

Report from the Pacific Islands Advisory Group

This document is submitted by the Pacific Islands Advisory Group to the Programme Board for information.

1 CURRENT STATUS

The terms of reference of the Pacific Islands Advisory Group (PIAG) were approved by the Executive Committee at its 53rd meeting in November 2020 (see document PB-19.14).

The PIAG has held regular monthly teleconferences since its inception in May 2020. Work is underway to develop the PIAG work plan, although this is proving to be challenging, not least in terms of availability of representatives of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) to provide feedback into this process (which is essential to strengthening their engagement in GEO in ways that will be useful to the PICTs).

In summary, the draft work plan includes the following proposed deliverables:

1. Prioritized list of GEO Work Programme activities, including regional GEOs, that will be engaged to determine their relevance to the needs of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs);
2. Meetings or workshops to consult with PICT stakeholders on how to encourage greater participation in GEO activities;
3. Options papers for the GEO Programme Board and Executive Committee consideration providing recommendations on ways to strengthen GEO's engagement with the PICTs, including, where appropriate, a draft implementation plan;
4. Establishment of a "GEO presence" within existing PICTs communities of practice to share information, knowledge, expertise and opportunities between GEO and the PICTs on Earth observations matters; and
5. Identification of GEO activities that clearly express the needs and progress of the PICTs to the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030).

Note: Some of the aforementioned items are dependent on the successful completion of other actions (for example, an options paper for the Programme Board and Executive Committee could only be usefully developed following the completion of other work plan activities).

Under the draft PIAG work plan the following key activities are currently underway:

- Earth observation platform in the Pacific (led by the Pacific Community);
- GEO-Pacific knowledge exchange (through PIAG meetings);
- Mapping of GEO Work Programme activities against the needs and priorities of the PICTs;
- An offer of satellite data to the PICTs (by China to the Pacific Community); and
- Encouraging PICTs to participate in GEO and GEO Work Programme activities (led by the GEO Secretariat).

A range of other activities have been proposed by PIAG members. The PIAG is working through each suggestion in terms of its importance of addressing identified needs of the PICTs and available resources (both in terms of contributed time and financial investment). A key challenge is ensuring that the PIAG as an advisory group acts to connect the PICTs with relevant activities underway across GEO rather than undertake additional activities that could more readily be delivered under other components of the GEO Work Programme.

2 CHALLENGES

- COVID-19 has slowed the effectiveness of PIAG due to the inability to convene in-person meetings.
- The work of the PIAG can only move as swiftly as the PICTs are able to engage, and their ability to engage is impacted by available capacity. This work could be accelerated if a working-level position within the PICTs could be established, dedicated to progressing GEO-Pacific engagement matters.
- The key objectives of the PIAG are to advocate for the needs of the PICTs across the GEO WP, identify current GEO-PICT engagement barriers and propose solutions for consideration by the GEO community, and to help representatives from the PICTs to connect with the GEO Work Programme to assist with identified needs. The PIAG has struggled at times to maintain its focus on addressing high level, strategic issues rather than operational matters that could be addressed through other parts of the GEO Work Programme.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The PIAG requests that the Programme Board note the challenges described above that have impacted the development and implementation of the PIAG work plan.

The PIAG welcomes the advice of the Programme Board in addressing these challenges, in particular, with assistance in identifying possible support for a dedicated liaison position within the Pacific Region to enable greater participation of the PICTs in GEO and the PIAG.