

Proposed Discussion Topics for October 3 ROE Panel Teleconference

Issues for the Letter

1. Tone: balance between support for ROE and recommended improvements

Weisberg: prefers more balance in letter, and would focus on 2 key improvements: (1) better definition of audience, and (2) better integration of sustainability.

Daniel: perhaps add a summary or conclusion section to the report to re-emphasize importance of ROE as an important opportunity for EPA to communicate to broad audience of publics, scientists and technical experts, and regulated industries

Murphy: Perhaps in the letter, we can better distinguish those recommendations that we think EPA can address right now to improve the ROE (i.e., restructuring the indicators) from those that may require more background work and will be addressed in future versions (i.e., focus groups).

2. Letter: simplify the recommendation about restructuring the ROE

Murphy: e.g., “the ROE could be restructured so it is easier to navigate and provides information in a more coherent and logical way”

3. Letter/Exec Summary: add mention of the importance of including more recent data in the ROE (Arvai, L. Johnson)

Clarifying SAB Panel’s Advice

4. Executive Summary and elsewhere: ROE as a “Report” versus a collection of indicators

Opaluch: the website isn’t a report in the traditional sense. Panel could emphasize the need for a synthesis or summary of findings or answers to the 24 questions, although recognizing that such a set of conclusions might be controversial. E.g., Executive Summary (page 2, lines 1-7).

5. Executive Summary and elsewhere: Parallel Tracks for Different User Audiences

Opaluch: Executive Summary (page 2, lines 8-14): One suggestion to meet the needs of diverse audiences is to have separate parallel tracks, where the interested public would be led along one line, while more technical users might be led along another line. A “How can We Help You?” might be useful, where the web site might ask a series of questions about what the user is looking for (e.g. detailed data to download, versus an overview or environmental status and trends)

This would also be a good place to emphasize that it would be useful to employ focus groups or other formal methods to obtain feedback from different users and potential users to find how the site could better meet their needs.

6. Executive Summary: Recommendation about adding “non-environmental, human dimensions” to the ROE

e.g., Executive Summary, page 2, bullet at lines 29-30

Rodewald: can the panel clarify what type of “non-environmental, human dimensions” should be added?

Daniel: Suggest instead using the phrase “environmentally relevant human dimensions”

Arvai: not sure about a separate bullet for non-environmental indicators. Emphasis is on indicators of sustainability, not the economic and social indicators themselves. Recommends adopting the language now in Section 3.2.4 (on page 13, lines 23-28).

7. Executive Summary: should SAB suggest regular SAB reviews of ROE (i.e., annual reviews)? (Arvai)

8. Section 3.1.1 and elsewhere: Definition of Sustainability and the “Three Pillars”

e.g., Section 3.1.1--page 6, lines 4-14; Recommendations in section 3.1.1

Theis: prefers the more extensive **definition** found elsewhere on the EPA website, over the one in the ROE

Roy: agrees panel should recommend a **definition**; he prefers the first one (on the ROE site), which would not require EPA to develop pages on economic and social pillars. These areas are not within the research and regulatory focus of EPA to the extent that natural resources are.

Frey: add text to end of “definition of sustainability” paragraph on p. 6: “Furthermore, EPA should distinguish between sustainability as a desired status or condition, and progress toward sustainability, in which the current status or condition may not be sustainability, but is a transition toward sustainability.”

Opaluch: Exec Summary (page 2, lines 29-30): some examples of useful **economic and social indicators** of sustainability might be emissions per unit GDP and/or emissions per capita; agricultural pollution per dollar of agricultural output (or per ton food production); food production per acre, income inequality or distribution of income, etc.

Frey: for the discussion of **Economic and Social Pillars** (p. 6), perhaps we should give some examples of what we mean by externalities... e.g., does this refer to adverse effects on human health and damage to ecosystems?

Roy: can panel provide any specifics on how **life cycles** would be considered in the ROE, especially when the focus is national scale?

9. Section 3.1.1 and elsewhere: Sustainability Trade-offs

Roy: page 7, lines 9-10: “Sustainability is said to involve or at least allow for...”**trade-offs**”. What definition is this based on? Not sure I agree that EPA needs to present the concept of trade-offs in ROE. How would it be presented?

Arvai: I’m not sure if the discussion of **tradeoffs** on page 7 really captures the discussion we had about the issue. To me, sustainability is a target that is defined by the tradeoffs one is willing or encouraged or required to make between resource use and conservation (broadly defined). These tradeoffs will be different at different times, and under different circumstances (e.g., based on the constraints placed around decision-making processes by policy makers/regulators). So, in this sense, sustainability is a moving target. This is why we need to take a systems perspective in the ROE; one that accounts for the various dimensions of sustainability that the EPA has set forth as priority areas linked to environmental protection (i.e., social, economic, and environmental indicators).

10. Section 3.1.1: Discussion of the Sustainability Framework Diagram

Roy: page 5, lines 26-30: not sure this criticism of the simplified diagram is warranted, not sure how a diagram could convey the “richness of the literature”—If there is such a diagram, provide a reference or delete these sentences.

11. Section 3.2.1 and elsewhere: Sustainability Tab and/or Integrating Sustainability with other Themes

e.g., 2. Executive summary, page 2 lines 24-26, and again in Section 3.2 (page 10, lines 36-42)

Theis: panel should decide and not be on the fence about this. I favor a separate tab for sustainability AND integrate sustainability indicators throughout the other categories. To remove the sustainability tab would diminish its importance at a time when the Agency (and the SAB) are trying to elevate it to a more visible status. Elsewhere in the report we have suggested many additional indicator data sets that could fit under the sustainability tab, and have shown how many of the existing indicators, grouped under one or more other tabs, could also fit under sustainability. This is consistent with how the report has always been organized (from the beginning): many indicators are used more than once; such an approach is self-integrating. The last four lines (39-42) beginning “Depending on...the tab may need to be renamed” should be struck.

