

Summary Report
17th Executive Committee Meeting
Washington DC, 16 November 2009
(As accepted at the 18th Executive Committee meeting)

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

The GEO Co-Chair from the United States, Ms Sherburne Abbott, chaired the meeting.

1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The Chair presented the agenda, which was adopted without any changes.

1.2 Approval of Summary Report of the 16th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2)

The Chair presented the document, which was accepted without any changes.

1.3 Review of Actions from previous meetings (Document 3)

The Secretariat Director presented the document and described how the closed action items had been resolved and how the open action items would be addressed.

The European Commission (EC) expressed its concern about action item 15.4 regarding the relationship between the Secretariat and the Committees and stated that it should not be considered closed. The Secretariat Director explained that the Secretariat had addressed this issue through a special section in the Work Plan Annual Update document and asked for clarification on what further steps should be taken to close this action. The EC responded, stating that the updated Work Plan did clarify the roles of the Secretariat and the Committees. However, in the opinion of the Commission, the Work Plan did not address the need to strengthen the relationship between the Secretariat and the Committees. The EC therefore confirmed that the action should remain open. South Africa suggested that the Committee would need to provide further guidance.

Norway raised concerns about Action 16.2 on inviting nominations to the new Evaluation Task Team. Given the low level of nominations received, he recommended that the item be kept open. The Secretariat Director confirmed that three nominations have so far been received; he suggested that this low number may be sufficient, although it may be advisable to invite more nominations from Plenary. (Further nominations were later received during the GEO-VI Plenary.)

Action 17.1 – Executive Committee to provide guidance on the further steps needed to close action item 15.4.

2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS REPORT (DOCUMENT 4)

The Secretariat Director presented the document, which covered only two months' worth of activities. He highlighted the release of an issue of GEO News and the continuing development of the Work Plan Management System. He noted the Secretariat's participation in World Climate Conference-3 and highlighted the importance of determining how the proposed framework for climate services would relate to GEOSS implementation.

The EC asked for clarification about the Work Plan management system. The Executive Director explained that it will be demonstrated at the GEO-VI Exhibition and placed on-line next week.

Norway pointed to an error in the document which should be corrected.

Action 17.2 – Work Plan management system to be placed on-line immediately following the GEO-VI Plenary.

3 REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS REQUESTING RECOGNITION AS PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (GEO-VI DOCUMENT 3 (REV1))

The Chair introduced the document and noted that there were eight applicants.

China said that GEO was receiving many applications every year, which was a sign of the Group's increasing profile. He stated that it was important to consider whether applicants can meaningfully contribute to GEOSS implementation before GEO accepted them. He noted that GEO-VI Document 20 on the role of Participating Organizations had been prepared by the Executive Committee but not yet reviewed by the Plenary.

The Chair stated that decisions on the current round of applications should not be contingent on Document 20, as it had not yet been discussed or accepted. The Secretariat Director recalled the earlier concerns about a healthy balance between the number of Members and the number of Participating Organizations in GEO. The EC expressed reservations about two of the applicants because they do not satisfy the criteria set out in the rules of procedure. The meeting then discussed the merits of several other applicants. It debated whether organizations should already be engaged in Work Plan Tasks before they are formally recognized, or whether acceptance into GEO would help to encourage engagement.

Australia suggested that another category might be appropriate for some organizations: intergovernmental organizations and the UN bodies, in particular, could be given another status. South Africa said that it would be unfair to change the rules in the middle of the game for these applicants; he argued for considering the eight applicants according to current rules and then reviewing the rules for future applications. The Secretariat Director noted that being recognized as a Participating Organization was not a prerequisite to contributing to GEOSS implementation. Norway said that there would be no value to increasing the number of "paper members" and observed that it was not clear from all the applications how they would contribute to the Work Plan. China said that GEO was an intergovernmental body so it should be clear about what kinds of organizations it wanted to encourage to join.

