European Vegetation Archive (EVA)

Data Property and Governance Rules

Discussed and approved during the European Vegetation Survey Workshop in Vienna on 26 May 2012.[1]

1. The status and purpose of EVA

The European Vegetation Archive (EVA) is an initiative of the Working Group European Vegetation Survey (EVS) of the International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS). The purpose of EVA is to establish and maintain a single data repository of vegetation-plot observations (i.e. records of plant taxon co-occurrence at particular sites, also called phytosociological relevés) from Europe and adjacent areas and to facilitate the use of these data for non-commercial purposes, mainly academic research and applications in nature conservation and ecological restoration.

2. Data contributions to EVA

Database owners or representatives who are willing to provide vegetation-plot observations from Europe can become members of EVA through application to the EVA Governing Board. Any database owner or representative can contribute all or just a subset of its vegetation-plot database to EVA. Databases contributing at least 5,000 vegetation-plot observations not previously included in EVA will be accepted if they meet the technical requirements specified by the EVA Coordinating Board; smaller databases may be accepted upon the discretion of the EVA Governing Board if they contain important data from regions or vegetation types that are poorly represented in EVA. With small databases (in particular those with less than 5,000 vegetation-plot observations) EVA encourages the owners or representatives to contribute these data to any relevant national or regional databases that are part of EVA, rather than contributing them separately.

Vegetation-plot observations are contributed to EVA by the custodians. A custodian is a person who owns the contributed data, or an authorised representative of all contributors of a collective database (i.e. a database containing data contributed by more than one person). Each database contributed to EVA is represented by one custodian and optionally one deputy custodian. EVA will deal only with the custodians or deputy custodians.

In the case of collective databases, it is the custodian's responsibility to solve intellectual property rights and authorship rules within the group of contributors before the database is contributed to EVA. EVA will not take any responsibility for data mishandling on the part of the custodians.

The rights of individual database owners or representatives will not be affected by contributing data to EVA. Original databases will remain in place and continue their activities in data acquisition, editing and use for various purposes. It is expected that data updates and corrections will be mainly done in the original databases rather than EVA and data updates from the original databases will periodically be sent to EVA to replace previous, outdated versions.

---

[1] Inspired by the *Intellectual Property Guidelines for the TRY Initiative*

3. EVA governance

EVA is governed by the EVA Council and the EVA Coordinating Board.

The EVA Council consists of the custodians of all databases that have contributed vegetation-plot observations to EVA, each database represented by one custodian. Changes of these Rules and the election of the EVA Coordinating Board are made with a majority vote of the EVA Council. Any votes in the EVA Council are weighted by factor of 1 for custodians of the databases with 1–10,000 vegetation-plot observations contributed to EVA, factor 2 for databases with 10,001–100,000 vegetation-plot observations and factor 3 for databases with > 100,000 vegetation-plot observations.

The EVA Coordinating Board consists of 4–7 persons who are responsible for everyday business, including data flow and management, applications for EVA membership, data requests, correspondence with data applicants, technical development of the EVA platform, handling species synonymy, public relations, applications for external funding and decisions on any issues not dealt with in these Rules. The EVA Coordinating Board is elected by the EVA Council for a four-year term with the possibility of re-election. Any person proposed by a custodian is eligible. At least one of the EVA Coordinating Board members must be a member of the EVS Steering Committee.

4. Data availability regimes

At the time of data submission or update, the custodians assign one of the following data availability regimes to the data contributed by them, either for the whole database or its individual subsets:

Regime 1: *Free-access data* are available to a wider community of users. These data can be released based on the proposal to the EVA Coordinating Board, with no need for special approval.

Regime 2: *Semi-restricted-access data* are available for data contributors only (i.e. custodians of databases included in EVA or persons approved by one of the custodians), but without the need for a specific permission in each single case. However, these data remain the property of the custodian or a group of people represented by the custodian. The custodian will be informed by the EVA Coordinating Board at least three weeks before the release of data. If no objection is raised during this time period, it will be assumed that the custodian has given the permission to use these data for the particular purpose.

