

Report
50th Executive Committee Meeting
Canberra, Australia, 9 November 2019

As accepted at the 51st Executive Committee Meeting.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

1 SESSION 1

1.1 Welcome from Co-Chairs and Secretariat Director

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed new members Chile, France, Ghana and Peru; and
- Thanked the Australian hosts for a very successful GEO Week 2019.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 50.1 – for decision)

Outcome: The agenda was adopted with the addition of items on changes regarding open-source software to the Rules of Procedure and on the process for the selection of the next Secretariat Director, to be handled during Any Other Business.

1.3 Lead Co-chair Goals and Objectives for 2020 (Document 50.2 – for decision)

Outcome: The Goals, Objectives and Indicators were approved, subject to several modifications requested by Executive Committee members.

Action 50.1: The Secretariat to prepare a revised version of the Goals, Objectives and Indicators. **Due: 51st Executive Committee meeting.**

2 SESSION 2

2.1 Review of GEO Week, GEO-XVI and Canberra Ministerial (for discussion)

Outcome: The Executive Committee recognized that GEO Week 2019 was very successful. Some specific observations included the following:

- The Industry Track was a useful innovation, but more opportunities for interaction between industry and government representatives should be provided;

- GEO should track progress toward the commitments in the Declaration and should also compile and monitor whether issues raised in Ministerial statements are being addressed;
- A lessons-learned process should be conducted with the Ministerial Working Group and a survey sent to all GEO Week participants;
- GEO should look to combine other events with future Plenary meetings where possible, including Regional GEO meetings;
- GEO should look to engage communities within the region where GEO Plenary meetings are held;
- GEO must ensure that the engagement of Pacific Island nations is followed up;
- There was successful engagement with indigenous communities and Executive Committee thanked, in particular, Australia and Conservation International for their efforts in this regard;
- Side event categories worked well, but it would be advisable to reduce the overlaps between too many events; and
- GEO should consider how future GEO Weeks could be more environmentally responsible.

2.2 Review of 2019 Applications for Associates Category (Document 50.3 – for information)

Outcome: The Executive Committee took note of the report.

2.3 Proposed Collaboration Areas with WMO (Document 50.4 – for decision)

Outcome: The Secretariat recommendations were accepted.

3 SESSION 3

3.1 GEO Knowledge Hub – Next Steps

Outcome: The Secretariat is to prepare an implementation plan for the GEO Knowledge Hub, in consultation with the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team. The plan is to be reviewed by the Programme Board at its 16th meeting (February 2020).

Action 50.2: The implementation plan, incorporating comments from the Programme Board, is to be presented to the Executive Committee. **Due: 51st Executive Committee meeting.**

3.2 Any Other Business

3.2.1 Process for the Selection of the Next Secretariat Director

Outcome: The Executive Committee launched the process for selection of the next Secretariat Director.

Action 50.3: Each GEO Caucus to identify one representative from the Caucus who will participate on the selection panel. **Due: 22 November 2019 to the Lead Co-chair.**

Action 50.4: The Lead Co-chair, with the assistance of the Secretariat, to establish contact with the human resources department of the WMO. **Due: week of 11 November.**

3.2.2 *Proposal from Finland*

Outcome: A session is to be added to the GEO Data and Knowledge Week 2020 on the issue of open-source software.

Action 50.5: Finland to circulate their proposal to Executive Committee members. **Due: 30 November 2019.**

3.2.3 *Date of the 51st Executive Committee Meeting*

Outcome: The meeting dates will be 19-20 March 2020.

3.3 **Review of Outcomes and Actions**

3.4 **Closing Remarks**

Report

50th Executive Committee Meeting

Canberra, Australia, 9 November 2019

FULL REPORT

Saturday, 9 November 2019

Meeting convened at 9:00

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

1 SESSION 1

1.1 Welcome from Co-Chairs and Secretariat Director

Li Pengde, representing the China Co-Chair, welcomed new members of the Executive Committee and reminded all members that the focus for the meeting following the Plenary is to discuss plans for the coming year.

Stephen Volz, United States Co-chair, stated that he was looking forward to also hearing a recap of the Plenary and the Ministerial Summit.

Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa Co-chair, thanked all who worked to create a successful GEO Week. He suggested that Executive Committee would review the outcomes of the week to determine what the Executive Committee needs to do in 2020.

