

## **Summary Report**

### **13<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**

#### **Geneva, 15-16 July 2008**

**As approved by the Executive Committee at its 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting in November 2008**

#### **1 GENERAL BUSINESS**

The GEO Co-Chair from the European Commission (EC) served as Chair for the meeting.

The Co-Chair from China expressed his appreciation for the support China has received from the GEO community for the earthquake in Sichuan earlier this year, which took nearly 100,000 lives. This tragic event highlighted the value of Earth observations for disaster management.

The Co-Chair from South Africa congratulated the Executive Committee and the Secretariat for their work in advancing and strengthening GEO. He felt that the documents for this meeting demonstrated that GEO as an organization was now in a strong position to advance the construction of GEOSS.

The Co-Chair from the US expressed his personal thanks to the Executive Committee for its commitment to building GEOSS. He noted the G8 statement on GEOSS and the role that Participating Organizations such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) can play in raising awareness of GEO and recruiting more developing-country Members.

The EC Co-Chair stressed the role of Executive Committee members in ensuring that GEO successfully transitions from a pilot phase to an operational phase. The existing momentum needs to be maintained and the number of components registered with GEOSS expanded. GEO must seek to address those issues of immediate concern to governments.

##### **1.1 Adoption of the Agenda (Document 1)**

The EC proposed adding the GEOSS Common Infrastructure IOC phase to the agenda as item 2.1.1. The agenda was adopted with this change.

##### **1.2 Approval of the Summary Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee (Document 2)**

South Africa noted two typing errors on page 5. With these corrections, the Report was approved.

##### **1.3 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3)**

The EC Co-Chair welcomed the fact that the number of open actions from previous meetings was steadily decreasing. The Secretariat Director briefly commented on the action items. He noted that a number of them require continuous attention and would therefore remain open indefinitely. The EC requested that the Secretariat liaise with the Science and Technology Committee regarding action 6.3 (“Secretariat to prepare a paper on how GEO would relate to selected research consortia, on a no-exchange-of-funds basis”). The Committee asked the Secretariat to continue working on the remaining open action items.

**Action 13.1 (to replace Action 6.3) Secretariat to liaise with STC to prepare a paper on how GEO would relate to selected research consortia, on a no-exchange-of-funds basis**

## **2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS**

### **2.1 Quarterly Report (Document 4)**

The Secretariat Director presented the Report. He concurred with the Co-Chairs that GEO was becoming a mature organization and that GEOSS was starting to become a reality. The past few months had witnessed the increased mobilization and energy of the GEO community, as confirmed by the G8 Declaration. Key activities in recent months included initiation of the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) IOC phase, preparation of the new 2009-2011 Work Plan, launching of GEO BON, action on forest monitoring and completion of the IGOS-P transition. He outlined changes in staffing and introduced Michael Tanner as the new seconded expert from the US. He informed the Executive Committee that the Netherlands had offered €200,000 to support an expert during 2008 and 2009 and that the expert from Brazil would soon arrive. Meanwhile, two staff members have recently left the Secretariat and two seconded experts and two contractors will be leaving within a few months. This will bring the total number of staff to 17, below the 20 or so the Secretariat needs to fully implement its responsibilities. He announced that office space was being reorganized and that the entire Secretariat is in the process of moving to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the WMO building.

The EC Co-Chair thanked the Director for his report. He recognized that an impressive amount of work is being carried out and that GEO is becoming a more complex organization. The US Co-Chair commended the large number of activities, the fact that activities were reported in almost all regions of the world and suggested that it might be interesting to report on and assess the progress being made on a region-by-region basis.

Germany applauded the Secretariat for its efforts but cautioned that it was important that actions that raise the expectations of the GEO community and of new partners be matched by delivery. He wondered if the Secretariat had adequate resources to follow through on all of its activities.

South Africa reported on its discussions with EADS-Astrium and on their GEO-Africa proposal.

The EC Co-Chair said that the Executive Committee should be active in promoting the secondment of experts from Members and Participating Organizations. The US asked that the end-dates of the seconded experts' contracts be added to the Secretariat organigram at the end of the document.

The Chair recommended that the Executive Committee formally acknowledge and promote the G8 reference to GEOSS. This was supported by the Executive Committee.

