

Draft Report
45th Executive Committee Meeting
Kyoto, Japan, 30 October 2018

As accepted at the 47th Executive Committee Meeting.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chair: Stephen Volz, United States.

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs

Outcome: The Co-Chairs noted with satisfaction that a smooth transition between Secretariat Directors had been realized and that contributions to the GEO Trust Fund have been increasing.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 45.1 – for decision)

Outcome: The agenda was approved as distributed.

1.3 Draft Report of the 44th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 45.2 – for decision)

Outcome: The report of the 44th Executive Committee Meeting was adopted as distributed.

1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 45.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the closing of the Actions from the 43rd Executive Committee meeting, except those with completion dates scheduled for ExCom 47 and 48. These are: Action 44.1 (Secretariat operations indicators to be proposed for Executive Committee review) remains open and will be due for the 47th Executive Committee meeting; and Action 44.9 regarding the work of the Subgroup to review the Rules of Procedure and current engagement of Participating Organizations due for discussion at the 47th Executive Committee and decision at the 48th Executive Committee.

- 1.5 Review of requests from Participating Organizations (Document 45.4 – for decision)

Outcome: The application from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was accepted. The application from Food for the Hungry was deferred pending receipt of additional information.

Action 45.1: Secretariat to request additional information from Food for the Hungry regarding their interest in Earth observation. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

- 1.6 Review of Slate of the 2019 GEO Programme Board (Document 45.5 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the Slate of Programme Board candidates recommended by the Secretariat for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

2 SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT

- 2.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 45.6 rev.1 – for information)

Outcomes: Opportunities for contributions from the commercial sector are to be posted publicly on the GEO website. The Secretariat will also work with the Lead Co-Chair to define means for ensuring adequate transparency with Executive Committee members regarding discussions and agreements with commercial sector organizations.

Action 45.2: The Secretariat to provide a brief update on commercial sector engagement. **Due: 46th Executive Committee meeting.**

Action 45.3: The Secretariat to present its proposed approach to ensuring transparency in dealings with the commercial sector to Executive Committee. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

3 REVIEW OF PLENARY DOCUMENTS

- 3.1 Review of Plenary Proceedings and Documents

3.1.1 Approval of the GEO-XV Agenda (Document GEO-XV-1.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft Agenda as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

3.1.2 Approval of the Report of GEO-XIV (Document GEO-XV-1.4 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft Report as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

3.1.3 Role of Regional GEOs (Document GEO-XV-4.2 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft document as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary, noting the need for flexibility and independence of Regional GEOs.

3.1.4 Proposal to Create a GEO Associate Category (Document GEO-XV-4.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft document as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary. If consensus could not be obtained during the meeting, the Executive Committee agreed that a proposal would be presented to the effect that Plenary delegate to the Executive Committee the authority to resolve any outstanding concerns regarding the implementation of the Associate category in the Rules of Procedure.

3.1.5 GEO Programme Board Report (Document GEO-XV-5.1 – for information)

Outcome: The Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to work with the Programme Board to determine how to address issues related to the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme. The Programme Board and the Secretariat were also requested to bring any remaining issues that could not be resolved to the Executive Committee.

3.1.6 Timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation (Document GEO-XV-5.4 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee indicated their strong preference for Option 1 regarding the timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation and directed that Plenary be informed of this view when the item was presented.

Action 45.4: The Secretariat to inform Executive Committee of impacts on the Secretariat arising from the decision on timing and also of in-kind contributions from GEO Members needed to implement the evaluation. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

3.1.7 GEO 2017-2018 Highlights Report (Document GEO-XV-Inf-01 – for information)

Outcome: No issues were raised concerning the document.

3.1.8 Work Programme Progress Report (Document GEO-XV-Inf-02 – for information)

Outcome: No issues were raised concerning the document.

3.1.9 Strategy for a Results-Oriented GEOSS (Document GEO-XV-8.1 – for information)

Outcome: Executive Committee members were invited to comment on the first draft of the Strategy, which was expected to be circulated to Programme Board and Executive Committee in January 2019.

Action 45.5: The Secretariat to provide communications materials to GEO Members to help them in explaining the Strategy within their communities. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

3.1.10 Update of the GEO Rules of Procedure (Document GEO-XV-9.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee noted that the document may need to be revised during the evening of 31 October depending on the outcomes of the discussions regarding the Regional GEOs and the creation of the new GEO Associate category.

3.2 Report of the Budget Working Group

Outcome: The Executive Committee welcomed the new contributions from five GEO Members and increased contributions from four GEO Members during 2018. The Executive Committee also thanked the members of the Budget Working Group for their efforts through the year.

4 COMMERCIAL SECTOR ROUND TABLE

4.1 Commercial Sector Round Table (Document 45.7 – for discussion)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee that they looked forward to having another opportunity to interact with representatives of commercial sector organizations, especially those from the Asia-Oceania region. It was agreed that the focus should be on listening to the views of the commercial sector and how they might be able to contribute to the implementation of GEOSS. In this context, it was suggested that it may be useful to identify in advance a small set of questions to which the commercial sector participants might respond during the session. It was also proposed that consideration be given to organizing such discussions in future within the Regional GEOs.

5 MINISTERIAL 2019

5.1 Preparation for the 2019 Ministerial (Document 45.8 – for discussion)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee took note of the preparations for the 2019 Ministerial that had commenced and welcomed offers of assistance and participation by other GEO Members in planning for the Ministerial.

6 SESSION OUTCOMES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Any Other Business

Outcome: No items were raised.

6.2 Session Outcomes and Summary of Action Items

Outcome: The Executive Committee reviewed and approved the Outcomes and Action Items from the meeting.

Report
45th Executive Committee Meeting
Kyoto, Japan, 30 October 2018

FULL REPORT

Tuesday, 30 October 2018

Meeting convened at 10:30

Chair: Stephen Volz, United States.