Jan Ramboer, representing the European Commission Co-chair, thanked the Australian team for the successful Plenary and Ministerial. He noted the many exciting side events that took place and received positive feedback from commercial sector firms regarding the Industry Track. Mr Ramboer noted that the hard work of negotiations before the event paid off with a unanimous approval of the Declaration.

Gilberto Camara, Secretariat Director, welcomed the new members to the Executive Committee.

Chile stated that they were delighted to be part of the Executive Committee. They thanked Australia for the organization of the meetings, noting that the preparations had started just after the previous Plenary. It was noted that new challenges had emerged during the week which would require complex solutions, but Chile was ready to work as part of the Executive Committee to address them.

France said that they were very happy to be part of the Executive Committee and offered warm thanks to the Australian hosts.

Peru thanked Australia and the Secretariat for the excellent job in organizing the week. They committed to working with other members of the Executive Committee to achieve good results for GEO.

Ghana expressed their sincere appreciation to the GEO community for choosing them to be part of the Executive Committee. Ghana has been a GEO Member since 2010 and has

played an active role in GEO, though it has been in a period of transition lately and thus somewhat less active. Ghana is committed to the objectives of GEO and to supporting GEO in achieving them. It is also committed to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. Ghana noted that it may in future propose a fourth Executive Committee seat for Africa so that all sub-regions of the continent may be represented.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed new members Chile, France, Ghana and Peru; and
- Thanked the Australian hosts for a very successful GEO Week 2019.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 50.1 – for decision)

Outcome: The agenda was adopted with the addition of items the process for the selection of the next Secretariat Director and a proposal from Finland, to be handled during Any Other Business.

1.3 Lead Co-chair Goals and Objectives for 2020 (Document 50.2 – for decision)

The Lead Co-chair presented the document and asked for comments.

Japan said that they were unsure how the indicator for Objective 2.2 would be measured. They proposed that a qualitative indicator may work better in this instance.

The United States said that they appreciated the continuity of many of the indicators from year to year. Regarding Objective 3.2, it was suggested that GEO may not be in a position to encourage the development of national coordinating mechanisms and so the second indicator may not be appropriate.

France suggested that, for the indicator for Objective 1.1, wording regarding the achievement of the goals and targets should be added, in addition to reporting. Objective 1.3 should include reference to the Paris Agreement. For Objective 1.5, it would be helpful to have more explanation of the vision. On Objective 2.1, a more detailed roadmap of the process is needed, as was previously discussed by the Executive Committee.

The United States responded that, regarding Objective 1.3, the Paris Agreement is a part of the UNFCCC processes that are mentioned and thus specifying the Paris Agreement is not necessary.

South Africa asked about the plan for dealing with the indicator for Objective 2.1.

Australia agreed with the United States to retain the current language for Objective 1.3. On Objective 2.1, it was suggested that the indicator could be based on the delivery of an implementation plan at the 51st Executive Committee meeting.

Outcome: The Goals, Objectives and Indicators were approved, subject to several modifications requested by Executive Committee members.

Action 50.1: The Secretariat to prepare a revised version of the Goals, Objectives and Indicators. **Due: 51st Executive Committee meeting.**

2 SESSION 2

2.1 Review of GEO Week, GEO-XVI and Canberra Ministerial (for discussion)

Iain Williams, co-chair of the Ministerial Working Group from the United Kingdom, opened the discussion by recalling how the Ministerial Working Group was focused on ensuring a successful Ministerial and Plenary with broad engagement from across the GEO community. In particular, the Working Group focused on increasing participation from the commercial sector, Pacific Island states, and indigenous peoples. Much effort was also directed to the engagement with ministers. Mr Williams stated that he believed these objectives had been met. He noted the success of the Industry Track and how this helped enable the commercial sector, including the new GEO Associates, to engage with the GEO Plenary. Mr Williams also reflected on the huge amount of work that was devoted to the preparation of the ministerial declaration, noting the importance of bringing in colleagues with expertise in diplomacy to assist in writing the declaration. He thanked the Australian colleagues for their tremendous efforts in making the Ministerial and the Plenary a success. He concluded by proposing that a final meeting of the Working Group be convened to review the event and to capture any lessons learned to support South Africa in their preparations for next year, welcoming support from the Secretariat to assist in this.

The United States agreed that lessons learned be gathered about the process and that the Ministerial Working Group meet once more to discuss how to document reflections of the members. It was also noted that GEO had created high expectations with the Pacific island countries and thus there was a need for a conversation in GEO on how to carry this forward.

