

**Report**  
**49<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Canberra, Australia, 5 November 2019**

*As accepted at the 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee Meeting.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Chair: Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa.

**1 OPENING AND PREPARATION FOR GEO-XVI PLENARY**

**1.1 Welcome from Co-Chairs and Secretariat Director**

**1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 49.1 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The agenda was adopted with the addition of one item regarding proposed changes to rules for GEO membership, to be addressed under item 3.5.

**1.3 Review of Requests from Participating Organizations and GEO Associates (Documents 49.2 and 49.3 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The Secretariat recommendations on the candidates for Participating Organizations and for GEO Associates were accepted.

**Action 49.1:** The Secretariat to consider changes to the Participating Organization and GEO Associate application forms to collect more information which is relevant to determining whether to accept the application. **Due: 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.**

**1.4 Review of Nominations to the Programme Board (Document 49.4 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The slate recommended by the Secretariat was approved.

**Action 49.2:** The Secretariat to reach out to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) to identify opportunities for their engagement with GEO and the GEO Work Programme. **Due: 31 January 2020.**

**1.5 Review of Nominations to the Mid-term Evaluation Team (Document 49.5 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The recommendations of the Secretariat were accepted. The funds available to provide travel support to evaluation team members from developing countries is to be determined in consultation with the Budget Working Group.

**1.6 Budget Working Group Report and GEO-XVI Financial Documents (GEO-XVI-8.3, GEO-XVI-8.4 and GEO-XVI-9)**

**Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee endorsed the proposed 2020 GEO Trust Fund Budget for presentation to the GEO-XVI Plenary for approval.
- Executive Committee members thanked the Budget Working Group for their preparation of the budget and for their sound management of the Trust Fund.

**1.7 Results-oriented GEOSS and Proposed Design and Proof-of-concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub (GEO-XVI-6.1 and GEO-XVI6.2)**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee acknowledged the good progress that was made on the proof of concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub.

**Action 49.3:** A revised GEO-XVI-6.2 document to be prepared, with the following text to appear on the cover page:

*GEO Plenary will take note of the proposed proof of concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub. GEO Plenary is expected to decide on whether to delegate authority to the GEO Executive Committee to oversee its further development. Should the GEO Plenary so decide, the GEO Secretariat, in consultation with the GEOSS Implementation Development Task Team and the GEO Programme Board, will propose a plan for further development of the GEO Knowledge Hub, to be presented for decision to the GEO Executive Committee at its March 2020 meeting.*

**2 GEO WEEK, GEO-XVI AND MINISTERIAL**

**2.1 Final Report of the Ministerial Working Group**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee thanked the members of the Ministerial Working Group and the Australian hosts for their excellent work in organizing the GEO Week 2019 events.

**2.2 Review of Ministerial Documents (MS 1, MS 2.1, MS 2.2, MS 2.3, and MS 4.2)**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee took note of the changes to the Ministerial agenda.

**2.3 Review of Plenary Documents for Decision or Discussion (GEO-XVI-1.3, GEO-XVI-1.4, GEO-XIV-7.2, and GEO-XVI-8.5)**

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Work Programme will be presented to the Plenary for approval, but not including the terms of reference of the Working Groups. The call for members of the Working Groups will be deferred until after the approval of the terms of reference by the Executive Committee.

**Action 49.4:** Executive Committee members to send comments on the terms of reference for all Working Groups. **Due: 15 January 2020.**

**Action 49.5:** The Programme Board is requested to review the comments and proposed revised terms of reference. **Due: 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.**

**2.4 Review of Plenary Documents for Information (GEO-XVI-2-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-3-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-4-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-5-Inf-01, and GEO-XVI-7-Inf-01)**

**Outcome:** No concerns were raised regarding the documents.

### **3 SECRETARIAT BUSINESS OUTCOMES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**3.1 Draft Report of the 48<sup>th</sup> Session (Document 49.6 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The report was adopted as distributed.

