was proposed by Eeva Furman. MB members Jiska van Dijk and Marie Vandewalle will engage on behalf of Alternet, and will be involved in the PEER roadmap along with Reinier.

Conclusion

Chair Maurice Hoffmann thanked all those present for their engagement and contributions to the discussion. The meeting closed at 12.00.