

Report from the Pacific Islands Advisory Group

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

1 INTRODUCTION

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have significant and increasing exposure to disaster risk, climate change and sustainable development challenges. In 2020, the Executive Committee convened the Pacific Islands Advisory Group (PIAG) to advise the Executive Committee and the Programme Board regarding the implementation of the elements of the Canberra Declaration for the PICTs.

Since the last report from the PIAG to the Programme Board in September 2021, the PIAG held five teleconferences for the full membership on 13 October, 10 November, and 8 December 2021, and 12 January and 9 February 2022. Teleconferences of the co-chairs occur prior to each of the full meetings.

The PIAG employs an inclusive approach to engaging with PICTs and relevant Participating Organizations. It capitalizes on targeted regional meetings and working groups (such as Asia-Oceania GEO, the Pacific Islands GIS and Remote Sensing Users Group, and the *Observation Spatiale au Service de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (OSS-NC)) to the fullest extent possible to drive engagement with PICT actors.

The PIAG presented its Engagement Strategy to the 55th Executive Committee (July 2021), and the Committee expressed their satisfaction with the progress made by the PIAG. This Engagement Strategy is provided in Annex A as a reference. During implementation of the Engagement Strategy, PIAG members will continue to participate in, support, and connect the various activities underway for the PICTs. This reflects PIAG's status as an advisory body. The PIAG is using this Engagement Strategy to track progress while the living PIAG Work Plan both evolves and is executed. In this report, we present an update of our progress on the Engagement Strategy for Programme Board review and comment.

2 PROGRESS

2.1 Membership Updates

- Jens Kruger has come aboard as the Deputy Director for the Ocean and Maritime Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC), managing the Digital Earth Pacific at SPC. Jens has made his initial steps into Andrew Jones' role on the PIAG.
- Nicholas Rollings from the University of South Pacific (USP), a multinational academic institution, has applied to the Executive Committee for USP to join GEO as a Participating Organization.

2.2 Progress

Since the previous Programme Board meeting, PIAG has made marked progress in terms of delivery against the five areas of Engagement Strategy focus. PIAG also has refined its detailed Work Plan as a living document to allow all members to easily track and update progress to individual items. The detailed Work Plan document is available on request to the PIAG co-leads or the GEO Secretariat.

Recent progress for each element of the Engagement Strategy is listed in Table 1. Completed efforts are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. PIAG Progress

Area Of Focus	Ongoing
Scope	Development of guides to the GEO Work Plan (WP) for the Pacific, Directory of the Earth Observation (EO) Ecosystem in the Pacific, and Capabilities Statement
Consult	PICT based organisations present at each PIAG meeting, followed by discussion. December 2021 Nicholas Rollings (University of the South Pacific, USP) and January 2022 Kelly Haden (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP).
Connect	Discussions on opportunities to engage the Pacific based academic and local Geographic Information System (GIS) groups with the GEO WP China and the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) will hold a training for Asian and Pacific region/PICTs in May or June 2022 on EO satellite applications. Technical training, including national government hosted (China) and regional organization-hosted training via Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society (GRSS). Active discussions and participation in setting up a regional Geographic Information System and Remote Sensing (GIS&RS) event in Noumea scheduled from 28th Nov to 4th Dec 2022.
Align	PIAG is working with member UNESCAP during their period of strategic planning and the 2022 Ministerial Conference to align frameworks for Asian and Pacific EO, e.g. The Asia Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030) 4th Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific (27 Oct, Bali Indonesia) PIAG is seeking opportunities to strengthen direct linkages between the PICTs and GEO activities on Disaster Risk management (Sendai Framework), Climate change, and Sustainable Development (UNSDGs)
Advise	Drafting report to 58th Executive Committee meeting.

Table 2. Progress Completed in Recent Months

Area Of Focus	Complete
Scope	Needs Assessment for DE Pacific complete and publicly published. Compiled additional reports of prior EO needs assessments Map GEO WP against needs of the PICTs including their regional organisations
Consult	University of South Pacific, as a multinational university, applied to become a GEO Participating Organization (PO)
Connect	The 14 th Asia-Oceania GEO (AOGEO) Symposium, 10-12 November 2021. Special Session 2 organized by the PIAG: Satellite data for the Pacific Islands: Supplier and User perspectives. ¹ <i>Observation Spatiale au Service de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (OSS-NC)</i> , 2-4 November 2021. ² Pacific GIS&RS User Conference, 22-23 November 2021. ³ GEO Week 2021, 25 November 2021. Side Session: Charting the course to greater engagement between GEO and the Pacific Islands. ⁴ The agreement on Satellite images cooperation to serve Small Island Developing States (SIDS)/PICTs between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Land Satellite Remote Sensing Application Centre (LASAC) signed on 14 Dec 2021
Align	GEO PIAG had a virtual meeting with Asia-Pacific UNESCAP leaders on 3 Feb to discuss upcoming UNESCAP events and strategic planning. Participants agreed to continue to explore the opportunities.

3 NEXT STEPS

The PIAG is actively implementing the living Work Plan, as depicted in the Engagement Strategy. We are exploring multiple modes by which GEO and PICTs may engage. This is not limited to engagement on technical aspects of Earth observation, but also including other elements of the Pacific Islands EO ecosystem such as user-driven perspectives, and education and capacity building. All of these seek organic ways in which PICTs might find intuitive connection with GEO.