**3.2 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 49.7 – for decision)**

**Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee closed Actions 48.2, 48.3, 48.4, 48.7 and 48.8.
- Actions 47.10, 48.5 and 48.6 will be addressed at the 50<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting.
- Action 48.1 will be addressed at the 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.

**3.3 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 49.8 – for information)**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee took note of the report.

**3.4 Programme Board Report (Document 49.9 – for information)**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee thanked the Programme Board for its work throughout the year.

**3.5 Any Other Business**

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee endorsed the proposal from Australia to request (under agenda item 8.5) that Plenary create a process to review the criteria for GEO Membership, with a recommendation to be brought to the Executive Committee. The Lead Co-Chair will present the proposal on behalf of the Executive Committee.

**3.6 Review of Outcomes and Actions**

**3.7 Closing Remarks**

## Report

### 49<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting

### Canberra, Australia, 5 November 2019

#### FULL REPORT

**Tuesday, 5 November 2019**

*Meeting convened at 10:30*

Chair: Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa.

#### **1 GENERAL BUSINESS**

##### **1.1 Welcome from Co-Chairs and Secretariat Director**

Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa Co-Chair, welcomed members and thanked the Australian hosts. He noted the ease of finding the various venues and in engaging with other participants, noting the work over many months to complete the preparations. In particular, he drew attention to the efforts of Australia over the year, not only in the planning for GEO Week, but also on Digital Earth Africa. Mr Muofhe also recognized the work done by the Executive Committee over the course of the year, which dealt with a wide range of issues. Mr Muofhe observed that the Executive Committee would be reviewing many documents for the Plenary and the Ministerial Summit. There would be discussion of how to take GEO forward, but also how to measure and document the progress that has been achieved. He noted that a good number of ministers would be attending, which is due to the efforts of Executive Committee members in encouraging their ministers and also to the Australian government. Mr Muofhe stated that he looked forward to constructive discussions and decisions on the Results-oriented GEOSS and the GEO Knowledge Hub. Finally, he recognized the valuable work that had been done over the year by the Programme Board.

Li Pengde, representing China Co-chair, expressed his pleasure at being in Canberra, noting that this would be the last Executive Committee meeting before the Plenary. He thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the documents. Mr Li noted the heavy workload in 2019 for GEO and also for Asia-Oceania GEO, which focused on the Mekong basin, small island states, and the Himalaya mountains. He drew attention to the successful 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-Oceania GEO Workshop which was held in Jakarta in April 2019 and to the 12<sup>th</sup> Asia-Oceania GEO Symposium which concluded the previous day. Mr Li expressed his satisfaction with the good cooperation that has been developed between GEO and UN-GGIM, as exemplified by the 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary meeting of the UN-GGIM-AP held during GEO Week.

Patrick Child, European Commission Co-Chair, thanked Australia, in particular Stuart Minchin and Jonathan Ross, for their warm welcome. He stated that the commitment to GEO and GEOSS in Europe remains strong. A new generation of leaders in the European Commission is coming in and they are placing a strong emphasis on the digital agenda and its challenges, which is very relevant to GEO. Mr Child expressed his wish that the

European Commission continue to show leadership within GEO. He noted several important topics for discussion at the meeting, especially those dealing with the Results-oriented GEOSS and the GEO Knowledge Hub, stating that it would be important to get the tone and the messaging right regarding what would be decided on the proposal during the Plenary. Mr Child thanked the Ministerial Summit planning team and the other co-chairs on their productive work in preparing the Declaration, including balanced and appropriate language on some sensitive issues.

Stephen Volz, United States Co-Chair, remarked that it was great to be back with Executive Committee colleagues, noting the good discussions that took place in the lead-up to GEO Week. Mr Volz observed that GEO now has the attention of the United States political leadership. He noted that the GEO Work Programme is the heart and soul of GEO and the ability to deliver on these commitments will demonstrate what GEO can provide. He stated that ministers' recognition of GEO's value is growing and that he anticipated a positive outcome from the Ministerial Summit.

