

Request to Extend the Mandate of the Pacific Islands Advisory Group

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

1 INTRODUCTION

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have significant and increasing exposure to disaster risk, climate change and sustainable development challenges. Building on the objectives of the 2019 Canberra Declaration, the Executive Committee, at its 51st meeting, convened the Pacific Islands Advisory Group (PIAG) to engage the PICTs and the GEO community in addressing regional needs and priorities for Earth observations.

The current PIAG terms of reference (see Annex A) expire at the end of calendar year 2022, although that mandate may be extended by decision of the Executive Committee. PIAG members have thoroughly discussed future options for the group and agreed that although there has been substantial progress in developing and engaging with the PICT community, and with GEO, the pandemic and other factors limited the ability to fully achieve the ambitious duties and deliverables in the terms of reference. There is consensus among the PIAG members to request an extension for two years (to the end of 2024), with no other changes to the terms of reference.

This extension will enable PIAG to fully implement its systematic approach and to integrate its actions with the opportunities presented by the 2023-2025 GEO Work Programme and the post-2020 GEO visioning exercise. This extension will also allow time to plan future engagement in the region, most notably by members of PIAG based in the PICTs. The Programme Board has been consulted on this strategy and has expressed its support.

In support of this request for extension, this document summarizes some of the key achievements of PIAG against the five areas of action identified in the terms of reference and explores possible models for GEO-PICT engagement beyond the conclusion of PIAG.

2 DETAILS SUPPORTING A REQUEST FOR EXTENSION

2.1 Overview

The PIAG employs an inclusive approach to engaging with PICTs and relevant GEO Members, Participating Organizations, Associates, and subject-matter experts. PIAG capitalizes on targeted regional meetings and working groups (such as [Asia-Oceania GEO](#) and regional Earth observations and geospatial organizations) to the fullest extent possible to guide engagement with PICT actors. In a region already challenged by constraints such

as fatigue and distraction caused by the burden of multiple remits and the lack of resources and capacity, the PIAG was initiated and convened at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, substantially diverting government and societal attention away from Earth observation-related activities. This compromised progress that might have been made through in-person stakeholder engagement that is both highly valued and potentially lengthy in the islands. Despite setbacks, PIAG has made systematic, substantial progress in communicating about GEO and Earth observations data sharing and applications at virtual meetings, and in fostering opportunities for capacity building and EO-community building in the PICTs. This also is mirrored in broader GEO engagement with PICT leaders and the Pacific Island Earth observations ecosystem of service providers, users, and their resources and priorities.

2.2 Progress

At the 55th Executive Committee meeting (July 2021), PIAG presented its systematic approach to the expected deliverables in its terms of reference as a 1-page logic framework (“log-frame”). The log-frame identifies a series of actions and opportunities intended to increase and improve opportunities for connections between GEO and the PICTs. The key elements are directly linked to the PIAG terms of reference and highlight links between GEO and the PICTs as high-level objectives. During implementation of the log-frame, PIAG members participate in, support, and connect the various activities underway for the PICTs. This reflects PIAG’s status as an advisory body. The log-frame is underpinned by a detailed work plan that is available on request. The PIAG uses this systematic framework to track progress while the living PIAG work plan is executed. Completed and current work of the PIAG is summarized in Annex B.

2.3 Vision

The request for extension is motivated by PIAG’s vision to continue to build and sustain mutual GEO-PICT knowledge exchange and genuine and effective engagement to benefit the PICTs and GEO as outlined in the Duties and Deliverables of its terms of reference. In the view of the PIAG, this relationship must be driven by Pacific Islanders, and be intuitive and organic with the cultural and professional networks among the PICTs. It should also reflect the Earth observations ecosystem in the PICTs by accounting for Earth observations service providers, users, capacity, and connectivity. If this approach is successful, it should result in increased GEO membership by Pacific Island nations, more regional integration into GEO Work Programme elements, engagement with capacity building activities, development of Earth observations-centred social media networks, and be supported by regional GEOs through true dialogue and co-production of value-added Earth observations products.

