
Report

52nd Executive Committee Meeting

Teleconference, 7-8 July 2020

<i>As accepted at the 53rd Executive Committee Meeting.</i>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs

Outcome: The Co-Chairs and the Secretariat Director thanked the GEO community for continuing the work of GEO during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, for their contributions to the pandemic response and recovery.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 52.1 (Rev.1) – for decision)

Outcome: The agenda was adopted as distributed. Several Members indicated their intention to speak during Any other business.

1.3 Draft Report of the 51st Executive Committee Meeting (Document 52.2 – for decision)

Outcome: The document was approved with the inclusion of several changes from Japan.

1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 52.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.5 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 52.4 – for information)

2 SESSION 2: STRATEGY AND PLANNING

2.1 GEO Knowledge Hub (GKH) Implementation Plan (Document 52.5 – for decision)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for its work on the development of the GKH implementation plan;

- Approved the implementation of the next phase (July 2020 to June 2021) of development of the GKH;
- Requested that the Secretariat provide regular updates to the Executive Committee, the Programme Board, and the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT) on the progress in implementing the plan and on the choice of thematic priorities when choices have to be made; and
- Requested also that regular information and updates about the GKH be provided to the GEO community, possibly through a webpage on the GEO website.

2.2 Programme Board Update (Presentation by the Programme Board Co-Chair – for discussion)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Programme Board for their work, especially under the difficult circumstances in the past few months, in particular, noting the successful GEO 2020 Virtual Symposium;
- Welcomed the Programme Board plan to prepare a document summarizing the challenges and opportunities for the GEO community arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Recommended that the GEO Awards process be formalized and its progress to be reviewed by the Executive Committee;
- Requested that the Programme Board provide information regarding progress made by GEO Work Programme activities over the past year; and
- Noted that the Programme Board has removed the rigid limits on the participation of commercial sector organizations in Foundational Task Working Groups but will ensure that this proportion does not exceed a reasonable limit.

2.3 Implementing the Resolutions of the Canberra Declaration: Update on Activities (Presentation by the Secretariat and Australia – for discussion)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Pacific Islands Advisory Group for their report and for the initial progress in engaging countries and territories in the region, and looked forward to strengthening capacity development for the Pacific Islands;
- Noted the good progress being achieved on the elements of the Canberra Declaration and appreciated the tracking of actions by the Secretariat;
- Requested that updates on progress against the Canberra Declaration be provided in advance of future meetings through the Secretariat Operations Reports; and
- Asked that the Pacific Islands Advisory Group engage more closely with the Programme Board and with Asia-Oceania GEO as it continues its work.

3 SESSION 3: FINANCES

3.1 2019 Financial Statement and Audit Report (Document 52.6 – for decision in advance of Plenary approval)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

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- Thanked Mr Brian Cover for his report; and
 - Approved the 2019 Financial Statements and Audit Report for presentation to Plenary.

4 SESSION 4: RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

4.1 Resource Mobilization for the GEO Trust Fund (Document 52.8 – for discussion)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Budget Working Group for the presentation and their work on the topic;
- Endorsed the Budget Working Group recommendations as stated in the document, requesting that the letters to GEO Members be signed by only the Secretariat Director to expedite the process.

5 SESSION 5: GEO MID-TERM EVALUATION

5.1 GEO Mid-Term Evaluation Update

7 SESSION 7: GEO WEEK 2020

7.1 GEO Week 2020 (Presentation by the Secretariat – for information)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Endorsed the proposal from South Africa to postpone the GEO-17 Plenary to October / November 2021;
- Proposed that an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting be held in November 2020 to deal with the key Plenary decision items, this meeting to involve GEO Members which are not members of the Executive Committee either directly in the meeting or prior to the meeting; and
- Created a Plenary Working Group to organize activities required to address required Plenary business issues as well as other engagement activities for the GEO community.

Action 52.1: Executive Committee members to nominate representatives to the Plenary Working Group. **Due: 10 July 2020.**

8 SESSION 8: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

8.1 Review of Applications for Participating Organizations

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the applications from the following organizations to become GEO Participating Organizations:

- Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT);
- Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH);
- Plan4all; and

- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

8.2 Review of Applications for Associate Category

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the applications from the following organizations to become GEO Associates:

- AmericaView; and
- Eversis.

9 SESSION 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

9.1 Any Other Business

9.2 Review of Action Items

Draft Report

52nd Executive Committee Meeting

Teleconference, 19-20 March 2020

FULL REPORT

Tuesday, 8 July 2020

Meeting convened at 12:40

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs

Li Pengde, China Lead Co-Chair representative and meeting Chair, opening the meeting, which was the second Executive Committee meeting held using the teleconference format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Li noted that the world was continuing to adjust its plans, operations, and expectations as we learn more about the virus and about the various measures for protection and control in each country. This has been a slower than normal year as the world adjusts to the pandemic, but GEO is still moving forward.

Huang Wei, China Lead Co-Chair, thanked the Secretariat for their work in preparing for the Executive Committee meeting against the challenge of the pandemic. He expressed his regret that he was unable to visit the Secretariat offices in March of this year as originally planned. Mr. Huang noted the exchange of letters of solidarity with the Secretariat Director in April 2020. He was impressed to learn that though the Secretariat staff were working from home, they remained dedicated to reaching the 2020 goals and objectives. Although, due to a schedule conflict, he was unable to attend the 51st Executive Committee meeting, Mr. Huang followed developments in GEO closely, especially with regard to the development and implementation of GEOSS. This year, the development of the GEO Knowledge Hub is in full swing and Mr. Huang stated that he looked forward to hearing about the latest developments. He also said that he was pleased to hear that the 2020 GEO Symposium was successfully held for the first time as a video link and hoped that it would pave the way for implementation of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme. Mr. Huang drew attention to an international cooperation project called China-GEO Cooperation Initiative (CGCI) which was launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology of China to provide continuous funding support to the GEO Work Programme. He noted that the pandemic situation is improving in some regions and countries and suggested that GEO Members share their experiences in applying Earth observation technologies to the response to and recovery from the pandemic. While GEO may not be able to meet together in person this November in South Africa, it is still possible to improve communication in various ways to discuss and explore the future of GEO together. Mr. Huang pledged to follow the example of previous GEO Co-Chairs and strengthen collaboration and communication within GEO and with the wider international community.