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Opening Remarks from the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat Director

The Lead Co-Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Executive Committee members, Observers and the Secretariat. He stated that he was pleased to report that the Lead Co-chair team and the Secretariat have made progress across all of the priorities which had been established at the beginning of the year. In particular, he noted that the transition of Secretariat Directors, from Barbara Ryan to Gilberto Camara, had gone smoothly, and thanked both the outgoing and incoming directors for making this happen. Mr. Volz also drew attention to the rebound in contributions to the GEO Trust Fund, with the result that the Trust Fund will show a surplus for 2018 and thanked Members for their contributions. He pointed to the redefinition of the Regional GEOSS Initiatives as Regional GEOs as a key item for the year which is expected to support better understanding of user needs in a regional context. He mentioned that he and his team have been working with the next Lead Co-chair and his team from South Africa, noting that the Lead Co-chair approach has been successful in maintaining close communication with the Secretariat between Executive Committee meetings. He urged all Executive Committee members to support preparations for the Ministerial in 2019 and to reach out to their ministers early. Finally, he noted that it had been a good year but was happy to hand over the Lead Co-chair role to South Africa.

Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa Co-chair, thanked the Lead Co-chair for his efforts through the year, noting that it had been a busy year with some interesting progress. He noted that GEO is addressing some big challenges that have been present for many years and is starting to show improvement. Mr. Muofhe concurred with the observation that the transition between directors had gone smoothly and acknowledged the willingness of the United States to work closely with South Africa to ensure a good transition between Lead Co-chairs. Looking forward, he noted that 2019 would be a busy year, including the need to ensure that GEO has achieved substantial progress to report to ministers. Mr Muofhe stated that he counted on the support of all Executive Committee members and asked that they collectively lead by example, which is starting to happen in terms of resources.

Patrick Child, European Commission Co-chair, stated that the United States had shown admirable leadership in 2018 in its role as Lead Co-chair, in particular, the sensitive and constructive way in which Mr. Volz led Executive Committee discussions. He said that he looked forward to South Africa leadership in the year to come. He noted that GEO is now focusing on the big issues facing the planet: Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework. He said that he was encouraged by the enthusiasm the new Secretariat Director is bringing to his role, though noted that GEO needs to ensure that its broader objectives remain at the forefront while improvements are made to the GEOSS architecture and on other issues. He stated that he looked forward to the discussion of other issues, including developing relationships with other entities.

Xinming Tang, China Co-chair representative, thanked the Secretariat for its contributions and noted the resilient transition from Ms Ryan to Mr Camara. He thanked Japan on behalf of Executive Committee for their organization of GEO Week 2018. He also thanked Australia for their offer to host the 2019 Ministerial, noting that this will involve a great deal of work for GEO, and stated that there would be many contributions from Asia-Oceania GEOSS, including on the Mekong River project, agriculture, and other areas. MrXinming Tang stated that he wanted to see more discussion of global issues within GEO and looked to cooperate closely on these issues with other GEO Members. He concluded by offering to work with South Africa as the next Lead Co-chair.

Gilberto Camara, Secretariat Director, thanked Ms Ryan for organizing a smooth and professional transition, noting the large number of documents that had been prepared by the Secretariat describing the rules and operations. Mr. Camara also thanked the Secretariat staff, remarking on their competence and professionalism. He also provided his personal appreciation to Mr Volz as Lead Co-chair, noting the amount of time he devoted to discussions with the Secretariat Director which demonstrated his strong commitment to GEO. Mr Camara also mentioned his appreciation of the support from the Executive Committee, in particular their support to the EAG process. He thanked Programme Board and noted that the Secretariat is providing more support to them, which is a necessary change in the relationship with the Programme Board. Mr. Camara also recognized Germany for their additional support to the Secretariat and Australia for their work on the open data cube.

Outcome: The Co-Chairs noted with satisfaction that a smooth transition between Secretariat Directors had been realized and that contributions to the GEO Trust Fund have been increasing.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 45.1 – for decision)

Outcome: The agenda was approved as distributed.

1.3 Draft Report of the 44th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 45.2 – for decision)

Patricia Geddes, Senior Administrative Manager in the GEO Secretariat, noted that comments received from China and Germany on the initial version had been

incorporated into the version that was included in the Executive Committee documents.

Outcome: The report of the 44th Executive Committee Meeting was adopted as distributed.

1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 45.3 – for decision)

Ms Geddes presented the Secretariat responses to each of the Actions.

Germany drew attention to item 44.1, noting that in the document for the 46th Executive Committee meeting regarding Goals and Objectives for 2019, there were no Objectives or indicators related to Secretariat operations. It was requested that this section be added back into the set of Goals and Objectives as was done in 2018. On Action 44.6, Germany stated that they had submitted comments on the proposed changes to the GEO Rules of Procedure but was told that the comments were received too late. It wasn't clear why comments were requested but then not addressed.

The Secretariat Director responded to the question regarding Action 44.6, saying that the comments from Germany were not consistent with the decision made by the Executive Committee at the 44th meeting. The Secretariat decided that it would be better to allow Executive Committee members to voice their concerns with the decision in the meeting itself rather than to revise the document.

Craig Larlee, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer in the GEO Secretariat, responded to the point on Action 44.1 by confirming that the Secretariat intended to develop indicators of Secretariat operations but that these would be presented to Executive Committee at its 47th meeting in the context of the Secretariat operations plan. The operations plan would be prepared only after agreement was reached within Executive Committee regarding the 2019 Goals and Objectives.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the closing of all Actions from the 43rd Executive Committee meeting, with one exception. Action 44.1 (Secretariat operations indicators to be proposed for Executive Committee review) remains open and will be due for the 47th Executive Committee meeting.