Gilberto Camara, GEO Secretariat Director, thanked the Australian hosts on behalf of the Secretariat and praised the great work of the team in putting together the Declaration. He acknowledged the work of the Secretariat, in particular that of Patricia Geddes and Steven Ramage, in the preparations for GEO Week. Mr Camara said that he looked forward to the renewed mandate for GEO in the new Declaration and the announcements that were expected from GEO Members during the week. He noted that the visibility of GEO has been much enhanced in recent years, and closed by thanking the Lead Co-chair for his leadership through 2019.

#### 1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 49.1 – for decision)

Australia requested time in the agenda to raise an issue with the GEO Rules of Procedure regarding country membership. The Lead Co-chair stated that the item could be raised under item 3.5 Any other business.

**Outcome:** The agenda was adopted with the addition of one item regarding proposed changes to rules for GEO membership, to be addressed under item 3.5.

#### 1.3 Review of Requests from Participating Organizations and GEO Associates (Documents 49.2 and 49.3 – for decision)

Patricia Geddes, Senior Administrative Manager in the Secretariat, presented the recommendations regarding the candidate Participating Organizations (POs). In doing so, she noted that the Executive Committee requested at its 48<sup>th</sup> meeting that the Secretariat contact the first two listed organizations to obtain further information, which was done.

Australia stated that they had no issues with the recommendations. The increased interest from organizations in Africa to engage with GEO was noted. The Secretariat was encouraged to respond to organizations that were not approved as POs in a positive way and to encourage their engagement in GEO in other ways.

The European Commission agreed with the recommendations and thanked the Secretariat for obtaining the additional information. The Commission proposed that

consideration be given to inclusion of more probing questions in the application, as had been previously suggested by Switzerland.

The United States agreed with the recommendations. The involvement of Regional GEOs in the review of some candidate organizations was noted as a good practice.

Ms Geddes then presented the recommendations regarding the candidates for the GEO Associates category.

Australia requested some additional information regarding Terradue. Italy responded that they have been strongly involved in various European projects, and with the European Space Agency and the Open Geospatial Consortium. Their involvement in GEO Work Programme activities has spanned about 10 years.

China stated that they agreed with the recommendations, and that the standard that the applicants are expected to support GEO activities, either global or regional, should be retained.

Germany asked that the Secretariat assessment address each of the defined criteria separately. Germany also stated that applicants rejected as POs should not automatically be accepted as Associates.

The Secretariat Director responded that the Secretariat relies on the assessments by the GEO Member of the applicant's country as to whether they meet the criteria or not.

Italy suggested that, to improve the process of reviewing the applications, more information be obtained from the applicants and provided to the GEO Members.

Germany said that their understanding of the process was that the Secretariat gathers the required information through the form, then does a first assessment against the criteria. The information is then forwarded to the GEO Member for confirmation. The decision on acceptance is taken by the Executive Committee, not by the GEO Member.

The United States observed that the process was a collaborative one between the GEO Member and the Secretariat. Both may have information that is not held by the other.

Australia said that there is agreement on all sides of the process. There should be a conversation between the Secretariat and the relevant GEO Principal.

Switzerland proposed that the application form be extended to allow the assessment to be completed without needing to go back to the organization for more information, either by the Secretariat or the GEO Principal.

**Outcome:** The Secretariat recommendations on the candidates for POs and for GEO Associates were accepted.

**Action 49.1:** The Secretariat to consider changes to the Participating Organization and GEO Associate application forms to collect more information which is relevant to determining whether to accept the application. **Due: 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.**

#### 1.4 **Review of Nominations to the Programme Board (Document 49.4 – for decision)**

Craig Larlee, GEO Work Programme Coordinator in the Secretariat, presented the recommendations for the slate of Programme Board nominees.

The European Commission stated that they agreed with the recommendations and thanked Alessandro Annoni, the outgoing principal representative, for his service. The decision by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to not apply for a new term was noted.

China said that they also agreed with the recommendations. They also shared the concern regarding WMO. China welcomed the interest from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) and acknowledged UNOOSA's space application programs. They also said that GEO should fully engage them in some way.

Japan stated that they supported the Secretariat proposal and noted that the Programme Board has contributed greatly to GEO and is increasingly important. Japan strongly supports the Programme Board.