Patrick Child, European Commission Co-chair, expressed his sympathy with those who have been affected by the pandemic and noted that the Commission was still largely in teleworking mode with only about 10% of colleagues in the office. He paid tribute to the efficiency of the GEO community, and in particular the Secretariat, for continuing the important work of GEO. Mr Child highlighted initiatives being taken by the Earth observations community in fighting the pandemic, notably a joint initiative of the European Commission, United States, and Japan to combine information from their three space agencies to address the pandemic. He stated that the GEO community is well placed to take account of the situation and that GEO should consider whether amendments may be needed to the GEO Work Programme to address health issues. Mr Child expressed his pleasure at being able to meet, even if it was only virtually, and to develop a common vision of the future and the evolution of GEO.

Steven Volz, United States Co-Chair, seconded the remarks by the Commission regarding the ability of GEO to continue its activities during the pandemic. He noted that GEO is seen as particularly capable in responding to challenges and to adapting to changing conditions. All agencies managing observational networks have been organizing to continue their observations during the crisis and in response to the crisis. Mr Volz expressed the view that life after the pandemic will be different than before and that GEO will be an important player in adapting to the conditions to come.

Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa Co-Chair, observed that the pandemic has been a difficult time for everyone. He also noted that a large amount of work was going on to ensure that Earth observations plays an important role such as when, for example, national governments have used Earth observations to identify accurate locations of populations. As conditions become less predictable, Earth observations become ever more important and it is critical that those who need to use Earth observations have the capacity to do so.

Gilberto Camara, GEO Secretariat Director, thanked Mr Huang Wei and the other Co-Chairs for their remarks and provided his best wishes to all those present and their families in these troubling times. He assured everyone that the Secretariat is working hard to continue operations. Mr Camara highlighted the recent GEO 2020 Virtual Symposium, which included a session on the use of Earth observations in the response and recovery to COVID-19 as well as many other sessions. He noted that participation in the Symposium was larger than in any previous Symposium and that, since the presentations and sessions were all recorded, the materials continue to be accessible by others. Mr Camara also drew attention to the large number of nominations received to the Foundational Task Working Groups, these nominations representing a diverse set of regions and organizations. He observed that it was a very positive sign for GEO that the number of persons wishing to collaborate with GEO is growing. Mr. Camara also stated that the GEO-Google Earth Engine Licence Programme had received 50 proposals of which 35 had been approved and would be announced shortly after.

Outcome: The Co-Chairs and the Secretariat Director thanked the GEO community for continuing the work of GEO during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, for their contributions to the pandemic response and recovery.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 52.1 (Rev.1) – for decision)

The Chair noted the streamlined agenda for the teleconference format and drew attention to documents that had been distributed earlier and which would be considered approved unless objections were raised.

China and Italy indicated their interest in speaking under Any other business. No members proposed changes to the agenda.

Outcome: The agenda was adopted as distributed.

1.3 Draft Report of the 51st Executive Committee Meeting (Document 52.2 – for decision)

Japan submitted several proposed changes prior to the meeting. No other issues were raised during the meeting.

Outcome: The document was approved with the inclusion of the changes from Japan.

1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 52.3 – for decision)

No requests for changes were submitted by Executive Committee members.

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.5 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 52.4 – for information)

Australia noted an item on the Coalition for Rainforest Nations and asked how this might be used to strengthen the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI). The Secretariat Director responded that the Secretariat has been working to engage the Coalition, which represents almost all countries that have significant tropical forests. Discussions are underway regarding the Coalition possibly applying to become a GEO Participating Organization. First, however, the focus has been on collaborative activities to bring them into the GEO Work Programme. This will likely start with a Community Activity proposal later this year. This would have positive consequences for GFOI. The Secretariat has also been working closely with GFOI lately on three contributions to supplement its Methods and Guidance Document (MGD). These contributions will address issues not currently fully represented in the MGD. The offer from the Secretariat has been well received by GFOI leadership. The Secretariat is also working with GFOI to permit the Coalition to use SEPAL, the FAO cloud services platform supported by the Government of Norway, as a solution for their needs without requiring pay for use.

Australia asked a follow-up question regarding what the unique contribution of the proposed Community Activity would be. The Secretariat Director answered that the current MGD emphasizes the use of sampling methods. The Coalition wanted to explore other methods, particularly “wall to wall” methods where every pixel is counted. They identified Brazil as the country where this is being done operationally. GFOI, at this moment, does not have a ready tool that uses wall to wall methods. If such a tool is developed through the Community Activity, it would be made part of the GFOI toolkit as the relationship goes further.

2 SESSION 2: STRATEGY AND PLANNING

2.1 GEO Knowledge Hub (GKH) Implementation Plan (Document 52.5 – for decision)

Douglas Cripe, Senior Scientific Advisor in the GEO Secretariat, presented the item, starting with a review of the timeline from the decision by the GEO-16 Plenary requesting that the Secretariat prepare an implementation plan to the submission of the plan for consideration at this meeting. Mr Cripe noted that the original timeline for the development of the plan was revised by the Programme Board which saw a need for additional consultation within the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT). After four iterations, taking account of all comments received, the implementation plan was now recommended for approval by both the GIDTT and the Programme Board.