1.5 Review of requests from Participating Organizations (Document 45.4 – for decision)

Ms Geddes presented two applications received by the Secretariat from organizations seeking Participating Organization (PO) status. She recommended that the application from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) be approved, noting that while it was not a United Nations (UN) agency, it was operating under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. It was also currently partnering with GEO in the context of work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regarding the application from Food for the Hungry, Ms Geddes recommended that the application not be approved but suggested that it be considered for the new GEO Associate category should this be approved by the GEO Plenary.

Australia suggested that a decision on Food for the Hungry be deferred pending a decision on the GEO Associate category, stating that it was important not to turn away

organizations that may be closer to the Earth observations user community on issues of importance such as food security.

The European Commission agreed with Australia, noting that it was important to have an engaged and contributing community of organizations in GEO. The Commission stated that GEO should clarify its future policy on POs, especially regarding expectations that these organizations will contribute to the GEO community and are not just seeking a symbolic association.

The United States agreed with the proposal from Australia to defer a decision on Food for the Hungry.

Australia cautioned that GEO should avoid becoming too strident in reviewing applicants, observing that Food for the Hungry is an international organization and so could potentially satisfy the criteria as a PO. It is not essential that POs deliver Earth observation information.

The United States agreed with the interpretation from Australia that Food for the Hungry met the criteria to be a PO.

Finland asked whether POs should be asked in the application form about specific contributions they intend to make to GEO and the area of information that they are interested in using.

South Africa agreed that the Secretariat should do more analysis of the application so that a more informed and considered view could be presented to Executive Committee.

Outcome: The application from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was accepted. The application from Food for the Hungry was deferred pending receipt of additional information.

Action 45.1: Secretariat to request additional information from Food for the Hungry regarding their interest in Earth observation. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

1.6 Review of Slate of the 2019 GEO Programme Board (Document 45.5 – for decision)

Mr Larlee presented the proposed slate of candidates for Programme Board and the rationale for the recommendation on behalf of the Secretariat. Seven seats would become vacant at the end of 2018, with an additional three seats potentially subject to early termination, giving a total of ten seats to be filled. The Secretariat had received fifteen applications for Programme Board seats, eight from GEO Members and seven from POs. Mr. Larlee reviewed four factors used by the Secretariat in developing its recommendation, these being the regional distribution of Programme Board members; contributions to the GEO Work Programme by the applicant Members or POs; past participation as a Programme Board member (where relevant); and the qualifications of the nominated representatives. Evidence regarding each of these factors was presented for Executive Committee review. Mr. Larlee concluded by recommending approval of the proposed slate of six GEO Members and four POs.

Finland asked how there could have been data on Programme Board participation by the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) when they were not a Programme Board

member in 2018. Mr. Larlee responded that, while MRI was only an observer to Programme Board in 2018, they participated in Programme Board meetings and subgroups through the year at a level exceeding that of many actual members.

The United States asked about participation of UN Environment in the GEO Work Programme. Mr Larlee provided examples of Work Programme activities in which the organization was currently engaged.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the Slate of Programme Board candidates, as recommended by the Secretariat, for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

2 SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT

2.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 45.6 rev.1 – for information)

Mr Larlee presented a summary of progress toward each of the Objectives established by the Executive Committee for 2018. On SDGs, he noted that there was good engagement with UN custodian agencies in several areas and noted that EO-based methods for indicator 6.6.1 had been upgraded to Tier 2. He drew attention to the key role that the EO4SDG Initiative played as a GEO focal point, but also that many other GEO Work Programme activities were engaged in various ways. He observed that a gap in Secretariat support to this priority had opened in 2018, but that it was anticipated that this would be filled in early 2019.

Regarding support to the Paris Agreement, Mr. Larlee stated that the GEO Climate Workshop was a key milestone in advancing GEO's work and that many stakeholders were recognizing a potential role for GEO in realizing outcomes. The GEO Carbon and GHG Initiative is a key player in this respect, although it was still at an early stage of development, but more integration with other climate-related Work Programme activities was needed, particularly on support to adaptation. He noted that there was an urgent need to fill the Secretariat climate position which had recently become vacant.

On the Sendai Framework, Mr Larlee noted that GEO was starting to build a strong relationship with UNISDR and that there was a key opportunity for GEO in providing input to the Global Risk Assessment Framework and the Global Assessment Report. He drew attention to the active Programme Board subgroup on this topic and the Secretariat support from James Norris. He concluded this section noting that more engagement from GEO Member countries was need to support use of EO by disaster-related agencies.

With respect to the emerging priority on urban resilience, Mr. Larlee observed that there were positive initial discussions with UN-Habitat regarding use of EO to support the New Urban Agenda, as well as opportunities for GEO to use urban resilience as an integrating theme to bring together SDGs, climate and disasters. On the emerging priority of ecosystem accounting, it was noted that the EO4EA Initiative had re-energized leadership and thus more progress was expected in 2019.

Turning to Goal 2 on commercial sector engagement, Mr. Larlee noted offers received from several commercial sector firms to provide services to GEO, in addition to existing involvement from the commercial sector in the GEO Work Programme. He stated the

that Secretariat was working on a plan for engaging more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly those based in low and middle income countries, in the GEO Work Programme.

On Goal 3, strengthening the membership base, Mr. Larlee noted that most GEO Member countries only have active involvement from one organization, while many Members are not active in the GEO Work Programme at all. He noted that the Secretariat would continue to implement its strategy to ensure that developing country Members are able to benefit from GEO. On open data, it was observed that further work is needed on this but that GEO lacks good data. A more targeted approach, in collaboration with partner organizations, would be required to make progress.