The Chair proposed returning to the discussion after the Committee had reviewed Document 20 on the Role of Participating Organizations, which would be discussed under ExCom-17 agenda item 4/5 on the Review of GEO-VI Agenda and Documents.

When the discussion of this item resumed, South Africa, which would present Document 20 to the Plenary, described the changes it had made to the document based on the guidance provided to it at the Committee's previous meeting. Australia clarified that what it had in mind was rather upgrading the status of UN bodies to an upper-tier type of Participating Organization. The EC expressed disappointment in the Committee's earlier decision to ask South Africa to cut a key section of the document. The EC also wondered if GEO should consider establishing two categories of Participating Organizations. However, rather than elevate certain Participating Organizations to a new "higher" category, as proposed by Australia, the EC's initial response was that it would be more appropriate to introduce a new class of GEO membership, e.g. "Associated Organizations". This would enable organizations that did not meet the requirements for becoming a Participating Organization, but that are active in GEO, to be formally recognized as being associated to GEO. The Secretariat Director

suggested that were any distinction to be made, it might be between organizations with a political mandate and those that are more technical.

The Chair then returned to the current list of eight candidates. Following an extended discussion, the meeting reached consensus on recommending two candidates for acceptance by Plenary. Some of those not recommended should probably operate through their national GEOs. They should also be encouraged to contribute to GEOSS implementation even without having the status of Participating Organization. The Committee agreed that, for those organizations that contribute to GEOSS but do not satisfy the criteria of being a Participating Organization, it should pursue a solution for ensuring that they are recognized and engaged.

Action 17.3 – Secretariat to write to the candidate organizations that were not accepted at GEO-VI to explain the decision and encourage them to engage actively in GEOSS.

Action 17.4 – The Executive Committee to look for a solution that recognizes and engages those organizations that contribute to GEOSS, even though they do not satisfy the criteria for being a Participating Organization.

4/5 REVIEW OF GEO-VI AGENDA AND DOCUMENTS

The Chair reminded the meeting that this agenda item was the main issue for the day.

The meeting discussed whether GEO-VI agenda item 1.7 on the recognition of Participating Organizations should be moved so that it will follow item 11 on the role of Participating Organizations (Document 20). It decided not to change the order and to treat the two issues separately.

The Chair noted that Facebook and YouTube had requested permission to videotape the opening Plenary speeches. The meeting agreed that this should be allowed.

The Chair stated that the time limit for oral reports would be kept to five minutes per country. The Secretariat Director highlighted the importance of the oral reports, which would not likely take much longer than an hour or so.

The EC asked for clarification about the significance of “accepting” the GEO Work Plan Progress report under item 2.2. The Secretariat Director said that it did not imply any commitment, but was simply a recognition by the Plenary of the work being undertaken by the GEO community.

The Secretariat Director anticipated that item 3.1 on recommendations for the long-term operation of the GEOSS Common Infrastructure would lead to a discussion. The EC expressed concern about the recommendation that the new GCI Coordination Team operate under the auspices of the Architecture and Data Committee (ADC). It was the view of the EC that the GCI Team must certainly work closely with the ADC and the other GEO Committees. However, the EC was of the opinion that the GCI Team should be established under the remit of the GEO Plenary, reporting periodically to the Executive Committee and annually to the Plenary. The Secretariat Director said that a second concern related to the proposal for creating a Trust Fund, and a third key issue was whether there should be a single GEO portal and Clearinghouse, or several.

Australia said that the GEOSS Common Infrastructure is the heart of GEOSS interoperability and more must be done to ensure that it operates on a robust and sustainable basis. In response to a question from Norway, the EC repeated that the GCI Coordination Team should report to the Plenary, and not to the Architecture and Data Committee as proposed in the document; this arrangement would be more appropriate because this work was inspired by the Cape Town Ministerial Declaration. Australia and the US supported this position. The Chair observed that there was a general sense in the Executive Committee that the Coordination Team should report to Plenary while also engaging with the various Committees.