Mr Cripe then briefly described the contents of the plan section by section. He emphasized that the plan would be for a one-year period following the approval by the Executive Committee, following which a plan for the next phase would need to be approved. Resources required for the first phase have already been approved by the Executive Committee in the Concept of Operations document and thus no new resources are requested at this time.

During the first phase of this step-by-step approach, the focus would be on five major tasks:

- Development of the first version of the digital library, which will be based on InvenioRDM;
- Linking the GEOSS Platform and the GKH;
- Working with GEO Work Programme activities to identify initial contributions to the GKH,
- Showcasing examples of reusability of Earth observations applications and demonstrating the benefits of doing so for GEO Work Programme activities; and
- Improving the digital library taking account of feedback from the GEO community.

Mr Cripe noted the importance of engagement of the GEO community during this first phase of implementation. He concluded by reviewing the findings and recommendations of the GIDTT in their summary report, which were included in the cover note to the GKH implementation plan. He went on to confirm that the Secretariat agreed with the recommendations of the GIDTT and stated how they would be addressed.

CEOS said that they were keen to highlight the availability of Analysis-Ready Data (ARD) on commercial platforms as a key element of the GKH model. It was noted that CEOS has a comprehensive strategy for ARD and asked that Executive Committee members stress the importance of this to their governments. Mr Cripe thanked CEOS for their point regarding ARD and noted that the Secretariat did not favour any particular suppliers of ARD, only that the solutions be open source and accessible over the long-term.

France thanked the Secretariat for their work on the GKH and stated that they supported approval of the plan. Regarding the thematic priorities to be identified, France asked how they would be selected and who would be involved, particularly whether there

would be a role for the Executive Committee. Mr Cripe responded that the focus will be on identifying focal points in each GEO Work Programme activity that is interested in contributing to the GKH, although other suggestions are welcome.

The European Commission commended the Secretariat on the development of the implementation plan following the request from the Executive Committee. The Commission stated that they were quite happy that the plan included the recommendations of the GIDTT and that the GKH would be properly connected to the GEOSS infrastructure and the GEOSS Platform. The Commission requested that the Secretariat update the Programme Board and the GIDTT on a regular basis. It was recommended that there be milestones for reporting at the end of the first year. It would also be important that the GKH be well-connected with other GEO activities. Mr Cripe responded that the GKH team would continue to work with the GIDTT on the connections with the rest of the GEOSS infrastructure.

The United States stated that they supported approval of the implementation plan and the expanded pilot. They were in favour of the stepwise approach and looked forward to the update next year.

Switzerland thanked all those who participated in the elaboration of the plan. They concurred with others regarding the need for transparent reporting to the GEO community, to which end it was recommended that the Secretariat consider creating a dedicated webpage to provide continuous information on progress, challenges and appeals to the GEO community which may arise. Switzerland stated that they fully endorsed the plan. Mr Cripe responded that the Secretariat is looking to create an online forum for the community to share issues and solutions with one another.

China agreed that the GKH is quite ambitious and so it is best to achieve it step by step. The addition of information and knowledge to the existing focus on data is an important and useful direction. China recommended that the GKH should connect with regional and national data and information sources. The completion of an expanded prototype was seen as quite feasible for this year.

South Africa welcomed the document, observing that it was very clear. The plan broadens and clarifies what the GKH is intended to be and how it will relate to other components of the GEOSS infrastructure. South Africa echoed the request from the European Commission and the United States for regular updates on progress. The stepwise approach was seen as sensible. The intent to engage the broader GEO community was supported and South Africa encouraged this engagement to be as broad as possible, including all GEO Members.

Chile also welcomed the document and recommended that special presentations be provided for each region. Presentations in Spanish were requested for the Americas region, if possible, to improve participation from Spanish speaking countries. Mr Cripe noted that the working language of GEO is English, although the information could be provided in other languages if additional resources were made available for this purpose.

Japan, Republic of Korea, and Italy indicated their support for the GKH implementation plan.

The Secretariat Director thanked Executive Committee members for their support and committed to implement the GKH in collaboration with the GEO community.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for its work on the development of the GKH implementation plan;
- Approved the implementation of the next phase (July 2020 to June 2021) of development of the GKH;
- Requested that the Secretariat provide regular updates to the Executive Committee, the Programme Board, and the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT) on the progress in implementing the plan and on the choice of thematic priorities when choices have to be made; and
- Requested also that regular information and updates about the GKH be provided to the GEO community, possibly through a webpage on the GEO website.

2.2 Programme Board Update (Presentation by the Programme Board Co-Chair – for discussion)

Yana Gevorgyan, Programme Board Co-Chair (United States), presented the item on behalf of the Programme Board. She noted that the 17th Programme Board meeting was held during the week prior to the 2020 GEO Virtual Symposium and so the report did not take account of the Symposium itself. Ms Gevorgyan noted the effort required to prepare for the Symposium, thanking the Secretariat and the Programme board Symposium subgroup for their efforts. She drew attention to the huge participation at this year's Symposium relative to previous years.

Ms Gevorgyan described the discussion at the Programme Board concerning the impacts of the pandemic on the GEO Work Programme. She indicated that a document would be prepared regarding the implications of the pandemic for GEO, targeting November 2020 for completion. The Programme Board would be using existing structures to gather information to support this paper, as well as other requirements. She reminded members that GEO Work Programme activities are voluntary contributions from GEO Members and other organizations and so while the Programme Board can propose actions and updates, there must be agreement with the activity teams.