Regarding Goal 4, good engagement with UN agencies through the engagement priorities was observed, drawing particular attention to collaboration with UN Environment. Engagement with the World Bank was continuing though progress was slower. The Secretariat was engaged in a series of discussions with several UN agencies regarding support to the use of EO information by these agencies; this process was going well. Less progress was observed in work with development organizations outside the UN system, however.

Finally, on Goal 5, Mr. Larlee stated that cash contributions were higher in 2018 as compared to 2017 but remained below the 2006-2014 average. Secondments to the Secretariat, however, had continued to decline in 2018 and were substantially below the average. He stated that a new resource mobilization strategy was being developed and, while it had good potential for identifying resources to support GEO Work Programme activities, it may not yield funds for Secretariat operations.

The Secretariat Director added that the SDG process was driven by UN agencies based on traditional statistical methods. The opportunity for GEO is to identify how EO can offer better alternatives to those traditional methods. This must involve, not just EO4SDG, but all GEO Work Programme activities, working with the Secretariat and the Programme Board. On the Paris Agreement, the issue is different. The Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) has a mandate to report to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on observations. GEO needs to understand that it plays a secondary role in this regard to GCOS. On Sendai, there are GEO Members that have made good contributions, such as ICHARM in Japan. Regarding open data, there are two different world: space-based and in situ. On the former, the Secretariat will continue to work with CEOS and space agencies to encourage opening data. In situ, on the other hand, is terribly challenging technically. GEO needs to understand the questions and the requirements. As to engagement of UN agencies, some of these agencies have already chosen organizations to support them, as with GCOS, others are working with GEO, as with the Convention on Biological Diversity and GEO BON, and others are still deciding. The Secretariat intends to work closely with those Work Programme activities that have policy mandates and to assist those who do not yet have a policy mandate to obtain one.

Finland observed that GCOS has delegated some of their mandate to other organizations to coordinate and, in this regard, terrestrial observations could be an area that GEO could take on. It was suggested that GEO prepare a plan for how the

community could react to this idea. It was also noted that Finland was working on a possible secondment to support a dedicated in situ position within the Secretariat.

The European Commission stated its appreciation for the Secretariat Director had highlighted the complexity and challenges with engagement with the various organizations, while noting that the engagement priorities appeared to remain very relevant. There is a need for GEO to be clever in its engagement, to avoid duplication of others' efforts. On commercial sector engagement, Mr. Child noted that in working with three large commercial organizations, there needed to be a balance between efficiency and transparency. He noted that the emphasis on SMEs did not come through as strongly as would be desired, suggesting that further work in this area would be needed in future. Mr. Child also suggested that, given the continuing resource constraints within the Secretariat, the first call on resources be directed to support to the engagement priorities and for developing countries.

The United States asked how the Secretariat planned to engage SMEs, especially in Asia-Oceania. Also, was the Secretariat looking at a more direct, proactive way to understand the status of open data in Member states?

The Secretariat Director responded that engagement of the commercial sector was difficult and that there was no recipe. In the example of the EAG, the Secretariat requested nominations of relevant commercial sector firms from Executive Committee members and nominations were received from Europe and South Africa. The Secretariat would be pleased to receive nomination from Asia-Oceania and other regions as well. He noted that all commercial sector participants needed to abide by the GEO Rules of Procedure and that the Secretariat shows no favouritism in who it works with.

Australia observed that it was a good sign that commercial sector firms were coming to GEO. This was a big hurdle to get over and one of the reasons for the creation of the GEO Associate category. GEO should be more welcoming to commercial sector organizations, not to bring them into GEO governance, but to be part of the community. Australian companies are interested in being involved, such as on data cubes, but don't know how to engage with GEO.

The United Kingdom observed that the document was not entirely clear with regard to how GEO can serve as the interface on space-based and in situ data; more detail would be helpful. Attention was also directed to other tools such as the open data barometer that address issues of data openness. The United Kingdom is supportive of commercial sector involvement, but transparency is vital.

The United States concurred that the in situ is harder to address than space-based data, which reinforces the need for a Secretariat position on in situ data. The importance of coordinating access to in situ data is critical.

The Secretariat Director thanked Germany for its recent contribution to the GEO Trust Fund to support climate or in situ, noting that the Secretariat was taking both of these issues very seriously. Since a secondment is being arranged for the climate position, the German contribution is expected to be used to hire a person to coordinate work on in situ data. Much of the current work in the Secretariat on in situ data is being done in conjunction with the EAG process, which is why there was little information in the

report. He noted that space agencies are becoming concerned about the lack of in situ data to complement the large volumes of data coming from satellites. Mr. Camara observed that scientists often have naive ideas regarding sharing of data; it is not sufficient to make the data available just through their own websites. There is a need to ensure reliability, curation, and long-term support. It isn't sufficient to adopt open data policies, these policies need to be implemented through trusted repositories. He concluded by remarking on the widespread recognition within the Executive Committee and the GEO community broadly of this issue, which positions GEO strongly to pursue this goal.

South Africa observed that significant obstacles remained in engaging, not only the commercial sector, but also GEO Member countries and their agencies. The GEO Associate category is an important element in making GEO more welcoming to these organizations, especially to SMEs in the global south. This is part of an effort to create pathways for these organizations to engage with GEO. South Africa stated that they looked forward to working with the Secretariat in the next year to implement these directions.

Germany asked about the mechanisms for discussing agreements with commercial sector firms.

The European Commission asked about the suggestion regarding repositories for open data and whether commercial sector firms would be taking this on.

The United States concurred with Germany and the European Commission, stating that GEO should not rely on the commercial sector for in situ data repositories.

The Secretariat Director responded that while the Google Earth Engine is the best current example of the digital economy model for EO, it is the solution of the present, not the future. Technologies such as these enhance the utility of EO, but GEO should not rely on the commercial sector for everything. The Secretariat is not proposing that a GEO situ data repository be hosted by the commercial sector and is working others, such as universities, to find non-commercial partners.