The EC supported the idea of choosing a single portal for the initial phase. Norway agreed. The EC noted that Annex 2 to the Recommendations proposes criteria for choosing one portal should the one-portal option be agreed. One criterion is that component providers be asked to set out the basis of their commitment for managing that particular component through 2015. Australia agreed on the need for having one committed GCI portal, but noted that this did not exclude the use of any number of community portals, given that GEO is a voluntary body. She noted that this would require well-defined specification of operational requirements and governance issues.

The Secretariat Director said that if the proposal for establishing a Trust Fund were to be accepted, it would need to be clear who was responsible and accountable. The EC observed that the document does not make a detailed proposal about the Fund, but simply notes that some kind of funding would be needed were there to be a single dedicated portal; a paper elaborating the mechanisms behind a Fund could be elaborated for the next meeting of the Executive Committee. Once the GEOSS Common Infrastructure is in place, much of the future development may in any case occur through the many community portals.

South Africa said that a paper on the governance issues surrounding the establishment of a Fund should be developed. The EC said that the establishment of a Fund would not affect developments up through the 2010 Ministerial, so this issue could be addressed next year. South Africa concluded that the Coordination Team should be established, terms of reference should be developed and governance issues addressed. Key issues include the selection procedure for a single portal, funding, in-house development vs external sourcing, and the time frame.

The meeting discussed whether or not there was a consensus on the report's recommendation that GEO choose a single portal. The EC said that a decision now one way or the other was essential to ensure that there would be something to show for the Ministerial. Australia said it was critical to make strong progress on this issue for the Ministerial and that the Executive Committee should make a strong statement on this.

Given the many open issues, the Secretariat Director predicted that the Plenary would not be able to accept the document as written. He supported South Africa's call for a new paper by the soon-to-be-established Coordination Team. It should be hoped that the Plenary would mandate the Executive Committee to advance this issue for its 18th meeting. The meeting broadly agreed on how to present its conclusions concerning the document and its proposals to the GEO-VI Plenary, and the Chair said she would capture these ideas during lunch and present some wording later in the day.

When the meeting later returned to this item, the Chair read out some text summarizing the Executive Committee's views for the Plenary. The Chair concluded that six of the eight recommendations were endorsed by the Executive Committee. Those regarding the proposed Trust Fund and the relationship between the Coordination Team and GEO would, however, need to be revised or further elaborated. The statement also included the messages that the selection criteria for the Coordination Team should ensure a balance between technical and non-technical members, that the Team should report to Plenary but also coordinate with all Committees, and that the Secretariat should maintain budget execution responsibility for any new Trust Fund if it was agreed that a requirement for a Trust Fund was justified. A selection process would need to be defined for choosing one portal, and the value of community portals should be recognized. The meeting fully supported the Chair's proposed approach.

The meeting then discussed how the four sub-items under agenda item 4 would be presented. Referring to item 4.4 on the GEO Baseline Initiative, the EC questioned whether this should be linked to the Summit or be treated simply as another GEO activity; this led to a brief discussion of the proposed Initiative.

For agenda item 5 on preparatory activities for the 2010 Ministerial Summit, the Committee invited Mr David Grimes of Canada to describe the progress being made by the 2010 Task Force, which Canada co-chairs together with China and the EC. He stated that the Task Force is focusing both on products for the summit and on the draft Declaration. China will soon send a notice to Ministers

asking them to take note of the date of the Summit. Outreach tools will be developed. Australia applauded the work of the Task Force and indicated they would explore their capacity for joining. France emphasized the importance of taking significant actions to ensure that Ministers will want to attend. Mr Grimes said the Summit agenda was an essential tool for attracting Ministerial interest.

