

Concept for the COMMON FORUM

1. Background

When establishing its secretariat after 2005, the first cooperation agreement came into force at the beginning of the 2nd secretariat period by 2008.

Since 2008, the **cooperation agreement** recognises COMMON FORUM (CF), as an informal network (see Art. 1: Scope) established by national governments and agencies in EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland holding an interest in technical and policy issues regarding contaminated land and groundwater management.

The cooperation agreement established a permanent secretariat, running for a three year period. The tasks of the secretariat (see Art. 4) were defined as:

- Being the formal speaker (spokesman) on behalf of CF;
- Organising CF meetings – usually two (2) meetings per year;
- Managing and developing communication and information exchange;
- E-Newsletter (3-4 per year);
- Research Agenda for Contaminated Land Management;
- Hosting and maintaining the CF Website;
- Developing the network, its mission, objectives and activities in order to contribute to preparing a European Agenda in contaminated land management during the upcoming years (with respect to the EU Green Deal and UN Sustainable Development Goals);
- On-going support (questionnaires, answers to CF members);
- Networking (e.g. EC, IMPEL, NICOLE, SEDNET, SOILveR + CABERNET);
- Represent CF at the Advisory boards of European projects (on the basis, that travel and accommodation costs are covered and reimbursed by the specific European projects);
- Identifying candidates to host a meeting of the International Committee on Contaminated Land (ICCL) meeting regularly held every two (2) years;
- Hosting the ICCL Website.

In the cooperation agreement the ‘Agenda Committee’ (see Art. 2, Constitution and responsibilities of the agenda Committee) is described as consisting of CF members from countries and regions offering the full contribution during the period of three (3) years; its responsibilities are:

- Assisting the secretariat in drafting meeting agendas;
- Providing guidance in the activities of the Secretariat;
- Evaluating the performance of the secretariat.

Until now, the secretariat has provided most functions of the network, including organizing and chairing meetings, representation to other networks, as well as regular secretarial services. It has been increasingly difficult to recruit a candidate willing and capable of providing the complete package. The budget has stayed more or less constant over the past 20 years, meaning it has been diminishing in real terms. In addition, we may face continued budget cuts, limiting the options for contributions as well as increasing travel restrictions.

During the meetings in Bern (autumn 2024) and Luxembourg (spring 2025), the future of the network was discussed. Based on the inputs the present concept note has been drawn up. It outlines a proposed future framework for COMMON FORUM beyond 2025.

2. Objective

The objective of the COMMON FORUM is to share and develop knowledge on contaminated land management and related subjects within Europe.

In order to pursue this objective the COMMON FORUM will:

- Maintain a network and platform for policy makers, regulators and technical advisors;
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences;
- Establish and maintain a discussion on policy, research, technical and managerial concepts;
- Offer knowledge and expertise to the European Commission, European Institutions, international networks, relevant industry networks, research and regulator networks.

A previous version of the objective is formulated in the Cooperation Agreement¹.

3. organisational structure

The COMMON FORUM is an informal network consisting of policy makers, regulators and technical advisors within management of soil contamination in Europe. Europe in this context is seen as the 27 European Union (EU) Member States, plus UK, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Türkiye, the six cooperating countries from the West Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, [North Macedonia](#), Montenegro, Serbia, and [Kosovo](#)) and countries supported by EU's Instruments [for Pre-Accession Assistance](#).

Meetings and information exchanges generally refer to the *Chatham House Rule*. The network is dynamic, and the activities within the network are dependent on the resources and contributions made available by the members. The definition of **members** or representatives is relatively open. Thus Liaisons from other networks may be invited to join the network. The organizational structure is shown in figure 1.

The **Agenda Committee** consists of the members who are contributing financially to the network. The agenda committee elects the chair, the vice chair and secretariat. Each country has one vote. Members of the agenda committee can raise topics for the attention of the board at any given time.

The chair is appointed for a three-year term. The term may be extended. The vice chair is initially appointed for a two-year term (2025-2027), then subsequently for three-year term. The term may be extended. The initial difference in length of term between the chair and

