

An Australian Perspective on GEOSS

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In the three years since the formal establishment of the intergovernmental GEO and the adoption of the GEOSS Implementation Plan, progress towards the ultimate aim of comprehensive, coordinated and sustained earth observations has been energetic. Working with its Members and Participating Organizations, GEO has built on and catalysed the efforts of many existing earth observation systems and initiated some significant elements of its essential interoperability framework. The full implementation of GEOSS and delivery of the comprehensive range of benefits aspired to across all nine socioeconomic benefit areas is still some years off, but the call to action proposed by the Fourth Earth Observation Summit in Cape Town is an important next step.

Australia is proud to have been part of the GEO community from the beginning. From the time of its Federation in 1901, Australia has valued highly its participation in international programs, both through bilateral and multilateral partnerships and through the more formal United Nations and predecessor systems. International scientific and research collaboration and the international free exchange of meteorological and other environmental data that have resulted from such programs have been of particular importance in understanding Australia's weather and climate in a global context and in addressing a diversity of environmental challenges.

Australia's southern hemisphere location, surrounded by ocean and subject to a highly variable and extreme range of climate and weather regimes, has bred in its citizens a healthy respect for the environment. Across the community, in many different areas of endeavour, decision makers are increasingly recognising the significance of high quality long-term earth observations, acquired from manual and automated surface-based platforms, as well as an increasing range of space-based and other remotely sensed data, as inputs to resolving diverse environmental and related issues. We recognise, in particular, the value we derive from access to and collaboration with the space-based observations programs of other countries.

Many of the key environmental issues facing Australia are not unique, although they are exacerbated by our geographic location, population distribution and climate. Foremost amongst them are disaster mitigation, water security and adaptation to a highly variable and changing climate, all of which are target activities in the GEOSS Implementation Plan. We are engaging actively within the Asia-Pacific region on activities such as Sentinel Asia and improved tsunami warning and response systems. Recent initiatives by the Australian Government have seen an enhanced focus on water information and the passage of a new Act of Parliament to empower the standardisation, collection and sharing of water data. We will look for opportunities through GEO to share our experience in this regard and benefit from collaboration with others. In furthering our understanding of the impact of climate change, including through public-good environmental programmes such as Australia's National Carbon Accounting System and the Global Initiative on Forests and Climate, we look forward to the success of GEO-initiated efforts leading to improved data

interoperability standards, improved global land cover mapping, coordination of ecosystem monitoring networks and the long-term continuity of publicly funded satellite data.

We congratulate GEO on its achievements so far and offer our assurance that Australia will continue to play an important role in securing its success into the future.