The United States supported the proposed slate of candidates, although noted some concern with the change in balance between GEO Members and POs. This was due to not enough nominations from POs. It was noted that one person had been nominated as a representative from two Programme Board members; this should not be accepted, but it was expected that the situation would be resolved.

South Africa noted some concern with the decision to not accept the nomination of UNOOSA.

Germany expressed the view that there should not be a limit on the number of seats on the Programme Board, which would then allow all applicants to be accepted.

Mr Larlee cautioned against removing the limit on the number of seats, as this may have a detrimental impact on Programme Board cohesion and functioning. This approach had been tried in 2016.

Switzerland said that GEO needs the best experts on the Programme Board. The Programme Board is not the best means to engage the UN system; there are too many organizations to accommodate them in the Programme Board.

The United States noted that the Secretariat proposal was to re-engage with UNOOSA, similar to the guidance the Executive Committee has given on the review of the POs. This is an example of the Executive Committee's own design of the process play out.

**Outcome:** The slate recommended by the Secretariat was approved.

**Action 49.2:** The Secretariat to reach out to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) to identify opportunities for their engagement with GEO and the GEO Work Programme. **Due: 31 January 2020.**



### 1.5 **Review of Nominations to the Mid-term Evaluation Team (Document 49.5 – for decision)**

Mr Larlee presented the Secretariat recommendations regarding the Mid-term Evaluation. In particular, he emphasized the need for Executive Committee guidance regarding travel support for nominees from developing countries.

The United States stated that they concurred with the recommendations, including the request for additional funds.

Japan said that they also agreed with the recommendations. They also stated their intention to nominate a person to the evaluation team.

The Secretariat Director proposed that the Secretariat discuss the availability of funds with the Budget Working Group.

South Africa accepted the recommendations and said that the Budget Working Group should ensure that the budget covered the travel support.

Australia observed that there may be funds available from the working capital fund, if needed. The highest priority, however, is to ensure that everyone pays their share to the Trust Fund.

**Outcome:** The recommendations of the Secretariat were accepted. The funds available to provide travel support to evaluation team members from developing countries is to be determined in consultation with the Budget Working Group.

### 1.6 **Budget Working Group Report and GEO-XVI Financial Documents (GEO-XVI-8.3, GEO-XVI-8.4 and GEO-XVI-9)**

Ms Geddes presented the budget, highlighting the travel expenses item as this is one of the few parts of the budget in which there is some flexibility.

Virginia Burkett, United States member of the Budget Working Group, reminded Executive Committee members that they had already reviewed the financial statements at their 48<sup>th</sup> meeting. She said that GEO finances are in good shape and cover all obligations to the WMO. This meant that there should be room to allocate funds for the evaluation team. The Budget Working Group had recommended that the travel budget needed to stay at the same level as it was previously, if not increase.

Australia noted that, when times were tough, the Secretariat took a bit hit to the travel budget. Now that finances have recovered, it is time to increase the travel budget, especially with the interest in GEO from new regions such as the Pacific. There is a need for the Secretariat to engage with others around the world, and travel is a necessary component to achieving engagement.

The European Commission noted that a replacement is needed for the Australian member of the Budget Working Group.

South Africa observed that the financial statements do not include contributions to Regional GEOs, as they do not go through the Trust Fund.

Australia suggested that contributions to Regional GEOs might be shown on the statements as extra-budgetary.



China noted that it would announce a contribution to the Trust Fund during the Plenary and is working toward providing a secondee to the Secretariat.

The Lead Co-Chair encouraged all GEO Members to contribute to the Trust Fund, as this supports the work of the Secretariat across all areas. He noted that travel is not a luxury for the Secretariat, but an essential aspect of the work they are tasked to do.

**Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee endorsed the proposed 2020 GEO Trust Fund Budget for presentation to the GEO-XVI Plenary for approval.
- Executive Committee members thanked the Budget Working Group for their preparation of the budget and for their sound management of the Trust Fund.

