

**Draft Report**  
**40<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Geneva, Switzerland, 11-12 July 2017**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Chair: Robert-Jan Smits, European Commission (EC).

[...]

**5 WORK PROGRAMME 2017–2019**

**5.1 Report from the Programme Board (Presentation – for information)**

- The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the three Programme Board co-chairs and to the Programme Board members for their excellent work.

**5.2 GEO Secretariat Review of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium (Document 10 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee noted the Secretariat's analysis, views on future events, report and survey results of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium. The Committee acknowledged that there are different reasons and perspectives for holding Work Programme Symposia, particularly given the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the Programme Board. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat and the Programme Board for organizing the 2017 Work Programme Symposium and to the government of South Africa for hosting the event.

**5.3 Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation (Document 11 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation for the work the Programme Board has done, with support from the GEO Secretariat, in preparing a tactical plan for the future of the Work Programme Symposium as a GEO Symposium.

**5.4 GEOSS Implementation – Status of GEO Indicators and Report on Progress (Document 12 – for discussion)**

- The Executive Committee acknowledged the complexity of monitoring in the GEO context and encouraged the addition of tools to support automation of data collection. The Committee endorsed the proposed directions for monitoring and reporting, recognizing the need to begin the process, while noting that the challenge will be to focus on the results achieved.

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**FULL REPORT**

[...]

**5 WORK PROGRAMME 2017–2019****5.1 Report from the Programme Board (Presentation – for information)**

Mr Albert Fischer (IOC) presented the report on behalf of the other Programme Board co-chairs, although he reminded the Committee that he had been unable to attend the previous Programme Board meeting. He began by reminding the Executive Committee of the responsibilities of the Programme Board under its terms of reference; in particular he drew attention to the breadth of responsibilities expected for what is a relatively small group. The transition to the 2017–2019 Work Programme is being completed; the task now is to build greater consistency and coherence within what was mostly built from the bottom up. Thanks to the dedication of Programme Board members, the Board has now met with the leads for most of the Work Programme activities. There is, however, limited capacity within the Board to address the Engagement Priorities.

Mr Fischer thanked Greece for hosting the Programme Board's seventh meeting in Athens, Greece. There were five key items on the agenda at this meeting. Discussion of the Work Programme Symposium was not addressed in this report because it appears as a separate item on the agenda. For the second item, Foundational Tasks, the Board believes that there has been good progress on most of them, especially the GEOSS Common Infrastructure. A need was identified to improve connections between Work Programme activities, for example, sharing methods, working on essential variables, and engaging users. GEO also needs to make the Engagement Priorities more visible; to do this, it may be necessary to reorganize the Work Programme to reflect these priorities. There was a recommendation on user needs to move away from an approach centred on SBAs and toward an approach building on mapping activities going on within Work Programme activities. A Subgroup is working on communications products related to the Engagement Priorities. A process has also been determined for revising the Work Programme. Among the changes anticipated, Aquawatch is interested in becoming an Initiative, while two new Initiatives are applying to be added and one is making a revision to its Implementation Plan. For Monitoring and Evaluation, the Programme Board largely endorsed the Secretariat proposal, noting the need to ensure that GEO is measuring what is important and requesting that qualitative information be added to the indicator process.

South Africa asked whether the changes to the user needs approach meant that the SBAs are no longer relevant.

The Chair commented that the SBAs have been superseded, to some extent, by the Engagement Priorities.

Mr Fischer responded that there is much overlap among the Engagement Priorities. The Board's focus is mostly on the SDGs; they have found the Engagement Priorities to be a useful construct. However,

it was cautioned that Work Programme activities do not necessarily fit neatly within a particular Priority. The Priorities are mostly useful as a way of talking about what is happening within GEO.

CEOS observed that the approach of defining user needs by SBA was tried in the past but didn't work. The Engagement Priorities are now the primary way that GEO is engaging users, although it could return to an SBA approach at a later date, if it were important to do so.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the three Programme Board co-chairs and to the Programme Board members for their excellent work.

## **5.2 GEO Secretariat Review of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium (Document 10 – for information)**

Mr Douglas Cripe, Work Programme Coordinator, presented the document. He noted that the 2017 Work Programme Symposium was the first time that the Symposium agenda had been developed in conjunction with the Programme Board and not just by the Secretariat. It was also the first time that a Symposium had been connected to another meeting, in this case the ISRSE, which had been hoped would attract greater visibility and engagement for the Work Programme Symposium. Mr Cripe reviewed the structure of the Symposium agenda and the focus of each of the sessions. Key messages emerging from the Symposium include: the Commercial Sector has a key role, especially in downstream services; the value proposition for Commercial Sector engagement in GEO should be better explained in reference to the needs of each perspective; GEO can play a role as an “honest broker” between the Commercial Sector and public agencies; GEO could do more to support essential variables in various domains; there is a need to strengthen connections between UN custodial agencies for SDG indicators and national statistical offices; and there is a need to step up engagement with Participating Organizations.