Ms Gevorgyan noted the support of the Programme Board for the GKH implementation plan and thanked the Executive Committee for their support.

Regarding the Foundational Task Working Groups, Ms Gevorgyan said that since the terms of reference were approved by the Executive Committee in March, a call had been issued, nominations received, and the Working Groups were launched. As to the change to the limit for commercial sector members of the Working Groups, Ms Gevorgyan stated that the Programme Board was of the view that a limit of two members per Working Group did not make sense in light of the overall numbers. Even then, nominations of persons associated with commercial sector entities made up only about 10% of the total nominations and many of those were from small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs) which represents an area of focus from the Canberra Declaration and for the Private Sector subgroup. The consensus decision then was to remove the limit while asking that the Secretariat monitor the situation and bring any issues of conflicts to the attention of the Programme Board. Ms Gevorgyan added that the terms of reference for the Private Sector subgroup were also approved by the Programme Board at its 17th meeting. The terms have a focus on SMMEs. She concluded by noting that the GEO Awards process was recently launched for 2020 and that the

Programme Board meeting scheduled for September may depend on decisions regarding the GEO-17 Plenary.

The European Commission stated that it was pleased to see that the Programme Board was able to continue its work in recent months despite the pandemic. The Commission welcomed the proposal to prepare a document on the impacts and opportunities arising as a result of the pandemic, though observing that it was unfortunate it could not be ready for the present meeting. They emphasized that the various cloud computing programmes being followed by the Programme Board need to be connected with the rest of the GEO Work Programme.

China thanked the Programme Board for their work and their recommendations. They suggested that the Programme Board mobilize and leverage the achievements of the GEO Work Programme for inclusion in the GKH. It was noted that the Working Groups may be useful for identifying and packaging knowledge resources for inclusion in the GKH. China also stated that the 2020 GEO Virtual Symposium has provided a very good reference for other events to follow.

The Chair valued the GEO Awards highly and recognized it as a great encouragement for GEO community to keep momentum. So he requested that GEO Awards be formalized and the progress should be reviewed regularly by Executive Committee, including the Term of Reference of the Awards Subgroup. He also suggested that the Awards subgroup consider expanding the range of categories for awards to include, for example, projects and applications. Regarding the Working Groups, it was good to remove the limit on the number of commercial sector members. South Africa then gave a brief presentation on behalf of the Programme Board Private Sector subgroup. The focus of the subgroup is on the commercial sector (noting that the term “private sector” also includes not-for-profit non-governmental organizations) and on SMMEs in particular. The subgroup is looking at both how GEO can support industry, notably use of Earth observations to produce marketable services, and how industry can support GEO, largely through involvement in GEO Work Programme activities. Subgroup members identified a need for more direct engagement with the private sector in their work and so are looking to bring in some private sector representatives from industry associations and regional GEOs. The subgroup is also developing a work plan to address the various duties in its terms of reference; these activities will focus on concrete actions that GEO can implement to strengthen and deepen private sector engagement with GEO.

The Chair stated that the Programme Board is very important for the GEO community, with activities proposed by many countries and organizations. It is important to understand what progress is being made in the various activities. What have been their recent results?

Ms Gevorgyan responded that the Programme Board is currently looking at the best way to engage the GEO Work Programme activities in the GKH. It has also assigned a task to the Awards subgroup to develop their terms of reference and also to identify other possible categories of awards. The targeting time for completing this task would be this November.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Programme Board for their work, especially under the difficult circumstances in the past few months, in particular, noting the successful GEO 2020 Virtual Symposium;
- Welcomed the Programme Board plan to prepare a document summarizing the challenges and opportunities for the GEO community arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Recommended that the GEO Awards process be formalized and its progress to be reviewed by the Executive Committee;
- Requested that the Programme Board provide information regarding progress made by GEO Work Programme activities over the past year; and
- Noted that the Programme Board has removed the rigid limits on the participation of commercial sector organizations in Foundational Task Working Groups but will ensure that this proportion does not exceed a reasonable limit.

2.3 Implementing the Resolutions of the Canberra Declaration: Update on Activities (Presentation by the Secretariat and Australia – for discussion)

Theadora Mills, Communications Manager in the Secretariat, gave a brief presentation on the actions being taken to implement the Canberra Declaration. Regarding paragraph 3 (of the Declaration) dealing with the engagement priorities, she noted the establishment of the Foundational Task Working Groups, two of which directly deal with two of the engagement priorities (climate change and disaster risk reduction). With respect to paragraph 8 on the digital economy, Ms Mills pointed to a session at the World Summit on the Information Society, moderated by the Secretariat, that brought together several UN agencies and other stakeholders around the topic of Building an Inclusive Digital Ecosystem for Earth. On paragraphs 10 and 11 (engagement of Pacific and other island nations), the recent establishment of the Pacific Islands Advisory Group was noted. In response to paragraph 16 (private sector engagement), Ms Mills drew attention to the Programme Board Private Sector subgroup which was described in the Programme Board report. Under paragraph 17 (capacity development), the establishment of the Capacity development Working Group was highlighted. Actions under paragraph 20 (diverse and inclusive GEO community), Ms Mills pointed to several activities targeting youth, women, and indigenous communities, including the Earth School partnership, campaigns to promote leadership opportunities for women in Earth observations, and the High-Level Political Forum session that included members of the GEO Indigenous Alliance. Regarding paragraph 18 (engagement of official development agencies), Ms. Mills noted a session on resource mobilization in the 2020 GEO Virtual Symposium as well as a project by the Graduate Institute of Geneva and supported by the Secretariat on innovative financing methods. She concluded by also mentioning other areas in which the Secretariat is involved on an ongoing basis to address various elements of the Canberra Declaration.