**1.7 Results-oriented GEOSS and Proposed Design and Proof-of-concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub (GEO-XVI-6.1 and GEO-XVI-6.2)**

Gilberto Camara introduced the item. He reminded Executive Committee members that the GEO Knowledge Hub (GKH) emerged as a recommendation from the Expert Advisory Group process. The proof-of-concept of the GKH had been requested by the Executive Committee and would be shown to the Plenary. If agreed by Plenary, the Secretariat would then prepare an implementation plan for the GKH. Mr Camara then noted that, as the Co-Chairs had requested a live demonstration at the meeting, he turned to Paola De Salvo, Information Technology Officer in the Secretariat, to present the demonstration.

The European Commission said that they were grateful to the Secretariat and the rest of the team for their work on this topic, noting the interesting progress that had been made. The Commission welcomed the orientation toward working with cloud facilities and open software to create a helpful tool to access and use the knowledge created in the GEO Work Programme activities. It was noted that this approach is similar to the path being taken in many other organizations to bring together and organize their information and tools. It was necessary, however, to understand the process more clearly. Is Plenary being asked to endorse the design of the GKH and to mandate the Executive Committee to decide on the details? The Commission believes that, given the limited time that the Executive Committee and the Plenary have had to understand the concept, they are not in a position to make such a decision. Instead, the Plenary should be asked to “take note of” the concept. The Executive Committee should look at this again at the 51<sup>st</sup> meeting to determine where it should go from there.

The United States thanked Ms De Salvo and the team for the presentation. The collaborative approach used to develop the proof-of-concept was noted and appreciated. It was observed that the document suggested the need for an implementation plan. The United States believes that this plan must be tested with the GEO community to ensure it is likely to meet their needs. It was suggested that the pilot of the GKH be considered to have been completed, but it is necessary now to get feedback from the community.

Australia said that the idea of a repository for the various knowledge resources is a good one. However, this could require significant resources for storage and computing. A second issue is with curation. It is unreasonable to expect that curation will be done for all resources in the GEOSS Platform, although it may be possible for resources in the

hundreds or thousands. What is the process for resolving disputes about whether the resource is of sufficient quality to be included? The next steps are also not entirely clear. Australia stated that the Plenary should be asked for approval to continue exploration under the direction of the Executive Committee.

China noted that the GKH is likely to require very comprehensive work by many stakeholders to connect all the various types of knowledge resources. This will require standardization of concepts and shared building with all stakeholders.

The Lead Co-Chair cautioned Executive Committee members against giving different and conflicting direction at each meeting.

Germany proposed that the GEOSS Implementation Development Task Team be asked to give a technical assessment of the proposal. Stakeholders should also be asked to give feedback. The assessment should consider the cost dimensions and the rules.

The Secretariat Director referred to the last paragraph in document GEO-XVI-6.2. This follows the recommendation of the Executive Committee at its 48<sup>th</sup> meeting. Everything has been done in accordance with the directions of the Executive Committee. Mr Camara asked whether the Secretariat will be allowed to continue the work. Is the Executive Committee empowered to oversee the next steps? He stated that everything that would be done from this point will be done in consultation with the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team. He noted that it was not the intention to store significant volumes of resources by the Secretariat, most of the resources will be hosted by other services. Mr Camara also pointed to the change in terminology from “curation” to “mediation”. He agreed that the next phase must include testing and response from the GEO community. He concluded by asking the Executive Committee to define a clear way forward.

Switzerland stated that it was important to head in the direction of results, but how GEO goes there is the question. GEO needs to work together, not just the Secretariat in isolation. The Programme Board is there to help. There is relevant expertise in the Member countries. GEO must consider the comments raised in Plenary for directing the further work required. This will be a trial and error process, trying things in a cooperative way, respecting all comments and contributions. As China had said, what is needed now is consultation.

The United States noted that the GKH is now part of the GEO Work Programme. By endorsing the GEO Work Programme, the Plenary endorses further work on the GKH. The last paragraph in the document captures the way forward well.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee acknowledged the good progress that was made on the proof of concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub.