2.4 Other considerations

Two additional factors contributed to the PIAG recommendation to request extension:

First, progress to date brings the PIAG poised to deliver several actions central to its mandate, but not within the current sunset date. These include:

- The “Oceania Geospatial Symposium” planned for late 2022 supported by PIAG leads and partners including the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands

Universities Research Network (PIURN), France, New Caledonia, Australia, the Copernicus programme, and others (the “Week at a Glance” from the Symposium briefing package is provided in Annex C);

- Development of three documents aimed to facilitate improved GEO-PICT engagement:
 - A GEO capability statement for the Pacific (value proposition of GEO to the Pacific);
 - A guide to the GEO Work Programme for the Pacific; and
 - A directory of the Earth observations ecosystem of the Pacific Island region (to increase the GEO community's awareness of the main Earth observations actors in the Pacific and their interests, needs and priorities);
- Regular participation of UNESCAP in PIAG and interaction with UNESCAP on the strategic space planning cycles in late 2022;
- Inception of a community-based network of academic Earth observations institutions in the Pacific Islands (University of South Pacific, University of New Caledonia, Pacific Islands University Research Network, and the University of Hawai‘i);
- Planned face-to-face information sessions and future targeted capacity building activities developed in coordination with PICT-specified needs, including, for example, training and technical support from natural resources satellites; and
- Engagement and potential support of [Digital Earth Pacific](#).

Second, the Programme Board is developing a new GEO Work Programme for 2023-2025; GEO is launching a visioning exercise for the post-2025 period, and the Expert Advisory Group on GEOSS preparing recommendations regarding GEO's role as a providing of information infrastructure. All three of these developments offer opportunities to include PICT priorities in their content. PIAG has already been exploring connections with the GEO Work programme as part of its log-frame “Connect” and “Alignment” activities, though these efforts could be greatly expanded with an extension of the mandate.

3 CONCLUSION

PIAG members believe that the termination of the PIAG at the end of 2022 would leave many of the expected outcomes of this process unrealized which would thus squander the energy and efforts invested towards building this community for the last two years, as well as the mutual learning that has been initiated. PIAG members agree that extension of the mandate, while retaining the deliverables as specified in the terms of reference, will enable the group to capitalize on the momentum, emerging collaborations, and large events planned for late 2022. Further, an extension will enable PIAG to position its engagement efforts in alignment with emerging GEO programmatic evolution.

With an extended mandate, PIAG will continue to develop a sustainable and mutually beneficial Earth observations relationship between GEO and the PICTs and will, among other actions:

- Continue dialogue with representatives of the PICTs, including through a GEO Track event at the Oceania Geospatial Symposium and a second *Talanoa* discussion (Pacific Island roundtable);

- Systematically explore connections between PICTs and GEO Work Programme activities, including with a renewed GEO Wetlands initiative, as coastal wet mangrove forests are central to multiple benefits (including sustainable development, climate action, disaster resilience) in multiple jurisdictions across Oceania;
- Plan face-to-face information sessions and targeted capacity development activities focusing on PICT-specified needs, including, for example, training and technical support from Earth observation service provider and analytical communities; and
- Explore future options, such as a dedicated community of practice, a GEO Work Programme Pilot Initiative, a possible regional presence in GEO, an alliance of small island states, social media networks, a GEO liaison position hosted at a PICT-based Participating Organization, or some combination of these or other options.

PIAG will continue to report regularly on its results to the Executive Committee and the Programme Board.

4 RECOMMENDATION

The PIAG recommends that the Executive Committee extend the PIAG mandate until the end of calendar year 2024, with no further changes to the existing terms of reference.

ANNEX A

Pacific Islands Advisory Group – Terms of Reference

1 PURPOSE

The Pacific Islands Advisory Group (PIAG) is convened to advise the GEO Programme Board and the GEO Executive Committee regarding the implementation of the elements of the Canberra Declaration for the PICTs. In the longer term, the group may also support GEO engagement with island nations in other regions.

In particular, the PIAG is requested by the Executive Committee to give special attention to articles 10 and 11 of the Canberra Declaration, which recognize the need for GEO to:

- Recognize the significant capabilities the PICTs and other island nations have to offer; and
- Be inclusive of these countries with their significant and increasing exposure to disaster risk, climate change and sustainable development challenges.

