

Summary Report
23rd Executive Committee Meeting
Istanbul, 15 November 2011
(As accepted at the 24th Executive Committee meeting)

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The meeting was chaired by Ms Manuela Soares, from the European Commission. In her opening remarks, the chair thanked the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for hosting the various GEO meetings, including the Plenary and stressed the need for the GEO-VIII Plenary to build on the success of the Beijing Plenary and Ministerial Summit and to demonstrate what had been achieved over the past year.

The GEO Co-Chair from the United States introduced US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Deputy Administrator Ms Kathryn Sullivan as the new US Alternate Principal. The GEO Co-Chairs from China and South Africa also made brief introductory remarks.

The chair presented the draft agenda for adoption. Japan asked that the meeting address a proposed GEO side event for Rio+20. The United States asked for a discussion how membership in Working Groups would be handled during Plenary. The chair stated that these issues could be handled under existing agenda items.

Australia, supported by Italy, said that there should be a discussion of future changes to the process for choosing the Secretariat Director. The chair proposed that, given the heavy agendas for both the Executive Committee and Plenary meetings, this issue should be noted and discussed at the March meeting.

Action 23.1 – Secretariat to add item to the Excom-24 agenda on future process for choosing the next Secretariat Director.

1.2 Approval of Summary Report of the 22nd Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2)

The Summary Report of the previous Committee meeting was approved without comment.

1.3 Review of Actions from previous meetings (Document 3)

The Secretariat Director presented the document. Italy asked why the UNEP Executive Director had declined the invitation to participate in GEO-VIII; the Secretariat Director said that it was due to a scheduling conflict.

Regarding Action 21.8, Italy reported that he had made efforts to engage others in the issue of a tsunami working group but had not received any interest; he proposed leaving the item open for now.

2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS REPORT (DOCUMENT 4)

The Secretariat Director presented the report. Two new staff members, Mr Espen Volden, seconded by the European Space Agency, and Mr Georgios Sarantakos, an Australian-funded contractor working on the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI), introduced themselves. The Director noted that of the current staff of 18, only six are seconded, a signal that secondments are decreasing. He explained that the Work Plan management structure has been fully integrated with the GEO web site, and he highlighted the Secretariat's work on the Global Agriculture Monitoring initiative (GEO GLAM), the UN Programme on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), and the Eye on Earth Summit.

Italy drew the meeting's attention to the importance of the UN GGIM meeting recently held in Seoul. While virtually all Executive Committee countries were represented at that meeting, few delegates were aware of GEO. He urged the Executive Committee members to check within their governments to identify their UN GGIM counterparts and then make contact. The next UN GGIM expert meeting will be held 13-15 August 2012 in New York and the next GGIM Plenary may be held in Doha towards the end of that year.

The Co-Chair from South Africa expressed interest in the reported activities in Africa and in later providing more official feedback to the Secretariat.

3 REPORT OF THE POST-2015 WORKING GROUP (DOCUMENT 5)

The chair proposed that this item be addressed together with Plenary document 25, which is included under agenda item 6 below.

The United States presented the report of the previous day's meeting of the Executive Committee's Post-2015 Working Group. The two-hour meeting had discussed the process issues for the Post-2015 Working Group, open to all GEO Members and Participating Organizations, that GEO-VIII was expected to establish, as well as the Executive Committee's development of an options paper that could help to inform the new Working Group.

The meeting had agreed that the best approach would be to develop an options paper with scenarios focusing on the scope of GEOSS and the form of GEO. The discussion on scope would consider the full range of societal benefits to be addressed, GEOSS as a system of systems, and the question of the extent to which GEOSS would deliver information services. Under form, the scenarios would address the nature of the intergovernmental body, its relationship to the United Nations, resources, and governance. The form and scope scenarios should be linked to one another. The options paper will be developed by a writing team, with the support of the Secretariat. The meeting had recommended that the options paper simply be forwarded directly to the new Working Group, rather than passing through an additional approval process.