**Action 49.3:** A revised GEO-XVI-6.2 document to be prepared, with the following text to appear on the cover page:

*GEO Plenary will take note of the proposed proof of concept of the GEO Knowledge Hub. GEO Plenary is expected to decide on whether to delegate authority to the GEO Executive Committee to oversee its further development. Should the GEO Plenary so decide, the GEO Secretariat, in consultation with the GEOSS Implementation Development Task Team and the GEO Programme Board,*

*will propose a plan for further development of the GEO Knowledge Hub, to be presented for decision to the GEO Executive Committee at its March 2020 meeting.*

## 2 GEO WEEK, GEO-XVI AND MINISTERIAL

### 2.1 Final Report of the Ministerial Working Group

Iain Williams, co-chair of the Ministerial Working Group, spoke on behalf of the group. He started by thanking the team for their efforts over many months, noting they had met 22 times. Their work built on the experience of Japan in 2018. Mr Williams noted that the political leadership team was a very useful innovation which provided helpful steering from a higher level. He thanked the Secretariat and Australia for organizing the meetings, observing that many of them were either early morning or late night in Australia. The team had focused on some key areas, which were delivered. The papers for the Ministerial Summit were an innovation. Mr Williams observed that confirming speakers was at times a challenge, as some were no longer available at a late stage in the planning. He noted that the working group had documented lessons learned from the process to assist the next teams. Members of the group had not always agreed on everything, but the collegial atmosphere had been fantastic. Finally, he thanked his fellow co-chairs, Virginia Burkett and Stuart Minchin, and the rest of the team for making the process a rewarding experience.

Ms Burkett added that the Ministerial Working Group did not deal with the logistics matters, as these were handled by Australia and the Secretariat. She also noted that the number of registrants was the largest ever for a GEO event and that the Industry Track looked to be very successful in attracting participants.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee thanked the members of the Ministerial Working Group and the Australian hosts for their excellent work in organizing the GEO Week 2019 events.

### 2.2 Review of Ministerial Documents (MS 1, MS 2.1, MS 2.2, MS 2.3, and MS 4.2)

Patricia Geddes described the changes to the draft agenda of the Ministerial Summit, noting changes to the China and United States Co-chairs.

Iain Williams described the three background papers for the Summit. There were no comments from Executive Committee members on the papers.

Ian Williams then reviewed the draft Canberra Declaration. He noted that it had been through many iterations within the leadership group and the Ministerial Working Group. It was then circulated to all GEO Members and POs. He observed that this was the hardest paper to produce and had taken account of all feedback received. Mr Williams stated that the current version had been agreed by all GEO Members, so far as was known. He also noted that it would be presented to Plenary first, in case there were any further comments.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee took note of the changes to the Ministerial agenda.

### 2.3 Review of Plenary Documents for Decision or Discussion (GEO-XVI-1.3, GEO-XVI-1.4, GEO-XIV-7.2, and GEO-XVI-8.5)

Patricia Geddes identified the changes that had been made to the Plenary agenda. She noted that the reference to document GEO-XVI-6.2 would need to be changed to “for discussion” based on the earlier discussion.

Australia advised that a request was anticipated from another country during the GEO Work Programme item to reclassify the Digital Earth Africa Community Activity to a GEO Initiative. Australia would respond to this request to say that the required documentation would be submitted to the Programme Board.

Germany asked whether the endorsement of the GEO Work Programme would include the terms of reference of the Working Groups. The Secretariat Director responded that it would. Germany then proposed that the terms of reference be revised to state that the Working Groups were accountable to the Programme Board.

The United States concurred with the proposal from Germany and stated that they had some issues with the terms of reference of the Climate Working Group. Further review was needed of the terms of reference of all of the Working Groups.

The European Commission agreed that it was necessary to look again at the mandates of the Working Groups before they are finalized.