The Lead Co-chair returned to the question from Germany on transparency of the arrangements on which the Secretariat is working with commercial sector organizations. The Executive Committee needs to be informed of what commitments have been made and what projects are being worked on. This needs to happen on a more frequent basis than Executive Committee meetings.

Finland stated that it was happy to see commercial sector organizations provide services as this is how to make GEOSS more relevant. Still, it is usually more cost-effective for GEO Members to host their own data repositories themselves, if they have the capability.

The Lead Co-chair thanked the Secretariat for its preparation of the document and for the presentation, which informed a good discussion. Mr. Volz noted that the Secretariat was expected to provide a proposal to address the concerns raised regarding transparency in its dealings with the commercial sector.

Outcomes: Opportunities for contributions from the commercial sector are to be posted publicly on the GEO website. The Secretariat will also work with the Lead Co-

Chair to define means for ensuring adequate transparency with Executive Committee members regarding discussions and agreements with commercial sector organizations.

Action 45.2: The Secretariat to provide a brief update on commercial sector engagement. **Due:** 46th Executive Committee meeting.

Action 45.3: The Secretariat to present its proposed approach to ensuring transparency in dealings with the commercial sector to Executive Committee. **Due:** 47th Executive Committee meeting.

3 REVIEW OF PLENARY DOCUMENTS

3.1 Review of Plenary Proceedings and Documents

3.1.1 *Approval of the GEO-XV Agenda (Document GEO-XV-1.3 – for decision)*

Ms Geddes reviewed the draft Plenary agenda.

The United States asked how questions during the panel sessions would be handled. Ms Geddes responded that the Slido application would be used again this year. She noted that the Secretariat has a better sense of how to use the application based on the experience in the previous Plenary.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft Agenda as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

3.1.2 *Approval of the Report of GEO-XIV (Document GEO-XV-1.4 – for decision)*

Ms Geddes stated that all changes provided by GEO Members had been incorporated into the document. This included some late changes received from Canada, which was the reason for distribution of a revised version.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft Report as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary.

3.1.3 *Role of Regional GEOs (Document GEO-XV-4.2 – for decision)*

Japan stated that it was important to recognize the need for flexibility and independence of the Regional GEOs. It was also expected that the Programme Board would continue to communicate regularly with the Regional GEOs.

The Lead Co-chair noted that the Plenary documents were circulated in advance and thus changes could not be made to the document; the Executive Committee could only decide to retract the document, if necessary, from consideration at Plenary. Japan replied that it only wanted to ensure that these points were noted by the Executive Committee and that it supported the document going forward for decision at Plenary.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft document as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary, noting the need for flexibility and independence of Regional GEOs.

3.1.4 *Proposal to Create a GEO Associate Category (Document GEO-XV-4.3 – for decision)*

Japan stated that the Executive Committee must ensure that POs are active in GEO. Japan also wanted to ensure that the Secretariat does not spend too much time on inactive organizations.

The Lead Co-chair noted that the Executive Committee had established a subgroup to look at rules regarding active involvement of POs and encouraged Executive Committee members to join this subgroup.

Germany observed that the Executive Committee had approved the GEO Associate category in principle, but not the details. Germany has concerns regarding potential financial contributions to the GEO Trust Fund by GEO Associates. These contributions should be treated separately from contributions from GEO Member states and should be controlled by Executive Committee to ensure that the intergovernmental character of GEO is not changed. The existing rules on commercial sector engagement should apply to GEO Associates. Applications to become GEO Associates from GEO Member countries should be circulated to the GEO Principal of the country for review prior to acceptance. Germany also asked about the consistency of the rules for the GEO Associate category with the WMO requirements, particularly regarding contributions from the commercial sector and noted that Switzerland had suggested that there may be complications for the host agreement. In summary, the view was expressed that the document was not yet mature.

China stated that they supported the creation of the GEO Associate category. However, it was possible that there may be many commercial sector firms interested in joining and thus there could be too many participants at GEO Plenary meetings. China suggested that the review of applicants for the GEO Associate category be delegated to the member state of the applicant or the Caucus.

The European Commission supported the comments from Germany, saying that these views were widely shared within the European caucus. The proposal was, in the view of the Commission, not yet fully mature. There was a need to check with WMO legal services regarding potential impacts on the host agreement with Switzerland. It was anticipated that the item would draw many interventions from the floor at the Plenary.

Australia reminded Executive Committee members that the proposal was intended to offer a mechanism for involvement in GEO without creating an say in decisions. The concerns that were being raised involved details rather than foundational issues. Australia supported bringing the issue to Plenary for higher-level guidance.

The Secretariat Director responded to some of the comments, stating that the current GEO Rules of Procedure already have strong statements about the involvement of the commercial sector, including avoidance of exclusivity and the need to abide by GEO principles. The wording in the Rules of Procedure was negotiated previously by Executive Committee and Plenary and includes statements regarding many activities, including contributions. The discussion on the GEO Associates should not be confused with the issue of contributions, as the latter are already sufficiently addressed in the Rules of Procedure. GEO is looking for a way to be able to sit together at the table with commercial and non-governmental organizations, while following the rules of GEO.

The Secretariat acknowledges the call for transparency in these dealings; the GEO Associate category adds to this transparency, providing more information to Executive Committee and Plenary than currently exists.

The United Kingdom agreed that the GEO Associate category will improve transparency, however, more information was requested regarding the role of the subgroup.

China stated that their chief concern was how to deal with the potential for too many applications and reiterated its suggestion that the Regional GEOs take on a greater role in engaging with the GEO Associates.

The Lead Co-chair stated that he agreed with the proposal to separate the issue on contributions from the discussion on the GEO Associate category.