The meeting also discussed the Terms of Reference of the Working Group as contained in the annex to Plenary document 25. Several comments from Germany, which had not been incorporated into the Terms of Reference as they arrived after the Plenary documents were distributed, were deemed useful and should be recommended to the Plenary for inclusion. The meeting recommended that the Executive Committee present these bracketed edits as a Committee recommendation, together with the proposal that the Working Group decide on its own final co-chairing arrangements. The Executive Committee agreed with these proposals.

Brazil requested further clarification about the proposals of the previous day's small-group meeting. The US confirmed that the options paper will be a working paper that will not feature government proposals and that the new Working Group is free to use it or not.

Action 23.2 – Writing team to distribute an options paper well in advance of the first meeting of the Post-2015 Working Group. Secretariat to revise the Post-2015 Working Group Terms of

Reference contained in Plenary document 25 to reflect changes accepted by Executive Committee.

4 REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS REQUESTING RECOGNITION AS PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (DOCUMENT 6)

The Secretariat Director presented the requests from the European Plate Observing System (EPOS), the European Renewable Energy Centers Agency (EUREC Agency), and the Global Earthquake Model Foundation (GEM) to become Participating Organizations. He recommended that all three be accepted.

Australia noted that EUREC Agency seemed to be a research organization. The Secretariat Director suggested that, in the Societal Benefit Area of energy, the transition from research to operations still has to occur, and that EUREC would help to facilitate this transition. Australia also asked whether EPOS was not a sub-programme of an existing Participating Organization. The Secretariat Director clarified that it was not a part of another organization.

The meeting agreed to recommend to the Plenary that it accept all three candidates.

5 REVIEW OF GEO-VIII AGENDA AND DOCUMENTS

The chair introduced the agenda item and said that the meeting should now go point by point through the Plenary agenda in order to prepare for GEO-VIII.

The Secretariat Director presented the first agenda item on the opening of the session. Moving on to item 2, the GEO Co-Chair from South Africa – who would also serve as the chair of GEO-VIII – said that those willing to speak under item 2.1 on national and regional activities should be asked to approach the Secretariat with their names in advance of the item.

Regarding item 2.3 on the evaluation of GEOSS implementation, Italy asked about the expected managerial response from the Executive Committee. The chair clarified that this response had been prepared earlier and was included in the relevant document. The Co-Chair from South Africa said that the Executive Committee's response to the critical comments about the GEOSS Common Infrastructure made in document now seemed rather weak and should perhaps be revisited. He responded to Italy's request for clarification, and the chair suggested that the Sprint to Plenary and other actions should be seen as addressing the report's substantive criticisms and recommendations. Further information should be provided to the Plenary during the discussions.

Moving on to items 2.4 and 2.5 on the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) and the Data Sharing Task Force (DSTF), Italy asked the DSTF Co-Chair whether he foresaw any particular problems or questions being raised in Plenary. The DSTF Co-Chair hoped for a positive discussion and said that the new Work Plan includes a structure for further advancing and advocating for data sharing. The DSTF supports this issue being carried forward via a Working Group reporting to the Plenary to ensure that it fully engages GEO Members.

Germany welcomed the DSTF report but said it would be useful to create a new category of activities for science and education. He noted that Germany has data that are free and available for science and education but not for other purposes, so they do not fit into the GEOSS Data-CORE. The United States said it would be useful to ensure a Plenary discussion on the issue of choosing new co-chairs.

The chair said the question was whether the call for new co-chairs should be made before or after the presentation of the new Work Plan management structure. The US, supported by Italy, recommended that it be done before, as there seemed to be a broad consensus for establishing a Data Sharing Working Group (DSWG), and this would simplify the subsequent management-structure discussion. The DSTF Co-Chair noted that members of the new DSWG should be nominated by Principals. The

Working Group needs to be well integrated into the new management structure, so that for example it could be responsible for executing the Work Plan Task on data sharing. The chair proposed that if the Plenary accepts the DSTF recommendations, the Plenary chair could then immediately ask for nominations. This approach was agreed.

Moving on to item 2.12, the Secretariat Director noted that the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) document would be presented to Plenary for acceptance. By accepting, the Plenary would be agreeing that contributions could be made to the GEO Trust Fund for the GFOI implementation plan. It was anticipated that Australia and Norway would announce contributions for the next three years, and the Plenary chair should consider inviting others to also contribute (Australia confirmed that she would indeed announce a contribution to this important initiative at Plenary). Acceptance also involved agreeing to the “Linkages Forum” and extending the life of the GFOI Task Force.