Australia advised Executive Committee members that an announcement would be made during Plenary in item 7.1 regarding an offer from Google. Google would offer to the GEO community credits to use its cloud computing technology Google Earth Engine, as well as offer to work with GEO Work Programme activities to share their results via Google Earth Engine for facilitate the scaling of GEO Work Programme results. It was noted that contributions to the GEO Work Programme have always been welcomed and do not need to be approved by the Programme Board or others in GEO. The details of how this will work can be resolved over the coming months, but this should not delay the announcement of the offer.

The Programme Board Co-chair supported the approach proposed by Australia. GEO should welcome the contribution.

Switzerland said that, while in the short term it may seem advantageous to accept these offers, they might have longer-term consequences for GEO, such as for sustainability. GEO should be cautious about locking in specific technologies or in dealing with one company over others. Additional reflection is needed on these offers.

The European Commission stated that they were uncomfortable with the process which led to this announcement. The choice of commercial partners should be conducted in an open and transparent way. GEO should deal with all of the companies that indicated their interest.

Australia replied that there was a call and an open opportunity for companies to contribute. Discussions are still underway with other companies but they have not yet made offers. GEO should not wait for all companies to come forward before accepting other contributions. All contributions should be welcomed.

The Secretariat Director provided additional clarifications regarding the process. The Secretariat issued an open call and received expressions of interest from six companies. The Secretariat then had a teleconference with each of the companies, explaining the conditions that would apply to all. The Director noted that each company has its own business model and that all were interested but most needed to go back for internal discussions. The process was handled in the same way with all of the companies. Throughout, the Secretariat has promoted the use of open-source technologies and the process has been conducted in a way that reduces the danger of vendor lock-in.

China observed that all countries work with the private sector. However, it is unclear what will happen after the first period. What are the sustainability arrangements? Second, the data is itself a resource to these countries. Who has ownership of the derived information and knowledge? Will this be specified in the agreements with the companies?

The Programme Board Co-chair stated that the choice of which GEO Work Programme activities work with the service provider must be left to the activities themselves, this cannot be decided by the Programme Board. But the Secretariat should provide information on the risks and benefits associated with each. There should also be a way of sharing experiences among the Work Programme activities that are working with the service providers.

Switzerland asked that there be more strategic thinking and a general framework to guide these efforts. This must go beyond a case-by-case basis.

The European Commission agreed that GEO should not refuse offers or turn contributions away. However, it is important to have an open process. The Commission appreciated the clarifications from the Secretariat on the interactions with the various companies. The danger is that the spirit of the GEO community may become diluted by the interests of the commercial providers. The Commission issued a plea for a clearer, more transparent process.

South Africa observed that there were two parts to the discussion. First is the process around the call. It was noted that GEO has no control over when contributions come in. Based on the information provided, the Secretariat had performed sufficient due diligence in the process around the call. The second stage of the discussion dealt with the strategic direction, such as how the contributions will be used and under what conditions. This should be discussed by the Programme Board.

Australia reminded Executive Committee members that they had addressed the strategic issues during the development of the commercial sector strategy and the rules of engagement with the commercial sector. Google just announced a contribution to Digital Earth Africa; GEO cannot control who contributes or when.

The Secretariat Director stated that its strategy is to provide access to any contributing cloud services through the GEO Knowledge Hub. Connecting to services from many providers avoids being locked in to any individual company.

The United States noted that the concern about lock-in was addressed by the Secretariat following an open process and receiving interest from multiple providers. Further, the United States co-chair of the Programme Board updated the Executive Committee that the Programme Board was informed by the Secretariat of Google's two-part offer and

agreed that the offer for credits towards the use of Google Earth Engine presented no new issues and supported its acceptance at this time. The Programme Board had also agreed to get involved in the second part of the Google offer to promote select GEO Work Programme results via Google Earth Engine by engaging in discussions with the Google team about the issues related to data rights and privacy.

The Executive Committee agreed with the Programme Board's approach and supported the announcement by Google on their offer to GEO, which would be delivered during the Programme Board's presentation on private sector engagement in the GEO Work Programme to Plenary, provided that the presentation made due reference to the open call and the expression of interest received from other companies.