Jonathon Ross (Australia) then presented on behalf of the Pacific Islands Advisory Group. He reminded Executive Committee members that the 2019 Plenary was very successful in engaging Pacific Island states and territories. The Talanoa statement expressed what the Pacific Islands were looking for from GEO. He noted that the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, a GEO Participating Organization and member of the Advisory Group, was leading discussions with Pacific Island countries on the

Advisory Group terms of reference, which demonstrates genuine co-design of the process. Mr. Ross also noted the challenge posed by time zones which has meant that meeting times may be uncomfortable for some GEO Members.

China offered to provide free high-resolution satellite imagery to Pacific Island countries for non-profit use. They also encourage other GEO Members to provide similar access. China also recommended that connections be reinforced between the Advisory Group and the Programme Board and Asia-Oceania GEO.

The European Commission requested that information on the implementation of the Canberra Declaration be circulated in advance rather than presented in the meeting. They drew attention to the element in the Declaration regarding the importance of in situ observations, which they hoped would be further developed. The Commission also looked forward to the work of the Climate Change Working Group, expecting that it may help GEO engage with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) process. Ms Mills replied regarding the first point that the Data Working Group was considering whether to establish a subgroup to focus on in situ data.

Australia agreed with the European Commission regarding reporting on the implementation of the Canberra Declaration and suggested that the reporting be included in the Secretariat Operations reports. It was also proposed that CEOS provide an update on their ARD strategy to the Executive Committee.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Pacific Islands Advisory Group for their report and for the initial progress in engaging countries and territories in the region, and looked forward to strengthening capacity development for the Pacific Islands;
- Noted the good progress being achieved on the elements of the Canberra Declaration and appreciated the tracking of actions by the Secretariat;
- Requested that updates on progress against the Canberra Declaration be provided in advance of future meetings through the Secretariat Operations Reports;
- Asked that the Pacific Islands Advisory Group engage more closely with the Programme Board and with Asia-Oceania GEO as it continues its work; and
- Accepted the offer from CEOS to present their ARD strategy to the Executive Committee.

3 SESSION 3: FINANCES

3.1 2019 Financial Statement and Audit Report (Document 52.6 – for decision in advance of Plenary approval)

Mr. Brian Cover, Chief of the Finance Division, World Meteorological Organization (WMO) presented the financial statements and audit report. Mr. Cover reminded Executive Committee members that WMO provides administrative support to the GEO Secretariat and acts as liaison with the auditors. He noted the strong partnership with GEO, in particular with Patricia Geddes, the GEO Secretariat Senior Administrative Manager. Mr. Cover first drew attention to the audit opinion which was “clean”, that is, there were no qualifications with respect to the financial statements. He also noted that there was now an improved control environment in WMO Finance for supporting GEO.

Mr. Cover said that GEO's financial results were generally consistent between 2018 and 2019. The balance sheet at the end of 2019 showed a very healthy financial position which covered all the liabilities plus planned operating expenses for the first half of the year. He observed that employee benefit liabilities increased considerably, largely due to WMO changing the actuaries, who adjusted the underlying assumptions and the discount rate used. There were no actual changes in the benefit plan itself, the changes were only to the estimate of the liability. Still, GEO has sufficient funds to cover the liabilities and these are clearly earmarked, a practice Mr. Cover recommends continue. He noted that WMO is contingently liable in the case of insufficiency of funds, though the funds are currently sufficient. He also remarked that there was a provision due to a case before a tribunal regarding staff pay, which has created a CHF 121,000 liability. The outcome of the case remains uncertain at this point. He reminded Executive Committee members that employee benefits are a long-term liability, not a current expense.

Turning to financial performance, contribution levels remained consistent between 2018 and 2019, though expenses were slightly higher. Salaries were higher due to the provision for long-term liabilities as previously discussed. There was also increased support for participants at meetings and travel costs were higher due to the Plenary meeting in Canberra. These changes were within expectations. The budget had included an amount of CHF 1.4M for secondments but the actual amount was much lower. Mr. Cover noted that while GEO's current financial position was healthy, 2020 would be more uncertain due to the pandemic. It would be important to ensure that contributions continued to come in. On the other side, expenditures for meetings and travel have been lower, meaning that cash flow remains positive.

Patricia Geddes noted her appreciation for the close collaboration between the GEO Secretariat and WMO regarding financial management.

The European Commission stated that it was pleased to see the positive assessment from the external auditor. They commended the Secretariat for its sound financial management of the GEO Trust Fund. It was noted that the Commission had already made its full contribution for 2020.

China thanked Mr. Cover for his report. They observed that the expenditures in 2019 exceeded the budget. Ms Geddes responded that the higher expenditures were for travel support to developing country participants at the Canberra Plenary; these extra expenditures were covered by a special contribution from Australia.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked Mr. Brian Cover for his report; and
- Approved the 2019 Financial Statements and Audit Report for presentation to Plenary.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00

Wednesday, 8 July 2020

Meeting convened at 12:00

4 SESSION 4: RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

4.1 Resource Mobilization for the GEO Trust Fund (Document 52.8 – for discussion)

Trevor Dhu (Australia) presented the document on behalf of the Budget Working Group. He stated that the Budget Working Group hoped to engage Executive Committee members in the nature of the problem that GEO is facing, to discuss some possible solutions, and to develop a plan for how to address the challenge. The intent was not to revisit the Concept of Operations or other previous decisions of the Executive Committee or Plenary, nor was it to reconsider the indicative scale or the issue of secondments. The focus at this time is on the persistent gap between the approved Trust Fund budget and the level of actual contributions. In doing so, the Budget Working Group has ensured that all suggested options conform to the existing GEO Rules of Procedure as well as to prior decisions by GEO governance bodies.