Regime 3: *Restricted-access data* are available for data contributors only (i.e. custodians of databases included in EVA or persons approved by one of the custodians) and their use depends on the permission of the respective data custodian. These data remain the property of the custodian or a group of people represented by the custodian. The custodian must be contacted any time when there is a request to use these data. The terms of data use must be negotiated in each specific case.

The EVA initiative encourages a gradual transfer of data contributed to EVA from Regime 3 to Regime 1, but the decision on the regime is entirely upon the custodians. The custodians may, at any time, change the regime category of their data or withdraw their data from EVA.

5. Data requests and terms of data use

Individuals or groups of individuals who would like to use the EVA data for research or application purposes submit a proposal to the EVA Coordinating Board describing the aims, basic methods and an approximate delineation of the data set they would require. With respect to data under Regimes 2 and 3 only proposals submitted by the custodians of databases included in EVA will be considered. Other persons may ask for these data provided their request is approved by one of the custodians. Custodians typically approve data requests of those persons who contributed data to the database for which the respective custodian is the owner or representative.

The proposal should contain (1) the applicant's name and address, (2) the project title, (3) a brief description of aims and methods of the study, (4) the estimated time of delivery of results, e.g. manuscript submission, (5) a specification of the data needed (geographic area described as countries, counties or range of geographic coordinates, vegetation type or other selection criteria), (6) the envisaged publications, (7) a proposal how to handle the authorship in publications based on the data from EVA, (8) an explicit statement that the applicant agrees with these Rules.

Each proposal will be considered by the EVA Coordinating Board, which will check (1) whether the applicant is eligible to obtain data according to these Rules, and if so, (2) whether there is a reasonable link between the aims, expected outputs and data requested, and (3) whether these rules are respected.

The EVA Coordinating Board will send the applicant the list of custodians who must to be consulted about data availability and authorship arrangements. EVA will release the data to the authors of the proposal after receiving the approval from the respective custodians.

The EVA Coordinating Board will make efforts to deliver the data as fast as possible, but the speed of this service may be affected by the available labour force and funding. Upon data delivery the applicants should deliver the result (e.g. a manuscript ready for submission) to the EVA Coordinating Board within three years. After this time they lose their mandate to use the data. Each paper using EVA data should be sent to the EVA Governing Board before submission for a check whether the data were used in accordance with these Rules. This check will not deal with the scientific quality of the manuscript and the EVA Governing Board members will keep any information contained in the manuscript confidential.

The applicants are not allowed to pass any data obtained from EVA (including those under Regime 1) to third parties or use them for purposes other than stated in the original proposal. Data obtained from EVA can be used for non-commercial purposes only and the final product (publication, report, software application) should contain a proper citation of the original data sources (or at least the main sources if there are many sources) and of the EVA database. Recommended references will be provided by the EVA Coordinating Board.

The titles of projects that have received data from EVA, together with the names of applicants, can be published on the EVA website. The applicants will send the papers based on the EVA data to the EVA Governing Board upon their publication and links to these papers can be added to EVA website. The applicants are encouraged to report any errors found in the data to the custodians of the original databases.

6. Authorship

Authorship of papers or reports based on EVA data under Regime 3 should be negotiated for each particular proposal between the applicant and those custodians who represent the databases that are sources of the data used in the project.

The recommended good practice for the applicants is that they offer co-authorship to at least one representative of each database whose data (1) account for more than 10% of the final dataset used in the particular project or (2) are particularly important for the project result (e.g. they represent a unique vegetation type or geographic area which is not documented in other databases). Becoming a co-author implies the possibility to contribute to the general concept of the product, data analysis and/or interpretation of the results. When in doubt, an inclusive, rather than a restrictive criterion should be applied.

Custodians representing collective databases should handle any offer of co-authorship received via EVA according to the internal rules or established practices of their database, for instance by proper allocation of the right of co-authorship to the person(s) who contributed to their database most of the data used for the particular project.