Australia offered to lead the conversation around engagement with the Pacific islands. This needs to be done in a sensitive way that is agreed broadly within the GEO community. GEO Week has raised the profile of GEO significantly within the Australian government, which has been very useful and is a positive outcome from hosting a Plenary meeting.

Jonathon Ross, member of the Ministerial Working Group, observed that it was good to have linked the Asia-Oceania GEO event and GEO Week. This wouldn't always be possible, but should be encouraged. He noted that there was quite a bit of content that fed from the Asia-Oceania GEO meeting to the side events and then to Plenary. Mr Ross observed that the organization of the side events was more complex administratively than in previous years, but was successful. In particular, there were larger audiences for the key side events, which created good connections across the community. He noted that there was a total of over 80 key, targeted and lightning events. The Pacific programme was also new and was important for this group. All of the Pacific events were well attended, both from people from the region and from the general GEO community. Mr Ross stated that it was critical that GEO follow up on this interest. It was expected that, in a year, the community will have prepared a business case to which GEO can respond. He encouraged the Programme Board to also look into this. Feedback from the Industry Track was also positive, although for future events GEO should look at how to bring the industry and government sides together more. This includes thinking creatively about how to structure the week, including the Plenary, to allow for more connection between groups. Response to the exhibition was also very strong. Having the

UN-GGIM and UN Environment meetings co-located was good to build linkages with these other organizations and communities, but while it was a good first step, the cross-fertilization was not as strong as had been hoped. Mr Ross was glad to see the meaningful indigenous participation during the week, not only from Australia; he thanked Conservation International for their work on this.

Patricia Geddes informed Executive Committee that the Secretariat would be sending out a survey to participants. She also proposed using a structured lessons learned exercise with the Ministerial Working Group.

China said that it was important to follow up on the points raised during the Plenary and the Ministerial. It was suggested that the Declaration points be translated into the GEO Work Programme. Also, consideration should be given to its implications for the Regional GEOs and the national GEOs. Publicity of the Declaration will be important, so it may be discussed in multiple contexts. The enthusiasm of many smaller countries was noted, including concerns expressed regarding climate change, food security and other issues. The interest of Pacific countries was noticeable and was welcomed. China endorsed setting up a task force to engage with these countries, and China offered to work with others on the engagement of the Pacific islands.

The United States agreed that it was important to map the points raised in the ministerial statements and follow up. It was unfortunate that there was not more interaction between the industry and government representatives. The industry track was quite successful and so it had been worth taking this risk. One point that was heard was that the commercial sector is not all the same; there are many different business models. It is important to look at individual examples, case by case. Regional GEOs will be important in reaching out to the commercial sector. GEO as a whole can then look across the Regional GEOs for best practices and commonalities. This would provide a basis for developing a stronger relationship with the commercial sector.

South Africa stated that, going forward, GEO should look at these events as opportunities to engage more communities in our respective regions. It is important to take advantage of these opportunities and to follow up afterward to ensure new groups are brought into GEO. South Africa agreed that it is important to bring the Declaration to life, to look at how we implement it over the next several years. GEO should look at how to improve engagement with the commercial sector, building on the strong foundation of the past week. The Industry Track should be an approach that the whole GEO community should take up. Overall, the flow of the sessions was good and showed that the meetings are being improved each time. The messages were unambiguous; it was very clear what we are trying to do. Participants are seeing the opportunities for them in their involvement in GEO. This GEO Week set a very high standard.

The European Commission agreed with Australia that the different types of side events worked well. GEO should look, however, at how to structure the overlap of the events. Regarding the Industry Track, it was originally set up to allow industry representatives to get together, but we can build on this for the next time.

The United States observed that statements were often made by the same small group of countries. GEO needs to broaden the range of countries that speak during Plenary meetings and Ministerials. It was useful to have Caucus representatives speak because it

forced countries to collaborate with one another. Regional GEOs should take a more active role in organizing interventions from their members. It was also noted that the GEO Associates who were present in the Plenary were not aware that they could speak in the meeting; this should be encouraged in future meetings.

Iain Williams thanked Executive Committee members for their very helpful comments. He also welcomed support from the Secretariat for the lessons learned process. He agreed that it was important to make the Declaration relevant to GEO's future work. He noted that GEO hadn't thought about making the Plenary the "greenest", most environmentally-friendly. Going forward, what would this look like? Mr Williams gave an example of a participant who offset his personal carbon emissions by planting trees; should this be a broader event?