Mr Dhu described the issue by noting that the approved Concept of Operations budget is for CHF 5.6M while average contributions to the Trust Fund have been about CHF 3.2M. This represents a gap between what the Secretariat has been asked to do and the funds that have been provided by Members. These contributions come consistently from a relatively small group of Members which include the European Commission (representing 27 countries) plus about 15 other countries. While it might seem that the obvious solution is to look at the countries that are not currently contributing, many of these countries are developing countries whose ability to pay is low (as based on the indicative scale). The total indicative scale amounts for the 73 smallest GEO Members would bring in less than CHF 200K, while the difference between the indicative scale and the actual contributions of the six largest Members is more than CHF 1.4M. The Budget Working Group concluded that the focus should be on the entire GEO community and should aim to change the culture of contributions.

The first proposal from the Budget Working Group is to issue a “pro forma invoice”, that is, an individualized statement of the indicative scale amount applicable to the GEO Member, but which is not an actual invoice. The latter aspect is critical to avoid having to book the amounts as accounts receivable. The letter would include information to help demonstrate the value of contributing to the Trust Fund. This step is proposed for immediate implementation.

The second proposal is to launch an annual fundraising drive focused on GEO Members and Participating Organizations. This would be kicked off at the GEO Plenary each year by setting and agreeing to a goal for that year’s drive. It would be followed by ongoing communications and updates to all GEO Principals and other stakeholders. It was proposed that this step begin in November 2020.

The third proposal is to create a “Friends of GEO” campaign to seek contributions from entities other than GEO Members and Participating Organizations who have a stake in Earth observations, including the private sector. In exchange for cash contributions at various levels, these contributors would be recognized and promoted as “Earth

Observation Champions”. Mr Dhu stressed that these external funders would not be allowed to directly influence the governance of GEO. He noted that the details of this third proposal are still incomplete and thus the Budget Working Group recommended that a more detailed concept be presented to the 53rd Executive Committee meeting for consideration.

Finally, Mr Dhu suggested that the Budget Working Group monitor the effectiveness of these actions over the next two years. Depending on the results, options other than those addressed in the paper may need to be discussed.

The United States thanked the Budget Working Group for the presentation and for their work on the issue. They noted that the contributions gap was a persistent problem. The United States supported the approach presented, observing that GEO has not often approach Members individually and so this would be a good step. It may also help to ensure that the Secretariat has the correct contact information for all Members.

The European Commission welcomed the work of the Budget Working Group on this topic and appreciated the thorough and professional analysis. It was agreed that there is a structural shortfall in the Trust Fund that should be addressed. The priority should be to increase the number of countries that are contributing to the Trust Fund. This will also create a stronger collective ownership of the work of GEO. The Commission expressed sympathy with the pro forma invoicing proposal but cautioned that care was needed in how it will be presented, especially ensuring that the messaging is clear that contributions remain voluntary. It would be important to provide a clear value proposition for Members’ association with GEO. The Commission also supported outreach to Participating Organizations. Regarding outreach to the commercial sector, there is some risk of undermining the intergovernmental nature of GEO, while noting that such contributions would not come with any role in the governance of GEO. The first two proposals should be exhausted before moving to the third proposal. The Commission also flagged that their contribution does not fit comfortably within the indicative scale, which is based on the UN scale of contributions, and so would need to work with the Budget Working Group on how to reflect this.

South Africa cautioned that a balance was needed between the amount that Members are asked to contribute and maintaining the voluntary nature of GEO. There is concern that time is running out to obtain additional investments in GEO.

France agreed with the Budget Working Group recommendations and said that it was important that the governance of GEO remains in the hands of its Members.

China expressed some concern that requiring a signature of the Lead Co-Chair on the letters to GEO Members may delay the process due to the approvals required and so suggested that the letters be signed by only the Secretariat Director. China also proposed that, while GEO pursues broadening the sources of income, it also reduce expenses. This is because the COVID-19 crisis and the consequent impacts on economies may lead to reduced contributions next year.

Italy recommended that the letter should be timed to connect with the budget cycle of each GEO Member. It was also suggested that the letter that would accompany the pro forma invoice provide a rationale for contributions that could be used by Members in seeking funds. Different approaches may be required for different kinds of Members. The overall aim should be to ensure that GEO becomes a recurring item in the budgets of

Members, which is realistic since the amounts are not huge. Italy requested more detail on the third proposal and how this would relate to GEO Associates.

Mr Dhu thanked Executive Committee members for their good suggestions which would help the effort be more targeted. He emphasized that it was important that GEO Principals be directly engaged in this effort. The Budget Working Group agreed that the contact with GEO Members needs to be diplomatic, nuanced, and targeted. He reminded members that the pro forma invoice is not to imply any change from voluntary contributions, but it being used to encourage GEO Members to be more invested and engaged with GEO. Regarding Italy's suggestion regarding budget cycles, while this would certainly be desirable, the Budget Working Group does not wish to let perfection stand in the way of taking action. The aim is to try, monitor, revise, but most importantly, maintain consistency. Mr Dhu noted that, under the current Rules of Procedure, any company can contribute to GEO, not only Associates. The question is not whether they can contribute or not, but whether they see a value in doing so. What was heard from the European Commission is that we should approach GEO Members first before moving to others; the Budget Working Group agrees with this. It will take time to build comfort within the GEO community with approaching the commercial sector. However, any eventual approach will take time to put together and so it is important to begin thinking about what such a campaign would look like even though it will not be implemented immediately.