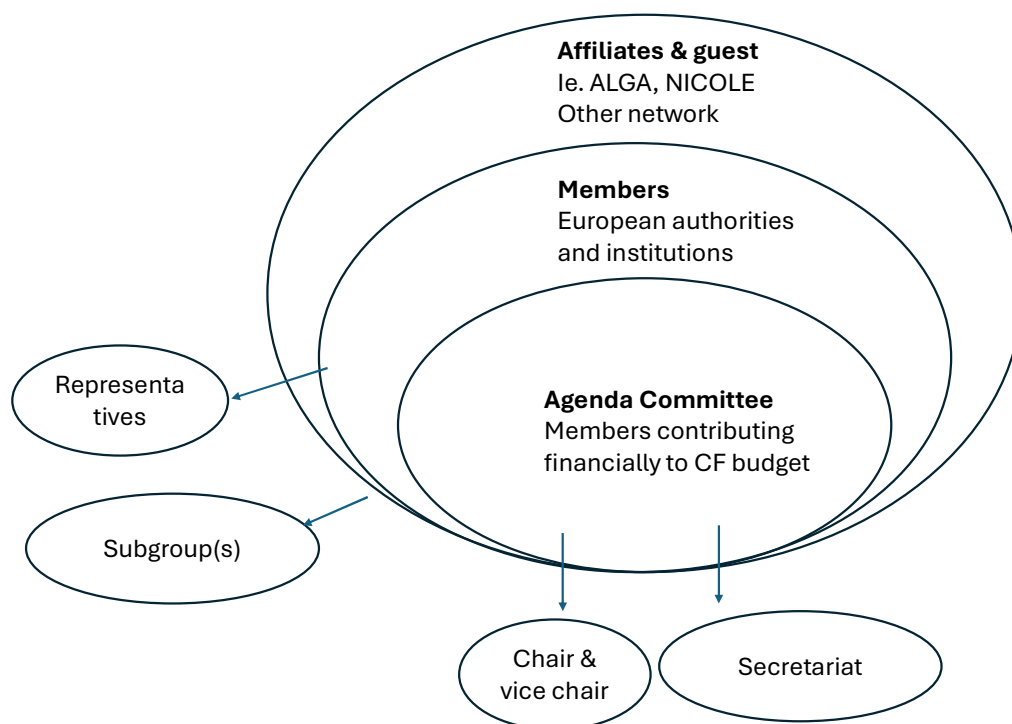
¹ The general objective in the cooperation agreement is formulated as “to develop strategies for managing and remediating contaminated land management and for land recycling with respect to protect natural resources. The COMMON FORUM has adopted the following mission statement:

- Being a platform for exchange of knowledge and experiences
- For establishing a discussion on policy, research, technical managerial concepts of contaminated land,
- For initiating and following-up of international projects among its members
- For offering an exchange of expertise to the European Commission and to European networks

the vice chair is intended to prevent a simultaneous change and to ensure continuity. Collectively, the chair and vice chair are the authorized signatories of the COMMON FORUM. The chair and vice chair are the spokespeople for the COMMON FORUM. The chair, the vice chair and the secretariat divide the administrative responsibilities amongst themselves.

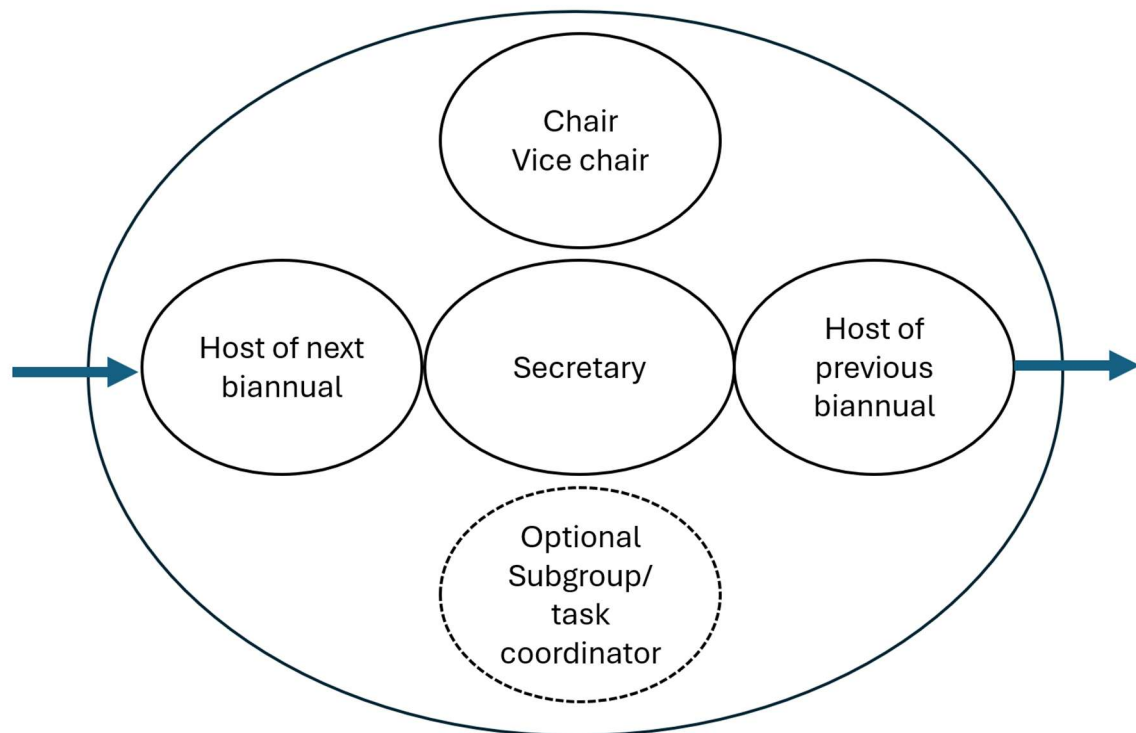
The purpose of the **board** is to coordinate the activities in the network and to ensure sufficient knowledge exchange to the wider forum. The board consists of the chair, the vice chair, the secretary and the hosts of the previous as well as of the next biannual network meeting. This insures a revolving engagement. The organization of the board is shown in figure 2.