The Chair stated that GEO Week is the most important week of the year for GEO. It brings a focus to how to make Earth observations information integrated with the economy and easier to use. How do we enable the Declaration to be implemented in every country? It is important that Executive Committee checks on progress each year, not just on paper, but through a real call to the world. Bring the Declaration back each year to look at progress. Perhaps we also need explanations of what each sentence in the Declaration means. He noted that GEO is for all countries and that it is important to ensure that no countries are left behind.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee recognized that GEO Week 2019 was very successful. Some specific observations included the following:

- The Industry Track was a useful innovation, but more opportunities for interaction between industry and government representatives should be provided;
- GEO should track progress toward the commitments in the Declaration and should also compile and monitor whether issues raised in Ministerial statements are being addressed;
- A lessons-learned process should be conducted with the Ministerial Working Group and a survey sent to all GEO Week participants;
- GEO should look to combine other events with future Plenary meetings where possible, including Regional GEO meetings;
- GEO should look to engage communities within the region where GEO Plenary meetings are held;
- GEO must ensure that the engagement of Pacific Island nations is followed up;
- There was successful engagement with indigenous communities and Executive Committee thanked, in particular, Australia and Conservation International for their efforts in this regard;
- Side event categories worked well, but it would be advisable to reduce the overlaps between too many events; and
- GEO should consider how future GEO Weeks could be more environmentally responsible.

2.2 Review of 2019 Applications for Associates Category (Document 50.3 – for information)

Patricia Geddes introduced the item, explaining that the Executive Committee had asked the Secretariat to review all applications and expressions of interest in the Associates category that had been received during the year. She noted that some applications are still in process due to the late receipt of the forms. A few applications had also not been approved by the GEO Principal, following the established criteria.

Outcome: The Executive Committee took note of the report.

2.3 Proposed Collaboration Areas with WMO (Document 50.4 – for decision)

Sara Venturini, Climate Coordinator in the Secretariat, presented the document. She reminded Executive Committee members of the original 11 areas for collaboration that had been agreed by GEO and WMO and that this list had been narrowed to five areas through discussions between the two Secretariats in July 2019. Following the direction of the 48th Executive Committee meeting, the Secretariat held further discussions with WMO and prepared a new set of recommendations, which take account of the WMO reform process and expected changes in GEO. Ms Venturini then explained each of the recommendations.

The Chair stated the importance of having more cooperation between GEO and WMO.

Japan agreed that it was important to have better collaboration and thanked the Secretariat for the report and welcomed Ms Venturini to GEO. Japan asked for more information on the reasons for the identification of the five topics. The role of the new Climate Working Group and the Climate Workshop in this process was also not clear. Japan recommended that the Climate Working Group take a leading role in coordination with WMO.

Switzerland recommended that the original eleven topics not be forgotten. While it was good to focus on the five areas, there is capacity within GEO to collaborate on other areas. In particular, Switzerland agreed with the first recommendation. GEO-GNOME is ready to collaborate with WMO. It is important to engage GEO Work Programme activities as part of the response. Switzerland disagreed with recommendation 2, preferring to keep the process internal. GEO should look for a different way of engaging with UN specialized agencies.

The United States was supportive of the recommendations, especially 1 and 2. It was good to “declutter” the space in which the two organizations overlap. The United States encouraged GEO to be cautious about involvement in areas where WMO has a clear mandate. It was also important to clarify the bilateral consultation mechanism.

France recommended to be less directive and more flexible in the recommendations, for example by not obliging to follow all the points of recommendation 1 but a least three of them.

CEOS stated that the Climate Working Group would be willing to help on implementing the recommendations. CEOS itself is working on some of these priority areas and can help support them.

South Africa requested clarification of points 4 and 5 in Annex A.

China stated that they agreed with most of the recommendations. Ministerial statements mentioned the importance for GEO of working with international organizations. While it is important to have a good relationship, GEO is not part of WMO. GEO is an independent international organization. It must establish a relationship with WMO as a partner. This is similar to GEO's relationships with UNOOSA, WHO, and so on. The work plan must be practical to implement. There is nothing wrong with a bilateral mechanism, but Executive Committee needs to understand the purpose.

The European Commission welcomed the document and supported the four recommendations. It was noted that the Commission was in the process of signing an agreement with the WMO that covers several areas and GEO is mentioned several times in that agreement.