The Secretariat Director thanked Executive Committee members who have been contributing to the Trust Fund. He observed that, since there was a small number of members who have an ability to make a big difference, contact should not be limited to a letter. There should be a conversation with them first before sending the letter to understand the barriers to contributing and how these barriers could be lowered. It might be necessary to take account of elections and other situations within particular countries. This does not need to be done for all Members, but at least for the largest potential contributors. The Secretariat supports the idea of a "Friends of GEO" campaign. The checks and balances in GEO are strong and thus limit the risk of any undue influence from donors on the actions of the Secretariat. The Director agreed with the proposal to start working on the third proposal as soon as possible. He noted that most countries that are not contributing or are contributing below the scale are facing challenges which will not be easy to resolve. It may be easier to make progress on approaching the commercial sector.

The United States noted that the Budget Working Group recognized the need to have a clear value proposition to send with the letters to Members and, ideally, to tailor it to individual countries. The Budget Working Group is also interviewing Principals in various countries to learn about the barriers and motivations for contributions. This information will be used to support the new requests to Members.

Chile recommended that GEO should include communications to the GEO Caucuses. It also suggested that presentations be made to the permanent missions in Geneva, perhaps by regional groups. These steps would support the letters to the GEO Principals.

The European Commission summarized that what we are seeking to achieve with the membership is a greater awareness that the viability of GEO may be called into question without additional contributions. It is important to "hold people's feet to the fire". If GEO proceeds with private sector fundraising immediately, this may dilute the

effectiveness of the approach to Members. If the funding from the private sector becomes significant in relation to that from Members, it will inevitably have an influence despite the checks and balances in place.

Mr Dhu stated that while the Budget Working Group wants to raise the profile of the issue, there is also a concern not to give the impression that contributions are no longer voluntary. The Budget Working Group is explicitly not considering moving away from the voluntary nature of contributions at this time. It is also not proposing that it implement an approach to the commercial sector, but that a concrete proposal for consideration of the Executive Committee be prepared to advance the conversation. The primary effort for now will still be on the approach to Members.

The European Commission agreed with the Budget Working Group recommendations.

The United States asked what resources would be required to implement the first two proposals? Mr Dhu responded that, for this calendar year, the required actions can be implemented by the Secretariat and the Budget Working Group members within existing resources. To customize and scale-up the approach would require additional, dedicated resources. It would also help the process if Executive Committee members also contacted other GEO Members directly.

The Secretariat Director reminded Executive Committee members that the Concept of Operations document included a position for resource mobilization which has yet to be filled. This recognized the need for a full-time post in the Secretariat to support these efforts. The Director agreed however, that much could be done on a short-term basis within existing resources. There are about 20 countries that could make a big difference and the Secretariat welcomed the assistance of Executive Committee members in approaching these countries.

The United States observed that if all GEO Members paid their indicative scale, GEO would be just OK. We have seen how, with more resources, GEO can do more. We should not limit our contributions to the indicative scale. GEO can do more with a higher level of resources.

South Africa agreed that the issue is not survival but executing the mandate of GEO. We should not limit ourselves to just getting by.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Budget Working Group for the presentation and their work on the topic;
- Endorsed the Budget Working Group recommendations as stated in the document, though requesting that the letters to GEO Members be signed by only the Secretariat Director to expedite the process.

5 SESSION 5: GEO MID-TERM EVALUATION

5.1 GEO Mid-Term Evaluation Update

The United States stated that they were satisfied with the progress to date and that they appreciated the team's efforts. They also asked whether contact information for the team leads could be provided to allow GEO Members and others to contact the team directly.

7 SESSION 7: GEO WEEK 2020

7.1 GEO Week 2020 (Presentation by the Secretariat – for information)

The Chair opened the item by announcing that South Africa has decided that it would not be in the best interests of GEO to hold the Plenary in South Africa in 2020 due to the uncertainties of COVID-19 and its impacts on international travel. However, South Africa has offered to host the Plenary in 2021.

South Africa added that, while many countries have opened and will be opening by the autumn, major uncertainty remains about international travel. South Africa noted that postponing the Plenary would have some implications for GEO. There have already been some discussions among the Co-Chairs and with the Secretariat. South Africa repeated their offer to host the Plenary in 2021.

Patricia Geddes gave a brief presentation regarding some of the implications of postponing the Plenary. She noted that GEO is not the only international organization that has had to cancel meetings. The Secretariat sought advice from the WMO legal counsel, and the proposal being presented is based on that advice.

The proposal is that the GEO Co-Chairs and the Executive Committee would agree to exceptionally extend the period between the GEO-16 and GEO-17 Plenary meetings from 12 to 24 months. This would mean that GEO-17 would take place in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in the October/November 2021 timeframe. The 53rd Executive Committee meeting will take place as planned during the week of 2 November 2020. The 54th Executive Committee meeting will take place in March 2021.

Should this proposal be accepted, there are several items that require adoption, according to the Rules of Procedure, in advance of 2021. These are:

- 2021 GEO Trust Fund Budget;
- Slate of Executive Committee members for 2021;
- Slate of Programme Board members for 2021;
- Updates and changes to the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme (if required).

The Secretariat, in consultation with the Co-Chairs, recommends that the GEO Executive Committee reviews, and provisionally approves, the time-critical items on behalf of Plenary. The Plenary would then formally adopt the items provisionally approved by the Executive Committee at GEO-17.

In addition to the approval of the time-critical items, the GEO leadership would be engaged during the November 2020 and the intervening period between Plenary meetings on other issues, such as:

- Progress on implementing the Canberra Declaration;
- Launching of the resource mobilization strategy;
- Annual GEO Highlights Report and promotion of the GEO Work Programme;
- Updates on progress and future directions for the GEO engagement priorities;
- GEO awards; and
- GEO response to COVID-19.