Referring to GEO-VI agenda item 6, Russia stated that he had proposed new wording for the updated weather target and had thought it had been accepted; this wording however was not reflected in the new document. Australia confirmed that the Target Task Team had discussed this wording and undertook to seek clarification from the co-chair of the task team.

Under agenda item 7 on GEOSS Monitoring and Evaluation, the Secretariat Director recommended that the GEO-VI Chair state that only three nominations to the new body had been received and invite others to participate.

The meeting reviewed the document prepared by the EC for agenda item 9.2 on Executive Committee membership. The EC summarized the document, noting that the Committee had earlier agreed that it preferred option 1, which calls for expanding the Executive Committee by one member. The Chair expressed concern that this issue could take up a great deal of time in Plenary, and the meeting discussed how best to handle the issue. The Chair proposed that the EC present the report in Plenary and that the Plenary then be asked to endorse the proposed option. She also noted that the Executive Committee had now moved towards a consensus on option 1, which was stronger than the previous “preference”.

The meeting discussed who would present the reports from the four GEO Committees under item 10.1 and the process for nominating new Committee co-chairs.

The Secretariat Director described the financial reports that would be presented under GEO-VI agenda item 12. He said that he would explain to the Plenary that contributions to the Trust Fund are not increasing despite the growing number of Members and that the Secretariat has now been forced to start running down its reserves.

Australia noted that it would present to Plenary the report of the Informal Finance Review Team. Australia also distributed for the meeting’s consideration a draft budget resolution to be submitted to Plenary by the Executive Committee. This led to an extended discussion of what impact such a resolution might have. South Africa questioned whether it would really have the desired impact. Argentina thought it should be more forward leaning. Australia said it was irresponsible for an intergovernmental organization to pretend to have money it doesn’t have, and stressed the distinction between budgeting and fund raising. The Chair proposed some editorial changes that could address the various comments made. Norway questioned why new Members are not contributing. South Africa and the EC returned to their concern that the message as presented in the text may not have the expected result.

Turning to GEO-VI agenda item 15 on the announcement of GEO-VII and the 2010 Ministerial Summit, the meeting agreed to hold the two events from 2 to 4 November 2010.

Action 17.5 – The GCI Coordination Team to submit a document addressing the issues raised by the Executive Committee and the Plenary to the Executive Committee’s 18th meeting.

6 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO GEO-VI (GEO-VI DOCUMENT 15)

The Secretariat Director presented the document, including the master schedule in annex. The EC remarked that it generally supported the document, except for the tight timeframe provided in the annexed GEO Master Schedule for 2010 for the GEOSS monitoring and evaluation process. The Secretariat Director said that the timing was compressed due to the scheduling of an Executive Committee meeting in July and proposed a possible solution. Australia commented on the proposed timing of the Work Plan Symposium, which it believed should be associated with the Plenary rather

than with the co-located Committee meetings. The meeting also discussed the timing of the Committee meetings and the Beijing Plenary and Summit.

In order to complete Annex C on the performance of the Secretariat and the Secretariat Director, the meeting asked the Secretariat staff to excuse themselves. The meeting then discussed their assessment and completed the Annex before inviting the Secretariat to return to hear a summary of the Committee's evaluation.

South Africa volunteered to make the presentation to Plenary of the Report of the Executive Committee.

7 REVIEW OF C4 REPORTING GUIDELINES (DOCUMENT 5)

The US presented the document, which it had revised based on earlier comments from the Committee. Australia expressed concern about whether the proposed approach would reduce the amount of coordination amongst Committees, noting that the very act of developing a common report to the Executive Committee facilitated coordination.

The EC agreed with the document and proposed one addition to ensure two-way communication between the Executive Committee and the C4. The Secretariat Director said that the title of the document should refer to the reporting of Committees, not of the C4, and he proposed an editorial correction, as did Australia. Based on these and several other corrections, the document was accepted.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Following brief concluding remarks by the four GEO Co-Chairs, or their representatives, the meeting was adjourned.