Germany stated that GFOI is an important initiative but the Task Force should be asked to develop a plan setting out hosting arrangements and other important details for the GEO-IX Plenary. Italy agreed and said that for GFOI to become a full GEO initiative and attract more support over the long term, a detailed plan should be submitted for donors. He noted a similar issue with item 2.11 on the GEO Global Agriculture Monitoring initiative, where the invitation for last September’s expert group meeting was not processed through Principals. These valuable new initiatives should respect the line of responsibility via Principals so that GEO does not merely become a collection of global initiatives.

The United States remained supportive of the GFOI and prepared to accept the implementation plan. However it had three requests: the Task Team should continue to develop the budgeting and staffing sections for approval by the Executive Committee, the Linkages meeting should not be held before 2013 and should learn from the results of the Forest Carbon Tracking (FCT) Task, and proposed contributions to GFOI should be accepted only after GEO’s CHF 3.5 million core budget was fully funded.

Australia said that the last point would be problematic, as funding from a country can come from different agencies with different priorities; as a practical matter for Australia, funding for GEOSS implementation via GFOI could not be linked with funding for Secretariat support. Italy agreed and said it would not be legally or politically possible to impose such a condition on governments; however, it might be interesting to explore whether a percentage overhead charge could be applied to such non-core donations and channelled to the Secretariat, as occurs in the United Nations.

The Secretariat Director said that, despite his concern that the Secretariat be fully funded, he had to recognize that funds that did not go into GFOI would not necessarily then go to the Secretariat. Given that the number of initiatives such as GEO GLAM and GFOI may increase over time, GEO should address this general issue, including Italy’s idea of charging an overhead.

The United States agreed that exploring options for charging overheads on initiatives could be useful, as its main concern was that the growth of special initiatives could divert funding for the Secretariat. He proposed that the Secretariat be asked to draft a paper on this for the Executive Committee. The chair noted that this issue would also be of interest to the Post-2015 Working Group. An interim solution could be to ask the GFOI as well as the Post-2015 Working Group to consider the issue. Italy noted that since GEO is voluntary, it may not be possible to impose a compulsory percentage overhead and that various rates could be recommended; he reiterated his view that the special initiatives should be viewed as a positive development.

Australia agreed that the special initiatives are positive and help to present the value of GEOSS to the world.

In response to a question for clarification from Brazil, the chair asked whether there was a consensus on a common Executive Committee position on the GFOI document and its implications for Plenary. The United States said the issues it had raised could be discussed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee rather than at this Plenary.

Moving on to item 3 on reports from Committees and Working Groups, Australia said that although the agenda indicated the Committee reports were “for information,” some of the reports did contain recommended actions. The Co-Chair of the Science and Technology Committee (STC) explained that the STC recommends that Plenary endorse the implementation of the STC roadmap, accept a position statement on data citation, and ensure that the STC reviews of Work Plan tasks by SBA be continued by an appropriate body under the new Work Plan management structure.

Asked to clarify, the STC Co-Chair confirmed that the STC fully accepted the Executive Committee’s previously stated view that gap analyses should be performed within each SBA, and that it simply wanted to emphasize that gap analyses should continue and that the issue should be considered by the Post-2015 Working Group.

The GEO Co-Chair from South Africa noted that the key question was how the Committee recommendations would be factored into the new Work Plan. This discussion could best take place within the new Implementation Boards. The United States observed that the Executive Committee discussions on the Post-2015 Working Group also recommended that gap analyses remain a live item. He noted the difficulties around channelling Committee recommendations through the Plenary.

The chair said that, given the pending new management structure, it could be most efficient at this point to ask the Committees to channel their inputs directly to the new management structures. The STC Co-Chair said this would work for all the recommendations except the position statement on data citation, which the STC believes the Plenary should be asked to accept. Germany agreed, remarking that the position statement is different because it is targeted to the outside world and addresses an important issue for the scientific community. This approach was agreed.