In terms of whether the 2017 Work Programme Symposium was a success, the positives include a better understanding among many GEO participants about the SDGs and the role of GEO and of the contributions from the GEO Flagships and Initiatives (for example, GEOGLAM) to the SDG process. Less positive aspects include feedback from participants that the objectives of the Symposium were too ambitious (for example, the breakout session on gaps) and a lack of actionable recommendations from some breakout sessions. The response to co-location with the ISRSE met with a mixed response: it provided visibility to a larger audience and there was opportunity within the ISRSE agenda to address GEO topics; on the other hand, coming at the end of a full week of events, participation in the Work Programme Symposium may have suffered. Regarding the Programme Board proposal under the next agenda item, there is concern within the Secretariat that a reduction from an annual schedule may not provide sufficient support for maintaining momentum and offering opportunities for the GEO community to come together. It is the view of the Secretariat that the Work Programme Symposium should support the needs of both Programme Board and the GEO community at large. As for future co-location of the Symposium with other events, it was recommended that such decisions be based on the needs of GEO at the time.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee noted the Secretariat's analysis, views on future events, report and survey results of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium. The Committee acknowledged that there are different reasons and perspectives for holding Work Programme Symposia, particularly given the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the Programme Board. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat and the Programme Board for organizing the 2017 Work Programme Symposium and to the government of South Africa for hosting the event.

## **5.3 Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation (Document 11 – for information)**

Mr Albert Fischer presented the document on behalf of the Programme Board Co-chairs. Mr Fischer recalled that Work Programme Symposia have typically been opportunities for the GEO community to share what was happening across the Work Programme. The 2017 Symposium was recognized as being well-organized by the South African hosts. It provided a useful occasion for discussion of the

Engagement Priorities and GEOs role. However, attendance this year was a little lower than usual, the combined meeting (including the ISRSE) was too long, and there were not enough task leads present. Mr Fischer referred to the document that highlighted the Symposium should reflect the boundary between science and policy. In this regard, there is potential for further connections to other scientific conferences, for example, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Fall Meeting. The document lists several objectives for Work Programme Symposia, but the question is how best to inform the co-design of future Symposia with the GEO community. The document proposes two distinct types of Symposia: one for Work Programme planning, the other for community building. The document proposes that GEO would not in the future hold a Symposium every year. In years where there would not be a GEO Symposium, it is proposed that regional fora, such as the GEOSS Asia-Pacific Symposium, or scientific conferences could serve the community-building function. Symposia for Work Programme development should be held every second year, well in advance of approval of the Work Programme. Mr Fischer drew attention to a proposed multiannual meeting cycle in the document. The Programme Board is looking for more discussion of these ideas within the Board and with the Executive Committee and Secretariat and so the document is only presented for information at this stage.

The United States asked whether future co-location with ISRSE had been agreed to by them. Mr Fischer responded that since GEO would need to carve out space within the ISRSE agenda under this proposal, this would need to be negotiated with the organizers.

Japan commented that GEO should take a more strategic view of the Work Programme Symposium, focusing more on outreach. There is a concern that GEO could lose the convening power of the Symposium if it takes too narrow a focus. There is no objection from Japan regarding the proposed name change, although it is important to recognize the power of branding.

The United Kingdom reported that some internal consultation was conducted with United Kingdom attendees on their experiences with the 2017 Symposium; there was no clear consensus. An increased role for the Programme Board in determining the pattern of meetings was welcomed, though. It was noted that the proposed schedule of future Symposia did not include reference to the timing of input from the GEO community into the Work Programme. The three-year cycle of Work Programme development might suggest a three-year cycle of kinds of Symposia. It was also remarked that the Symposia outcomes identified in the paper seemed input-focused and need more work.

Australia reminded the Committee that the role of the Programme Board was always to make the whole of the Work Programme greater than the sum of its parts. It is common for discussions in GEO to become very technical; the Programme Board is needed to move GEO beyond the technical discussions and toward moving GEO as a community toward defining the products and services needed globally for end users. For example, starting with essential variables has the potential to bog down GEO for many years. A better approach is to start with the product and then look at the Work Programme to see how GEO could meet that need. The Programme Board should help move the discussion away from technical considerations of variables toward a more strategic perspective.