2 DUTIES

- Work with the PICTs and international organizations to increase their participation in GEO governance and relevant GEO Work Programme activities, consistent with the priorities and needs identified in the [GEO Week 2019 Talanoa Outcome Statement](#);
- Organize, and participate in, discussions with representatives from the PICTs to support local communities (including GIS and remote sensing) in expressing and then better understand their interests, needs, constraints, and priorities, and where appropriate, support their capacity building as related to GEO and the GEO Work Programme;
- Work with other parts of the GEO Work Programme that are relevant to the PICTs;
- Encourage those living in PICTs to share with the GEO community their Earth observations expertise, areas of interest, and priorities, and to provide feedback and advice on GEO's products and services; and
- Work with the PICTs to identify and implement technical Earth observations solutions according to expressed needs and priorities of the PICTs.

3 TERM

The PIAG is convened until the end of the 2022 calendar year. This term may be extended by decision of the Executive Committee

4 EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

- Prioritized list of GEO Work Programme activities, including regional GEOs, that will be engaged to determine their relevance to the needs of the PICTs.
- Meetings or workshops to consult with PICTs and international organization stakeholders on how to encourage greater participation in GEO activities.

- 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.
- Establishment of a “GEO presence” within existing Pacific Island Communities of Practice to share information, knowledge, expertise and opportunities between GEO and PICTs on Earth observations matters.
- Identify 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 \(2018-2030\)](#).

5 MEMBERSHIP

Members of the PIAG must be nominated by GEO Members, Participating Organizations or Associates.

Leadership of the PIAG will be decided by consensus of its members. Geographical diversity and co-leadership are encouraged. The current co-leads are Australia; China and the Pacific Community (SPC), supported by New Caledonia (France).

The GEO Secretariat will provide support to the PIAG.

6 REPORTING

The PIAG will report its progress to the Executive Committee annually, unless there are key matters specific to the PIAG scope and deliverables that require Executive Committee’s consideration.

The PIAG will provide an update at each Programme Board meeting as a regular standing item to ensure close connectivity between PICTs and the GEO Work Programme.

7 REVISIONS

These terms of reference may be revised at any time by the Executive Committee.

ANNEX B

PIAG Logic Framework – Completed Activities¹

AREA OF FOCUS	COMPLETED
SCOPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Pacific EO Needs Assessment complete and published • GEO WP mapped against needs of the PICTS • Side event GEO Week 2021: Charting the course to greater engagement between GEO and the Pacific Islands
CONSULT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging Pacific-Islands based academic and local EO groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Dec 2021: Nicholas Rollings, USP ◦ Jan 2022: Kelly Hayden, UNESCAP ◦ Mar 2022: Melissa Iwamoto, PacIOOS ◦ Jun 2022: Brianna Bambic, Allen Coral Reef Atlas Initiative
CONNECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satellite data for the Pacific Islands: Supplier and User perspectives (AOGEO Symposium 2021) • Observation Spatiale au Service de la Nouvelle Calédonie (OSS-NC) Nov 2020 • Pacific GIS&RS User Conference 2021 • Agreement on Satellite images cooperation to serve SIDS/PICTs between FAO and LASAC signed on 14 Dec 2021 • GRSS sponsored USP seats for MOOC in GIS • USP, as a multinational university, accepted as a GEO PO
ALIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEO PIAG met with Asia-Pacific UNESCAP representatives to discuss upcoming UNESCAP events and strategic planning

PIAG Logic Framework – Current Activities

AREA OF FOCUS	ONGOING
SCOPE	Resources and References: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capability Statement (GEO's Value Proposition to PICTs); 2. Guide to the GEO WP for the PICTs; and 3. Directory of the EO Ecosystem in the Pacific
CONSULT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite guest speakers each monthly meeting, followed by discussion • Active collaboration to support PICT members with individual requests
CONNECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging Pacific-Islands based academic and local EO groups • Technical training (China and APSCO in August 2022 on EO satellite applications; regional organization-hosted training via GRSS) • PIAG support for Oceania Geospatial Symposium in Noumea Nov 28th to Dec 4th 2022
ALIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIAG support for UNESCAP on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific/ The Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030) • Ongoing efforts to link with DRR, Paris Climate Agreement, UN SDGs, and UN DOS
ADVISE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus-reaching on strategy-going-forward and request for Extension to ExCom-58

¹ A detailed list of completed and ongoing activities is included in the full PIAG work plan, available upon request.

ANNEX C Oceania Geospatial Symposium “Week at a Glance”