The Lead Co-Chair summarized by stating that the Executive Committee has already gone through a lengthy process of defining how GEO will engage with the commercial sector. GEO should see the offers of contributions from commercial firms as a positive. GEO is also able to revise the process over time as it learns from the experience.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Work Programme will be presented to the Plenary for approval, but not including the terms of reference of the Working Groups. The call for members of the Working Groups will be deferred until after the approval of the terms of reference by the Executive Committee.

**Action 49.4:** Executive Committee members to send comments on the terms of reference for all Working Groups. **Due: 15 January 2020.**

**Action 49.5:** The Programme Board is requested to review the comments and proposed revised terms of reference. **Due: 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.**

#### **2.4 Review of Plenary Documents for Information (GEO-XVI-2-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-3-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-4-Inf-01, GEO-XVI-5-Inf-01, and GEO-XVI-7-Inf-01)**

Iain Williams presented the documents, noting that each one ends with a set of questions that are intended to stimulate discussion during the sessions.

**Outcome:** No concerns were raised regarding the documents.

### **3 SECRETARIAT BUSINESS OUTCOMES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **3.1 Draft Report of the 48<sup>th</sup> Session (Document 49.6 – for decision)**

Patricia Geddes presented the draft report, noting that it had been circulated for comments and none had been received.

**Outcome:** The report was adopted as distributed.

#### **3.2 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 49.7 – for decision)**

Patricia Geddes reviewed each action item and the proposed response.



**Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee closed Actions 48.2, 48.3, 48.4, 48.7 and 48.8.
- Actions 47.10, 48.5 and 48.6 will be addressed at the 50<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting.
- Action 48.1 will be addressed at the 51<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee meeting.

**3.3 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 49.8 – for information)**

The Secretariat Director presented the report, focusing on the results achieved against each of the 2019 Objectives.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee took note of the report.

**3.4 Programme Board Report (Document 49.9 – for information)**

Ivan Petiteville, Programme Board co-chair, presented the report on behalf of the Programme Board. He described the composition of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme and highlighted the major changes from the 2017-2019 Work Programme. He then described the outcomes of a special session convened by the Programme Board to discuss GEO support to UN-Habitat. Mr Petiteville also reported on a lessons learned review process undertaken by the Programme Board at the conclusion of its 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme development process. He concluded by thanking all the members of the Programme Board for 2020.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee thanked the Programme Board for its work throughout the year.

**3.5 Any Other Business**

Australia raised an issue that emerged as a result of the efforts to engage small island states in the Pacific. It came to light that the Cook Islands and Niue are not eligible to become GEO Members under the current Rules of Procedure even though they are members of WMO and other UN organizations. Australia requested that Executive Committee request that Plenary create a process to consider revising the Rules of Procedure to enable these and other small island states to become GEO Members.

China suggested that these countries could participate in Asia-Oceania GEO even without being GEO Members.

The United States stated that GEO needs to follow the current rules and so cannot accept them as Members this year. It agreed with the proposal to create a study group to look into possible changes to the Rules in future.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee endorsed the proposal from Australia to request (under agenda item 8.5) that Plenary create a process to review the criteria for GEO Membership, with a recommendation to be brought to the Executive Committee. The Lead Co-chair will present the proposal on behalf of the Executive Committee.

**3.6 Review of Outcomes and Actions**

Executive Committee members confirmed the outcomes and actions from the meeting.



### 3.7 Closing Remarks

The Secretariat Director and the United States and European Commission co-chairs thanked South Africa for their service as Lead Co-chair and welcome China as incoming Lead Co-chair.

The South Africa co-chair thanked his fellow co-chairs for their support during the year. He noted that it had been a very busy year, especially with the preparation of the Ministerial Summit. He then formally handed over the Lead Co-Chair role to China.

The China Co-Chair representative thanked the South Africa Co-Chair for the excellent work during 2019. He noted that it was a special time for China to assume the role of Lead Co-Chair. With the support and lessons learned from the other Co-Chairs, China will ensure the work of GEO is carried out. He noted that the Executive Committee is the leading team for the GEO community and that it can make progress if they continue to work together.

*Meeting adjourned at 17:30*

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