The IEEE commented that the proposed schedule in the document is too closely tied to the ISRSE. There are many other conferences that might be of interest. On essential variables, attention was directed to the project “Atlantis”, of which GEO is a part. It is not necessary to start bottom up, GEO can also bring a top-down perspective.

CEOS stated a concern with essential variables. The Essential Climate Variables are very tightly defined, but this took ten years to achieve. Essential variables are emerging from many directions, but many of these may not be truly essential. Regarding an earlier comment about GEO potentially having a representative at the World Bank, it was asked what this means. GEO is just the Members and Participating Organizations, thus it already has a representative there via ESA. GEO should be looking at using each other’s resources in an organic way.

Mr Fischer agreed that the focus should be on end user products. Essential variables are most useful in an inward-looking context, in how GEO would deliver observations. The work of the Programme Board was different this year from last year; last year was more focused on the review of the Work Programme activities. Now, there is a need to think about how the Board's work changes over the three-year cycle.

The Secretariat Director reminded Executive Committee Members that there are people who come to the Work Programme Symposium that do not come to Plenary. Their participation may not further the objectives of the Programme Board per se, but there is still benefit to the GEO community of coming together on a regular basis.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation for the work the Programme Board has done, with support from the GEO Secretariat, in preparing a tactical plan for the future of the Work Programme Symposium as a GEO Symposium.

#### **5.4 GEOSS Implementation – Status of GEO Indicators and Report on Progress (Document 12 – for discussion)**

Mr Craig Larlee, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer in the Secretariat, gave a presentation summarizing the key points from the document. The presentation emphasized that 2017 represents the first phase of a longer term process which will need to be adjusted and refined based on experience in implementation. While the ultimate direction of GEO monitoring is to support the demonstration of the added value of GEO, this must be approached in a step-by-step process. GEO currently lacks basic data on the status of Work Programme activities, the users targeted by these activities, and the products and services being developed to meet identified user needs. This information will be required before it will be possible to systematically assess the extent to which user needs are being met and the impacts that result. In the meantime, however, the collection of the data to support the indicators will also support other essential functions within GEO, including the Programme Board's role in identifying gaps and opportunities across the Work Programme and the implementation of the Foundational Tasks. Data collection for the first phase of indicators is currently underway, mostly through direct interaction between the Secretariat and the leads of GEO Flagships and Initiatives. Data collection tools have been developed, and refined through testing, which will be used by the leads to input key data concerning their activities. Based on the results of this first phase, a second phase of indicators will be implemented in 2018. Mr Larlee also described plans for the Report on Progress to be presented at the 2017 Plenary. This year's report will be shorter and based on a set of cross-cutting themes, rather than reporting the details for each Work Programme activity individually. There will also be an intent to make better use of illustrations, graphs, user testimonials, and examples of the impact of Earth observations in real decision contexts.

The Chair thanked Mr Larlee for his efforts on moving this topic forward and emphasized the importance of continuing to move in the direction of benefits and impacts, while recognizing the complexity of the task.

Finland commented that GEO now has a plan for how to implement a set of indicators, so we will need to observe how it goes. However, the proposed approach seems to create more burden on the Secretariat. It was suggested that web analytics could be used to measure performance, including from websites of the GEO Flagships.

Japan asked about the target audience of the report. A report based on data and evidence could be useful to convince others that GEO is worth the investment, but also narratives are also needed to show examples of achievements. Evidence-based stories will provide ammunition for financial officers.

South Africa appreciated the effort thus far and encouraged consideration of who the indicators are intended for, including thinking of the indicators in terms of levels from activity to output to outcome;

different levels may be appropriate for different audiences. Also, it was suggested to consider use of the “SMART” concept for indicators, for example, the aspect of indicators being time-bound.

Mr Larlee agreed that many of the Phase 1 indicators are measures of activities, but this is a necessary first step. There is little information currently available on who the intended end users are for the Work Programme activities; this information is required if we are to assess outcomes and impacts. With regard to use of web analytics, this approach will be applied for the GEOSS Portal this year and assessed for potential application to the Flagships and Initiatives. In many instances, the websites are not the primary delivery mechanism for end user products and services and so website analytics may not provide as much useful information about outcomes and impacts.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee acknowledged the complexity of monitoring in the GEO context and encouraged the addition of tools to support automation of data collection. The Committee endorsed the proposed directions for monitoring and reporting, recognizing the need to begin the process, while noting that the challenge will be to focus on the results achieved.

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