- The PIAG plans to deliver a draft Report to the 58th Executive Committee meeting.
- Education and Capacity Building: An informal coalition of educators and academicians is forming within PIAG. These experts teach coursework and train Pacific Island students in geospatial science in institutions across the Pacific Islands. They are fostering experts who will help develop connections between the EO community, island EO users, and GEO. This connection with educational sector is crucial to empower the next generation of Pacific EO practitioners. Doing so will grow the Pacific GEO community.
- Discussion amongst PIAG members has highlighted the gap in regional satellite radar coverage needed to produce analysis-ready data for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Climate Change, and other Work Programme elements with activity in the Pacific Islands. Cloud cover is a chronic impediment to electro-optical imaging, and many PICTs are regularly covered by clouds. Radar punches through cloud, but data currently are sparse. Thus, PIAG recognizes the need

¹ <https://aogeo.net/2021-14th/>

² <https://oss.nc/>

³ <http://www.picgisrs.org/2021-conference-agenda/>

⁴ https://earthobservations.org/geoweeek2021.php?t=full_schedule

to further encourage satellite data providers to include PICTs requirements and adjust their missions in order to collect over island landforms. This is an excellent example of an opportunity for GEO and its members to come together on a platform mission need.

- The PIAG is exploring ways for increasing GEO's outreach in the PICTs to demonstrate how GEO is addressing the global agendas, as well as fostering opportunities engagement of the PICTs and other organizations in the GEO Work Programme. For instance, raising awareness of the GEO engagement priorities – all highly relevant for the PICTs; and promoting how they can access free and open data and use many other resources through the GEO infrastructure.

4 VISIONING – THE WAY FORWARD

The PIAG Charter is scheduled to sunset in late 2022. The group has built good momentum despite the pandemic and achieved and planned more activities. It recognizes that more needs to be done to attract greater engagement of Pacific Islands members, that the PIAG should remain inclusive, and that a somewhat informal format (self-organizing) where open and technical discussions are possible and fewer constraints is beneficial.

After consultation with PIAG members, we do not see the termination of the PIAG in 2022 as an option, given the energy and efforts towards building this community. On the contrary, we have begun to discuss our vision for the way ahead. We feel that a one- to two-year extension of the terms of reference, with delivery of a final report, will permit us to capitalize on the momentum, emerging collaborations, and large events planned for late 2022 such as the OSS in New Caledonia and the UNESCAP Ministerial Summit. The Report to the Executive Committee later in the year will include recommendations for continuing GEO support for the Pacific Islands in helping them further connect with Earth observation and environmental applications.

Annex A

Draft Outline of the PIAG Engagement Strategy

Goal: Welcome new Members from the Pacific and other island nations to the GEO community, and recognise the significant capabilities they have to offer. Emphasise the importance of GEO being inclusive of these countries with their significant and increasing exposure to disaster risk, climate change and sustainable development challenges. <i>EO Talanoa Statement (2019)</i>			
PIAG Terms of Reference	Proposed Activities	Proposed Outputs	Planned Outcomes (5-10 Years)
<p>SCOPE the EO needs and priorities of the Pacific</p> <p>CONSULT with PICTs to understand needs, barriers, opportunities for engagement</p> <p>CONNECT technical EO activities in PICTs and GEO with one another</p> <p>ALIGN with relevant UN agendas</p> <p>ADVISE GEO governance on how to strengthen the links between PICTs and GEO</p>	<p>Identify EO needs and end user priorities and connect to the GWP</p> <p>Strengthen PICT GEO engagement</p> <p>Promote participation by PICTs in activities that increase knowledge sharing, expertise and opportunities</p> <p>Promote alignment with UN ESCAP and other UN Agendas</p> <p>Advise ExCom and PB on ways to improve GEO-PICT engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritized list of WP to promote/facilitate engagement with PICTs • Identify the best channels for individual GEO member assistance to PICTs • Establish a PICT community of practice (CoP) • Increased PICT membership in GEO • Increased PICT involvement in GEO workshops and meetings • PICT leadership forum for GEO • Training and development opportunities for PICTs, includes data sharing • Greater PICT engagement with the private sector. • Greater transfer of knowledge GEO ↔ PICTs • Aligned activities GEO ↔ UN ESCAP • GEO-UN ESCAP workshops • Alignment with other UN Agendas • PIAG Draft Engagement Strategy 	<p>Talanoa Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PICT governments lead all Earth Observation conversations and interventions in the Pacific. • PICT leaders and governments able to apply available EO to support enhanced decision making and achieve sustainable outcomes/development. • PICTs actively support marine and terrestrial stewardship in partnership with GEO and Earth Observation partners. • PICTs utilize EO to benefit regional blue economies. • Recognition of Traditional Knowledge in the Pacific and its inclusion as part of EO interventions and application to Oceans and Lands sensing initiatives. <p>Canberra Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEO community provide valued support to PICTs with their significant and increasing exposure to disaster risk, climate change and sustainable development challenges. • GEO community recognizes and draws on the EO capabilities the Pacific retains.