Figure 1. the structure of the COMMON FORUM.



The intention is to promote a robust structure not depending on one single person, while cementing a clear responsibility. The chair, subsidiarily vice chair, calls meetings of the board and sets the agenda. Board meetings may be called whenever relevant but should be held at least four times a year. Sub group coordinators and network representatives may be included when relevant. The agenda committee shall meet at least once a year, either by extension of a board meeting or during a biannual meeting.

Figure 2. the organization of the board.



The network depends on volunteers to **represent** COMMON FORUM in other networks and expert groups, and the participation in and coordination of **thematic subgroups**. Subgroups may be formed to pursue specific topics or deliverables, within the COMMON FORUM alone or in cooperation with other networks or entities. The subgroups report to the board and are obliged to share their findings in the wider network. The constitution, tasks and deliverables of any subgroup are determined and described upon installation of the group, by the group itself.

The **secretariat** is hired by the agenda committee for a period of 3 years. The chair may propose a company or a natural person as secretary. The tasks of the secretariat are agreed more specifically between the chair, vice chair and the secretary.

The duties of the secretariat include:

- Maintaining a member list, accessible to members
- Hosting and maintaining a CF web page
- Publishing a number of newsletters a year in cooperation with the members
- Maintain an information sharing platform
- Providing ongoing support in relation to collection and dissemination of questionnaires, answers questions by CF members
- Keeping track of contributions and the collection thereof
- Preparing the annual budget and accounts
- Taking and distributing minutes of meetings of the agenda committee and the board
- Helping the host in organising the biannual meetings

- Ensuring follow up on scheduled meetings

Subgroups perform their own secretarial tasks.

4. Deliverables

Twice a year COMMON FORUM will organise a network meeting. These **biannual meetings** typically last three days, and include the exchange of knowledge through presentations and discussions. Agenda Committee meetings may be included in the program when needed. Related networks and representatives from regulators and policymakers in similar subjects may be invited for the meetings. The program is organised by the board in cooperation with the hosting member. The Biannual meetings are under the *Chatham House Rule*. The hosting of the biannual meetings is rotated between the member organisations.

In addition to the biannual meetings the COMMON FORUM may deliver a range of activities and outputs. These include but are not limited to:

- Disseminating relevant information amongst its members
- Following of and contributing to European legal initiatives on soil contamination, in particular pertaining to the Soil Monitoring Law
- Contributing opinions to EU soil policy
- Representing the COMMON FORUM in the Soil Expert group
- Facilitating subgroups and their meetings
- Maintaining an online shared work space
- Supporting national initiatives and information collection
- Participating and representing COMMON FORUM in other related networks
- Supporting related initiatives and knowledge exchange

The prioritisation of tasks is done by the board in consideration of the priorities of the general members and the resources available and offered.

5. Budget

The budget commitments as of January 2025 until December 2027 amount to 71.250,00 € annually, incl. VAT. The annually available budget excl. VAT for the same period is 58.744,13 €, + 10.000 € in kind contribution from EAA (Austria).

Cost element	Remarks	€ (excl. VAT)
Secretariat	Including travelling costs	30.000
Webpage		13.000
Board funds	May be allocated by the board as remuneration or for other purposes	15.000
Total		58.000

The secretariat shall hold a reserve amount sufficient to at least ensuring the contractual obligations of the network. As COMMON FORUM is an informal network, the contractual basis

is established in the Cooperation agreement between the Agenda Committee members and the secretariat.

6. Cooperation Agreement

A cooperation agreement is drawn up every three years between every member of the Agenda Committee and the secretariat. Specifications of the deliverables and conditions for the secretariat are defined in the cooperation agreement. The standard financial contribution is set to € 7.000 / year or € 21.000 for a secretariat period of three years for each member, including VAT, but contributions like VAT may vary from country to country. As rates of VAT differ, the contribution in relation to VAT maybe be revised in the coming budget period. In addition to financial contributions, the cooperation agreement also recognizes contributions in kind, as well as one-off donations. This contribution should be quantified where possible and the deliverable specified.