Australia agreed with the separation of the contribution issues from the GEO Associate category discussion. It was noted that there would be an application process which would provide an opportunity to reject applications if numbers were too high. Executive Committee can also delegate responsibilities for review to Regional GEOs at a later point if necessary.

Finland suggested that the Secretariat check whether GEO Associates could use the status to obtain some benefit. He suggested that GEO could proceed to bring the proposal to Plenary, but it wasn't clear how the discussion would be handled given that there still was not consensus on the changes to the Rules of Procedure within Executive Committee.

Germany noted that the GEO Associate category included organizations other than just commercial sector and thus the Rules of Procedure regarding engagement with the commercial sector would not apply to those organizations.

The Secretariat Director stated his belief that the rules that had been proposed by the subgroup provide sufficient guidance to the Secretariat and that Executive Committee retained the power to take corrective action if there were concerns with how the category was implemented.

The Lead Co-chair proposed a path forward, noting that the concerns raised by Switzerland had not been fully addressed. Mr Volz also observed that participation by the commercial sector is lowest in Asia-Oceania and highest in Europe. Part of the aim of creating the new category was to help engage organizations from other regions. Mr Volz proposed that the paper be brought forward to Plenary for approval on a conditional basis, with the Swiss concerns and the financial issues to be resolved by the 47th Executive Committee meeting. This would give Plenary a chance to discuss the issue and give a preliminary approval at this meeting.

The European Commission agreed that the proposal from the Lead Co-chair was constructive, but asked for clarity on exactly what the Plenary would be asked to approve. The concern is not to restrict actions by others, but to ensure that the changes to the Rules of Procedure are correct from the outset.

Australia proposed that Plenary be asked to approve the creation of the GEO Associate category in principle, with resolution of any outstanding issues to be delegated to Executive Committee.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the draft document as distributed for presentation to the GEO-XV Plenary. If consensus could not be obtained during the meeting, the Executive Committee agreed that a proposal would be presented to the effect that Plenary delegate to the Executive Committee the authority to resolve any outstanding concerns regarding the implementation of the Associate category in the Rules of Procedure.

3.1.5 GEO Programme Board Report (Document GEO-XV-5.1 – for information)

Ivan Petiteville, Programme Board Co-chair, presented the report on behalf of the Programme Board. Mr Petiteville began by reviewing the status of the 2017-2019 GEO Work Programme, noting the changes that were incorporated in the update being presented to the GEO Plenary. He noted that the Secretariat had offered to collect information on each of the Flagships and Initiatives to support the Programme Board review leading toward the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme. The Secretariat also committed to coach Work Programme leads in advance of and during the preparation of their new Implementation Plans. Mr Petiteville then described key aspects of the work of the subgroups on the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework, noting that these subgroups would continue their activities in 2019. On progress reporting, Mr Petiteville observed that fewer than half of the Work Programme activities were submitting progress reports, which are needed by Programme Board for monitoring implementation of the GEO Work Programme.

Mr. Petiteville described the key role that the Programme Board subgroup played in the development of the Plenary document on the Regional GEOs. He noted that the Programme Board supported the proposal, but was of the view that the Regional GEOs should remain visible within the Work Programme, even though they would no longer be under Programme Board oversight. He also noted the importance of ensuring that any data or information infrastructures developed by the Regional GEOs abide by GEO principles.

Regarding the EAG process, Mr. Petiteville stated that the Programme Board had been briefed on the process but that further clarification of the details on the interaction between the EAG and the Programme Board was needed. As a general principle, Mr. Petiteville stated that it was the position of the Programme Board that any activity required to implement the recommendations from the EAG be included in the GEO Work Programme.

Mr. Petiteville concluded by summarizing the preparations for the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme. He stated that a call for new or revised Implementation Plans was expected to be issued in early December, with revised templates and guidance being developed in time for the call. Programme Board hoped to leverage the 2019 Ministerial to obtain additional contributions from GEO Members and POs to the GEO Work Programme. He also noted that the development of the 2020-2022 Work Programme would require significant effort, including support of all Secretariat experts. Mr. Petiteville also asked Executive Committee to confirm whether there would be any changes to the engagement priorities in the 2020-2022 period that should be taken into account in the development of the next Work Programme.

Australia, as host of the 2019 Ministerial, encouraged the Programme Board to “think big”, that is, to identify the greatest challenges that GEO faces and how GEO Members can help address those challenges.

The Secretariat Director thanked Programme Board members and co-chairs for their efforts through the year, as well as the Secretariat staff supporting Programme Board and the information gathering process on the Flagships and Initiatives.

The Lead Co-chair responded to the question from the Programme Board regarding the engagement priorities by stating that the current engagement priorities will remain the priorities for the 2020-2022 period.

Outcome: The Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to work with the Programme Board to determine how to address issues related to the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme. The Programme Board and the Secretariat were also requested to bring any remaining issues that could not be resolved to the Executive Committee.

3.1.6 Timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation (Document GEO-XV-5.4 – for decision)

Craig Larlee spoke to the draft slides intended to present the item for Plenary. He drew attention to a change in the options on timing for the Mid-Term Evaluation from those that had been presented to the Executive Committee at its 43rd meeting. The option being recommended in the Plenary document proposed that the launch of the evaluation be postponed until January 2020, with presentation of the findings to the Plenary in 2021. The rationale for this change was based on the workload in the Secretariat in 2019 due to the development of the 2020-2022 Work Programme, support to the EAG, and preparations for the 2019 Ministerial.

The European Commission stated that their preference was to remain with option 1, with the evaluation launch in 2019.

The United States concurred that it would be better to have an earlier evaluation, even if it were less complete.

The Secretariat Director stated that the recommendation was based in part on the tasks that the Secretariat must complete in the next year. There is a limit of what can be achieved while maintaining quality. He noted that the evaluation will be incomplete if it cannot address results emerging from the EAG process. Mr. Camara stated that the Secretariat staff would be in a better position to manage the evaluation process in 2020.