Building on the success of the 2020 GEO Virtual Symposium, and in collaboration with the Programme Board, a series of events would be organized, potentially including webinars, virtual interactive panel sessions, a virtual industry track, communications

campaigns, and regional activities. To organize these events, it was proposed that a Plenary Working Group be considered.

South Africa added that they have been engaging industry associations in South Africa regarding the organization of an industry track at the Plenary. They are still keen to have some kind of industry events this year in GEO, though perhaps virtual events.

France supported the South Africa proposal, suggesting that there could also be some events related to GEO in Africa. France also proposed something on the GEO Knowledge Hub.

Australia supported the offer from South Africa to host the Plenary in 2021. The main question is whether it would be possible to hold a reduced Plenary in 2020 using a virtual format.

The United States concurred with the South Africa proposal to defer the Plenary. They agreed that it would be useful to strike a group to look at engagement activities during what would have been the Plenary period. However, the United States did not agree with holding a virtual Plenary as this would devalue Plenary meetings.

China supported the South Africa proposal. Plenary should be resumed on an annual basis after 2021. However, a GEO Highlights Report should still be sent to the GEO community in 2020. It was also suggested that GEO Members could be asked about what needs to be improved in GEO.

Ms Geddes responded that the Secretariat had looked into holding a portion of the Plenary as a virtual event but determined that it would not be feasible. It was in everyone's best interest to postpone the Plenary rather than hold a reduced version.

Australia suggested that the engagement actions should be spread out over a longer period of time; a virtual GEO week would not be tenable. It was suggested that the four decision items could be covered in a virtual meeting format that would provide an opportunity for GEO Principals to have a voice.

The United States suggested that the extraordinary Executive Committee meeting to decide on the four items could be made open to GEO Members. It would be a reminder that the business items are what Members are responsible for. This would also demonstrate that the decisions are taken in an open way, visible to Members.

The European Commission expressed the concern that a gap of two years between Plenary meetings could lead to a loss of interest and engagement of Members. They agreed that it is not possible to hold a Plenary week virtually, although it may be possible to hold virtual sessions on particular topics, such as the engagement priorities, resource mobilization, the Working Groups, etc. A working group should be set up to organize such an event. Also, the Lead Co-Chair for 2021 will need to be appointed. It is important the GEO remain present on the international scene, it is also a question of communication.

South Africa agreed with the proposal for an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting open to Members to deal with Plenary decisions.

Switzerland agreed with South Africa that GEO Members should be involved in the decisions.

Australia stated that they were comfortable with the proposed extraordinary Executive Committee meeting.

The Secretariat Director stated that the proposal of an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting would raise logistic issues. The experience of the Symposium is not similar since the participants were not able to speak directly. He requested that the Secretariat have time to understand the implications of the proposal.

The European Commission supported holding an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting that would not allow additional participants but would offer additional events around the meeting.

The United States cautioned that the Executive Committee should not direct the Secretariat to implement an extraordinary meeting prior to understanding the implications. This Executive Committee meeting should not attempt to recreate a virtual GEO week, but how to add additional participation into an Executive Committee meeting. A team should be set up to look into these questions in more detail and the United States offered to participate on such a team.

South Africa suggested using the CEOS Strategic Implementation Team meeting as an example of how to organize an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting. CEOS responded that they are willing to share their experience if it is relevant.

Italy agreed that all Plenary representatives should be involved in the decisions, but this should be done in advance of the meeting, not during the meeting. The Executive Committee could take the decisions after GEO Principals have been given the opportunity to comment.

Australia agreed that the meeting should not try to do all the business of a GEO week, but only the key business items in which GEO Members should be involved.

The United States agreed that it is important for GEO Members to have a voice in the business functions of GEO. While not necessary substantive, it is symbolic. They welcomed the CEOS experience though stated that it may not be entirely comparable.

Chile suggested that the Working Group should examine all possible options. It will be necessary to separate the critical issues from the others. The latter can be the focus of a special virtual symposium prior to the South Africa Plenary. The critical issues can be dealt with by correspondence and through Caucuses.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Endorsed the proposal from South Africa to postpone the GEO-17 Plenary to October / November 2021;
- Proposed that an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting be held in November 2020 to deal with the key Plenary decision items, this meeting to involve GEO Members which are not members of the Executive Committee either directly in the meeting or prior to the meeting; and
- Created a Plenary Working Group to organize activities required to address required Plenary business issues as well as other engagement activities for the GEO community.

Action 52.1: Executive Committee members to nominate representatives to the Plenary Working Group. **Due: 10 July 2020.**

8 SESSION 8: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

8.1 Review of Applications for Participating Organizations

This item was dealt with in advance of the meeting by email exchange. No objections were raised by Executive Committee members to the recommendations from the Secretariat.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the applications from the following organizations to become GEO Participating Organizations:

- Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT);
- Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH);
- Plan4all; and
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

8.2 Review of Applications for Associate Category

This item was dealt with in advance of the meeting by email exchange. No objections were raised by Executive Committee members to the recommendations from the Secretariat.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the applications from the following organizations to become GEO Associates:

- AmericaView; and
- Eversis.

9 SESSION 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

9.1 Any Other Business

China offered to host the GEO Data and Knowledge Week in 2021, as the 2020 event was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Secretariat Director welcomed the offer.

Italy announced that their hyperspectral satellite (PRISMA) is now operational and the data will be fully open for all users.

9.2 Review of Action Items

Executive Committee members reviewed and approved the outcomes and action items from the meeting.

The Chair thanked members for their comments and cooperation.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00

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