The Secretariat Director then confirmed that items 4.1 on the GEO 2012-2015 Work Plan and 4.2 on the Work Plan management structure were to be dealt with separately, and he said that there was no need for an introductory presentation on 4.2. The GEO Co-Chair from South Africa, supported by Italy, agreed. Australia said that it was not clear how the new management structure of Implementation Boards would capture the lessons learned by the Committees. Germany said the forced rotation of the Board co-chairs every year could be problematic and it could be better to say that the Boards should designate co-chairs every year.

The European Commission voiced some of its concerns, notably over the structure of Tasks and components, which does not seem substantively different from the current structure of Overarching Tasks and sub-Tasks. It is imperative to have strong Task leadership to ensure that integration of components works better than it has in the current Work Plan. In addition, the European Commission noted that the word “coordination” can mean different things to different people, and as a result can lead to some confusion when discussing the new management structure. The language used in the documents should be revised to remove such ambiguities..

Italy characterized the concerns of the EC as relating to the issue of a top-down vs. a bottom-up approach to Work Plan management. The EC clarified that in its view the Implementation Boards should have a light advisory role and not a management role; the responsibility for management should remain with the Task teams. The US supported the Italian statement and proposed leaving the final details to the committees and the Secretariat, which should be asked to formulate the next steps; details of how the structure will actually work will be elaborated in practice over the coming year.

The chair summed up by the discussion and concluded that the Executive Committee would recommend to the Plenary that it accept the document on Work Plan management without changes.

Concerning agenda item 5 on finance reports, the Secretariat Director noted that key challenges have been the transition to IPSAS and the fluctuation in the Swiss franc exchange rate.

Turning to item 9 on the presentation of the slate of nominees for the Executive Committee, and speaking for the European caucus, the chair informed the meeting that the United Kingdom will join the Committee, Germany will continue for one more year and the EC will continue for at least one

year. Russia said that it would continue to serve as the Committee member for the CIS region. The other caucuses had not yet met.

Concerning the update of the Rules of Procedure, Italy endorsed all of the proposed changes and added that rule 3.2 should be refined to say that “The Secretariat is encouraged, *in close cooperation with interested countries through their Principals*, to organize,” etc. This addition would help to ensure better coordination at the national level. This change was accepted.

Australia and the United States discussed their respective interpretations of the rules concerning the provision of advice and reports by the Committees to the Plenary.

Brazil confirmed that it would offer to host the GEO-IX Plenary next year in Foz do Iguacu. The Secretariat Director reported that no offers have yet been received for the 2013 Plenary and Ministerial.

Action 23.3 – the 24th Meeting of the Executive Committee should address the issue of distinguishing general contributions to the GEO Trust Fund from specific contributions to GEO initiatives such as GFOI.

6 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO GEO-VIII (GEO-VIII DOCUMENT 26)

It was agreed that the Report of the Executive Committee to the Plenary should include the assessment of Secretariat performance as an annex but not the master schedule for 2012. The inclusion of several paragraphs on the current, 23rd, Executive Committee meeting would be approved by the Co-Chairs before the Plenary. The Secretariat will revert to the Committee later with possible dates for its first meeting in 2012.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Japan distributed its paper on a proposed GEO side event at the Rio+20 Conference. He noted that Japan had submitted an input document to the conference secretariat that highlighted the general consensus that GEO will continue beyond 2015. The chair expressed the meeting’s appreciation for this initiative.

Brazil explained that the conference exhibition and side meetings will take place from 16-19 June 2012, a few days before the main 20-22 June meeting. CEOS reported that its recent plenary meeting had discussed the possibility of having a side event and that GEO and CEOS should discuss how to collaborate. It was agreed to work on two parallel events and decide later how they might converge.

A working group consisting of Japan, Italy, Brazil, the US and the Secretariat was established to prepare the GEO side event. Brazil, supported by CEOS, recommended engaging the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), as it would soon be taking over the CEOS chair. The Secretariat Director, supported by the chair, cautioned about presenting GEOSS as primarily a space initiative.

Brazil asked whether GEO had contributed to the UN document submitted already to Rio+20, and the chair confirmed that it had not.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Action 23.4 – Rio+20 working group to prepare a GEO side event for the Rio+20 Conference and coordinate with CEOS.

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