South Africa agreed with option 1.

The Lead Co-chair asked if any members supported option 2. None were recognized.

Outcome: The Executive Committee indicated their strong preference for Option 1 regarding the timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation and directed that Plenary be informed of this view when the item was presented.

Action 45.4: The Secretariat to inform Executive Committee of impacts on the Secretariat arising from the decision on timing and also of in-kind contributions from GEO Members needed to implement the evaluation. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

3.1.7 GEO 2017-2018 Highlights Report (Document GEO-XV-Inf-01 – for information)

Outcome: No issues were raised concerning the document.

3.1.8 Work Programme Progress Report (Document GEO-XV-Inf-02 – for information)

Outcome: No issues were raised concerning the document.

3.1.9 Strategy for a Results-Oriented GEOSS (Document GEO-XV-8.1 – for information)

The Secretariat Director introduced the item by reminding Executive Committee members that this was an active area of work in the Secretariat and that the Plenary document represented the status at a point six weeks earlier. One change since then has been the addition to the EAG of several members from commercial sector firms. Additional commercial sector participants would be welcomed from other countries. Mr Camara said that the presentation to Plenary would follow the general outline of the document, but would provide additional detail on the way forward.

The Lead Co-chair noted that the document was more of a vision statement than a Strategy and so Executive Committee members may not be able to offer many substantive comments at this stage.

Mr Camara responded that he would be seeking comments from Executive Committee members on the draft Strategy at a later date. The Strategy is currently in preparation by the Secretariat and would be reviewed by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) by the end of the year. It would then be circulated to Executive Committee and Programme Board members in January 2019.

Finland suggested that, in future, the Strategy be presented to Executive Committee in the form of a document rather than as a presentation.

Australia asked for clarification of the process by which the EAG is gathering examples of possible solutions on elements of the Strategy.

The Secretariat Director responded that EAG members were invited to propose examples. He invited Australia to also contribute an example based on their work on the open data cubes.

The United Kingdom stated that clear communication was needed about the Strategy to help GEO Members communicate these new directions to their own communities.

Outcome: Executive Committee members were invited to comment on the first draft of the Strategy, which was expected to be circulated to Programme Board and Executive Committee in January 2019.

Action 45.5: The Secretariat to provide communications materials to GEO Members to help them in explaining the Strategy within their communities. **Due: 47th Executive Committee meeting.**

3.1.10 Update of the GEO Rules of Procedure (Document GEO-XV-9.3 – for decision)

Patricia Geddes presented the item on behalf of the Secretariat, noting that the changes shown in the document were of three types: 1) changes to Executive Committee

responsibilities regarding the GEO Trust Fund; 2) changes related to the Regional GEOs; and 3) changes reflecting the addition of the GEO Associate category.

The European Commission stated that they understood from the previous discussion that the changes to the Rules of Procedure related to the GEO Associate category would not take effect until the Executive Committee had resolved the outstanding issues.

Australia suggested that different colours be used to distinguish between the three sets of changes.

The Lead Co-chair noted that the document had already been sent to GEO Members. He expected that the changes regarding the GEO Associate category would be approved by Plenary, with the changes to become effective 31 March 2019. This would allow the Executive Committee to address any outstanding issues.

The European Commission noted that this would put pressure on the Executive Committee to resolve the issues or the changes would take effect anyway.

The Lead Co-chair expressed his concern that the Plenary cannot approve changes that they would not have seen.

The Secretariat Director said that the Secretariat was prepared to adjust the Rules of Procedure document following the discussion in session 4 of Plenary, which would then be presented in session 9. This would provide some flexibility and would separate decisions on substance from the formal decision on the Rules of Procedure.

The Lead Co-chair proposed that the Plenary be asked to approve the GEO Associate category in principle. If the concerns that have been raised can be resolved without further changes to the Rules of Procedure, then Plenary delegates to the Executive Committee the ability to approve implementation of the GEO Associate category. If, however, the concerns cannot be addressed without further changes to the Rules of Procedure, the GEO Associate category will not take effect until the new set of changes are presented to the 2019 Plenary.

The European Commission stated that their understanding of the earlier discussion was that Plenary would delegate to Executive Committee the ability to make other required changes to the Rules of Procedure.

Germany and Finland agreed with the position of the European Commission, with Finland stating that Plenary has full powers, including to delegate decisions to the Executive Committee.

Outcome: The Executive Committee noted that the document may need to be revised during the evening of 31 October depending on the outcomes of the discussions regarding the Regional GEOs and the creation of the new GEO Associate category.

3.2 Report of the Budget Working Group

Virginia Burkett presented the report on behalf of the Budget Working Group. Ms Burkett began by reviewing the financial status prior to 2018, notably the decline in cash contributions to the GEO Trust Fund, as well as in-kind contributions through secondments, since 2015. She explained steps that the Budget Working Group had taken to address this issue, including distribution of an indicative scale of contributions

which provided clear guidance on the amount of an equitable contribution by the country based on a sustainable budget for the Secretariat. She also outlined several suggestions made to GEO Members that could be considered when transitioning to the fair contribution. Ms Burkett noted that the equitable contribution to the Trust Fund did not include funding for Flagships or Initiatives and, while contributions to specific Work Programme activities could be made through the Trust Fund, such contributions should be over and above the core funding and would be earmarked specifically for the designated activities.

Ms Burkett then showed the impact that these efforts by the Budget Working Group had shown. Cash contributions had increased in 2018 above 2015 levels. Secondments had not yet returned to previous levels but were expected to increase in 2019. Five countries (Viet Nam, New Zealand, Cambodia, Armenia and Norway) were new contributors in 2018, four of which contributed at their indicative scale amount. As well, four GEO Members (Australia, European Commission, Germany and the United States) increased their contributions significantly above those of the previous year.