Frey: Perhaps we can dispense with the mixed opinions in the teleconference, but in any case I don't think there were mixed opinions that sustainability should be better integrated throughout the ROE, and this point should be clear.

12. Section 3.2.1 and elsewhere: Including Key Stories

Roy: e.g., Section 3.1 (page 12, lines 8-10): can panel define what is meant by a “key story?” Is there a danger that EPA will be accused of cherry-picking these stories? Causality

October 2, 2014

among many different indicators is not always easy to present as a story. Is it not better to let the data speak for themselves?

Frey: for last recommendation in Section 3.1.2 (using the framework as a tool for integration) on page 9, perhaps we should add that we are not expecting extensive or comprehensive coverage of all possible combinations, but rather some cogent illustrative examples to illustrate the thought process.

13. Sections 3.2.6 and 2.3.7: Clarify Recommendations for Additional Data

Roy: panel should provide specifics on data sources to be used to address different questions. In the past, the data sources used are primarily from EPA and other federal agencies. If panel is suggesting that data from peer-reviewed literature be incorporated, not just federal data sources, this is considerable broadening of the potential scope of ROE.

Frey: Page 16, lines 21-23: regarding the suggestion that the WARM model be used to derive benefit estimates from waste recycling: while this is a good idea, a key tenet of the ROE is to use measured data rather than derived data. Thus, perhaps we should tone down recommendations such as these.

Johnston: Page 18, line 4: After “specific human uses” consider adding the sentence: “The National Estuary Program (<http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/nep/>) might be a source of relevant, comparable data for high profile estuaries.”

Parkin: Page 18, line 7: Data on local water restrictions and bans are not very reliable nor do they serve as very good indicators of human health risk. If these are added to ROE, limitations of the data need to be clearly stated. I feel that we should point out the need to comment on limitations, where we mention these types of data.

Parkin: Page 18, lines 16-19: Indicators of resistance and resilience: this should be expanded with a few additional sentences. It merits more definition and depth.

Parkin: Page 19, lines 2-3: would like a reference that discusses pros/cons of Green Regional Product or other similar approaches

Parkin: Page 19, 12-13 (also p. 33, lines 28-29): these health outcome metrics all have limitations for use in the ROE; these limitations will need to be clearly stated if these data are included in ROE

Theis: recommend that newest data on GHG emissions be added for Energy Use indicator to emphasize the relationship between GHG and economic activity

14. Section 3.3: Incorporating Statistical Information

Roy: hesitant to recommend statistical tests be applied to national aggregate data where original authors have not done so; e.g., for freshwater data, the data come from different states with differing methods and different sample sizes; applying statistical test to the aggregate does not improve the quality of the analysis.

Frey: Page 20, line 34 (and Page 21, line 20): Weight of evidence is often used to evaluate causality. The EPA Cancer Assessment Guidelines, and the Integrated Science Assessments developed under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, are examples of this. However, this text seems to refer more to "lines of reasoning" rather than "weight of evidence," per se. In any case, some references should be cited here.

15. Section 3.3: IPCC Approach to representing uncertainty

Roy: Page 20, lines 14-23: the IPCC approach seems hard to apply generally across the range of metrics in ROE. If the recommendation stays in, the panel should provide an example that pertains to one or more ROE indicators.

Frey: Page 20, lines 14-23: Qualitative terms about uncertainty are ambiguous and interpreted differently by different individuals. Thus, the use of qualitative terms may obfuscate or confuse, rather than provide insight. If qualitative terms are used, it is critical that their quantitative definition be reported and readily available to the user.

16. Section 3.4 and elsewhere: Level of Priority and Timeline for Recommendations

Rodewald, Daniel: Time frame (short versus long term) and relative priority (high, medium, low) only specified in Section 3.4: does panel agree with those in section 3.4, does panel want to provide that level of detail in other sections?

R. Johnston: Develop and use consistent terminology for time frame and priorities for all recommendations

Murphy: Perhaps in the letter, we can better distinguish those recommendations that we think EPA can address right now to improve the RoE (i.e., restructuring the indicators) from those that may require more background work and will be addressed in future versions (i.e., focus groups).

L. Johnson: p. 22, lines 28 and other: be consistent about providing priorities and level of effort; be clear about which recommendations are highest priority.

17. Section 3.4.2 and 3.5.1: Focus Groups

Johnston: the report language might be broadened to reflect the fact that focus groups are not the only possible method that the Agency might use to gather relevant information on site usage, clarity, usability and performance. Focus groups are a primary method that should be recommended, but other approaches (e.g., one-on-one interviews and site testing with individual users, or surveys of potential users to evaluate information needs) could also be effective.

18. Section 3.5.1: Questions for Site Users

Parkin: for the list of questions on p. 2, the last question in the list could be dropped because it is a question for the agency rather than for potential users

19. Section 3.5.2: Advice on Primary Audience

L. Johnson: page 28, lines 10-12. Perhaps I am misinterpreting this recommendation, but as worded I disagree with this recommendation. The EPA states who their primary audiences are, and the general public is not at the top of that list (pg 27 lines 1,2). We cannot expect EPA to devote scarce resources to reconstructing the ROE for use by the public, when they are not the primary audience.

20. Section 3.5.3 (Structure of Individual Indicators):

Rodewald: On pages for individual indicators, proposed Levels 3 and 4 have potential to overlap substantially.