Ms Venturini responded to several of the points raised. She noted that the terms of reference of the Climate Working Group could be amended to reflect their role in the collaboration with WMO. Regarding the original 11 areas of collaboration, they are not being forgotten but the reduction was based on messages from WMO that they wished to focus on a smaller set of issues, principally climate and data. Recommendation 2 had been suggested by WMO as a means of gaining greater support for collaboration with GEO from their members. Ms Venturini noted that some of the previous collaboration areas were not included due to changes in GEO Work Programme activities and signals from WMO that they were not supportive of GEO efforts in those areas. Regarding radio frequency issues, GEO's involvement had been very limited in the past and currently there was little expertise on the issue in the Secretariat.

Outcome: The Secretariat recommendations were accepted.

3 SESSION 3

3.1 GEO Knowledge Hub – Next Steps

Douglas Cripe, Senior Scientist in the Secretariat, reviewed the document and the presentation to the Plenary.

France asked that, in preparing the plan, the Secretariat ensure that measures are taken to enable the GEO Knowledge Hub to be implemented through alternative providers.

Outcome: The Secretariat is to prepare an implementation plan for the GEO Knowledge Hub, in consultation with the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team. The plan is to be reviewed by the Programme Board at its 16th meeting (February 2020).

Action 50.2: The implementation plan, incorporating comments from the Programme Board, is to be presented to the Executive Committee. **Due: 51st Executive Committee meeting.**

3.2 Any Other Business

3.2.1 *Process for the Selection of the Next Secretariat Director*

South Africa introduced the item, which had been previously discussed in closed session. It was noted that, due to the various steps and timing required under the WMO human

resources rules, it was important to begin the selection process imminently. South Africa then briefly outlined the major steps of the process.

The United States said that the process described was as expected. The previous process was appropriately executed and so no major changes were required. It was noted that the Executive Committee should look at how the announcement of the chosen candidate would be made, given the need for sensitivity to all candidates. It was also important to look at how to ensure involvement in the process from all five Caucuses. The United States volunteered to participate on the selection panel, but would connect first with the Americas Caucus.

South Africa also indicated their willingness to serve on the selection panel.

Outcome: The Executive Committee launched the process for selection of the next Secretariat Director.

Action 50.3: Each GEO Caucus to identify one representative from the Caucus who will participate on the selection panel. **Due: 22 November 2019 to the Lead Co-chair.**

Action 50.4: The Lead Co-chair, with the assistance of the Secretariat, to establish contact with the human resources department of the WMO. **Due: week of 11 November.**

3.2.2 *Proposal from Finland*

The European Commission noted that Finland had raised an issue during the Ministerial but that it wasn't addressed then. The matter concerned whether GEO should state a preference for open-source software in its Rules of Procedure. The Commission asked whether China might consider a session in the GEO Data and Knowledge Week 2020 on this issue.

Outcome: A session is to be added to the GEO Data and Knowledge Week 2020 on the issue of open-source software.

Action 50.5: Finland to circulate their proposal to Executive Committee members. **Due: 30 November 2019.**

3.2.3 *Date of the 51st Executive Committee Meeting*

China noted a conflict with the original date of the 51st Executive Committee meeting and important internal meetings of the Chinese government.

Outcome: The meeting dates will be revised to 19-20 March 2020.

The dates for the Executive Committee meetings in 2020 are therefore:

51st Session – 19-20 March 2020, Geneva, Switzerland

52nd Session – 7-8 July 2020, Geneva, Switzerland

53rd Session – 3 November 2020, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

54th Session – 6 November 2020, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

3.3 **Review of Outcomes and Actions**

The outcomes and actions from the meeting were reviewed and approved.

3.4 **Closing Remarks**

The United States, South Africa and European Commission Co-chairs thanked Executive Committee colleagues and the Lead Co-chair.

Mr Li thanked colleagues for their patience and support, and Australia and the Secretariat team for the organization of GEO Week. He also thanked the China GEO office for their support to his role as chair. Mr Li noted that GEO is a unique community that is at once technical, economic, political, and of the people. GEO will continue to make contributions to the digital economy and to global sustainability. On behalf of the Lead Co-chair, he promised to make best use of the resources across the various ministries and agencies within China to support GEO's work. He also committed to using contacts with WMO and other international organizations to further GEO's goals and encouraged other Executive Committee members to do the same.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30.

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