Ms Burkett then addressed the 2017 Financial Statements and Audit Report, noting that the timing of the reduction of contributions in 2018 coming late in the year meant that expenditures could not be reduced sufficiently to avoid a deficit. This deficit meant that the working capital fund was drawn down, though noting that the fund was designed specifically for use in such circumstances. Despite these factors, the Audit Report provided GEO with a clean bill of health financially.

The 2018 Interim Report on Income and Expenditure shows a significant improvement in the funding position for GEO, with cash contributions expected to exceed CHF 3.7 million. A surplus of approximately CHF 300,000 is projected for 2018, which will replenish the working capital fund.

The 2019 Proposed Trust Fund Budget is based on assumptions of cash contributions of CHF 3.7 million and in-kind contributions of CHF 1.55 million. Modest growth is forecast in out-years reflecting increasing costs.

Australia noted that while it was good that total contributions were now above the sustainable budget amount, there was still a need to bring cash contributions to that level.

The Secretariat Director thanked the Budget Working Group for their efforts, especially on encouraging contributions to support the work of GEO. He noted that the United States has also recently provided some in-kind support for resource mobilization.

The European Commission announced that Gilles Ollier would replace Andrea Tilche as their representative on the Budget Working Group.

China thanked GEO Members for their contributions to the GEO Trust Fund. China noted that in the past part of their contribution was used to support participation by developing countries. This support will now be separated from their general contribution to the Trust Fund.

Outcome: The Executive Committee welcomed the new contributions from five GEO Members and increased contributions from four GEO Members during 2018. The

Executive Committee also thanked the members of the Budget Working Group for their efforts through the year.

4 COMMERCIAL SECTOR ROUND TABLE

4.1 Commercial Sector Round Table (Document 45.7 – for discussion)

South Africa introduced the item, stating that the format would follow that used at the previous round table in Washington. The expected outcome of the discussion was to continue to explore paths to increase engagement by the commercial sector in the GEO Work Programme.

The United States asked if there was any specific communication requested from Executive Committee members and how South Africa envisioned the conversation taking place.

South Africa replied that, as with the previous round table, it is primarily a listening process for Executive Committee members, to learn what the commercial sector wants from GEO and their perspective on how they wish to be involved.

The European Commission suggested that a few general questions be formulated to which the commercial sector participants could respond.

Japan stated that they were five Japanese companies actively using EO would participate in the round table.

China added that they were pleased to participate in the round table. They also stated that they would like to see other forums for interaction with the commercial sector, especially under the Regional GEOs.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee stated that they looked forward to having another opportunity to interact with representatives of commercial sector organizations, especially those from the Asia-Oceania region. It was agreed that the focus should be on listening to the views of the commercial sector and how they might be able to contribute to the implementation of GEOSS. In this context, it was suggested that it may be useful to identify in advance a small set of questions to which the commercial sector participants might respond during the session. It was also proposed that consideration be given to organizing such discussions in future within the Regional GEOs.

5 MINISTERIAL 2019

5.1 Preparation for the 2019 Ministerial (Document 45.8 – for discussion)

Stuart Minchin presented on behalf of Australia. He noted that the paper distributed to Executive Committee members was only a starting point for the process, hoping that it might prod members to become engaged in the preparations. The Government of Australia was excited to be hosting the Ministerial in Canberra and initial work has been underway in Australia since the decision on the Ministerial was made by Executive Committee in July. The document proposes some ideas for engaging ministers, a plan for the preparations, and a suggested theme. In addition to the normal

formation of a Ministerial Working Group, Australia has suggested creating a high-level leadership group at a political level to focus on ministerial engagement. They see the Ministerial as a huge opportunity for GEO to engage countries missing from GEO, including many of the small island developing states. GEO could assist many of these countries in addressing the issues they are facing but also to bring these countries into the GEO community. Australia is ambitious and seeks a high level of ministerial involvement. This is the first Ministerial since the new Strategic Plan was kicked off and it is also a chance to display some of the changes being introduced by the new Secretariat Director.

The United States asked whether Australia needed assistance in engaging countries in Oceania. Australia responded by saying that there are areas where changes are needed, for example, not all satellites acquire data over the Pacific islands. This could be addressed relatively simply. It was also noted that the effects of climate change will be felt first by many of these countries, that are also severely impacted by natural disasters. There is an opportunity for GEO to galvanize engagement around the three engagement priorities. This could provide a basis for an announcement at the Ministerial regarding a GEO turn toward the Pacific.

China indicated their interest in joining the organizing committee for the Ministerial, in their role as co-chair of the Asia-Oceania caucus. Australia replied that China was welcome to join.

The United Kingdom shared the view that GEO should be even more ambitious. Perhaps focusing on a theme of investment is too inward-looking. Perhaps focus instead on the value that GEO can provide to countries. The United Kingdom would also be willing to discuss possible efforts on small island states.

Japan offered to assist Australia in planning for the Ministerial.

Finland agreed that more work was needed to flesh out the theme of investing, drawing on the example of the Slush events held in Helsinki annually to raise investment for technology firms.

South Africa offered to provide any form of partnership needed to ensure a successful Ministerial.

Australia agreed that the theme still required further work. The intent was not about investing in GEO as an organization, but about investing in the capabilities needed to realize the GEO vision. Success in Australia for gaining a 25-year government commitment was built on arguments about the value realized through investing in Earth observations.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee took note of the preparations for the 2019 Ministerial that had commenced and welcomed offers of assistance and participation by other GEO Members in planning for the Ministerial.

6 SESSION OUTCOMES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Any Other Business

Outcome: No items were raised.

6.2 Session Outcomes and Summary of Action Items

Outcome: The Executive Committee reviewed and approved the Outcomes and Action Items from the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 17:30

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