The Secretariat Director responded to the comments, observing that governments indeed have a wide range of expectations from GEO, including those highlighted in the G8 Declaration. He noted the importance of regional activities and of regional outreach for attracting new Members, particularly from Africa and South America. He confirmed that an appropriate level of staffing in the Secretariat would range from 20 to 22. The Director welcomed the proposal that the Executive Committee take an active role in promoting the need for secondments.

Japan appreciated the cooperation of other G-8 countries on the G-8 Declaration and stated its continued commitment to GEOSS. It reiterated its offer to host the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia Pacific Symposium in 2009. Executive Committee members thanked Japan for this offer and for its contribution towards the recognition of GEOSS at the G8 Summit.

The meeting discussed the possibility of arranging to have a report on GEO made to the G8 science ministers, and it was agreed to pursue this idea for next year.

**Action 13.2 Secretariat to add expiry dates of secondments to the GEO Secretariat organigram**

### **2.1.1 GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI)**

The European Commission provided a brief overview of the draft terms of reference for the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) Initial Operating Capability Task Force (IOCTF). The meeting discussed the adequacy of the proposed timeline. The Committee decided to recommend limiting the active lifespan of the IOCTF to a period of one year, starting 1 July 2008 and ending 30 June 2009. IOCTF members, however, will continue to advise and assist the Executive Committee in reporting on the outcome of the Initial Operating Capacity phase to the GEO-VI Plenary in November 2009.

The meeting also discussed the potential for conflicts of interest on the part of IOCTF members who also belong to entities providing components for the GCI. It recommended adding an 8<sup>th</sup> item under the Approach and Functions section whereby potential conflicts of interest should be brought to the attention of the other IOCTF members; each Task Force member is to take on responsibility for monitoring these potential conflicts. The remaining items in the terms of reference pertaining to the Purpose, Objectives, and Approach and Functions of the GCI IOC Task Force Team met with the approval of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee adopted the terms of reference as modified (Annex A – Terms of Reference of the GCI) and took note of the IOC Task Force Work Plan.

### **2.2 Report on Income and Expenditure January-June 2008 (Document 5)**

The Secretariat Director presented the Report. He pointed out that the level of contributions for 2008 is lower than expected and that this level has been gradually declining over the past 3 years. In addition, he drew the Committee's attention to the WMO's new financial rules which require funds for all annual staff salaries to be fully obligated at the beginning of each year. This requires the Trust Fund to be maintained with a minimum balance of CHF 2 million at the start of each year to avoid cash flow problems and maintain Secretariat operations. These observations led the Secretariat to prepare a revised budget and will require it to reduce expenditure.

The US confirmed that it would continue to contribute USD 600,000 to the Trust Fund. The EC explained that it cannot provide an increased direct contribution for 2008, 2009 and probably 2010. However, the EC would look to provide continued indirect support (e.g. travel and subsistence support for certain Committee meetings and Plenaries).

South Africa voiced concerns about the Trust Fund's solvency and suggested that one way to reduce costs would be to only partially subsidize the travel of developing country participants to GEO meetings. Argentina suggested that the option of having mandatory contributions to the GEO Trust Fund be reconsidered.

The EC Co-Chair concluded the discussions by stating that "we will get as much GEO as we contribute". The Co-Chair recognized that four million Swiss Francs is a "cruising speed" level of funding for the GEO Secretariat and the target budget level should be established at CHF 6 million including in kind contributions. Germany suggested that this target budget level be circulated to the finance authorities of Members.

The Executive Committee discussed the possibility of asking WMO to recognize the pledges of GEO Members to alleviate cash flow problems until the actual contributions are received. It also discussed the possibility of setting up a Working Capital Fund. During an extended discussion, the Committee reviewed various options for raising additional funds and reducing Trust Fund expenditure.

The meeting concluded by agreeing that the Co-Chairs should write to the Members requesting additional contributions, that the Secretariat should explore the possibilities and implications of creating a Working Capital Fund and propose to establish one to the Executive Committee if and when needed, and that the Secretariat should seek economies in expenditure, particularly regarding travel to GEO meetings.

**Action 13.3 Co-Chairs to send a letter to Members requesting contributions to the GEO Trust Fund**

**Action 13.4 Secretariat to explore the benefits of establishing a Working Capital Fund**

### **2.3 Finance Task Team (Document 6)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. Australia welcomed the approach and confirmed that it would participate in the task team. It was also recognized that, if the task team's mandate is also to help attract funding, the broader GEO community will need to be informed and engaged.

The US proposed that the task team members try to communicate amongst themselves before each Plenary session to ensure adequate consultation on the budget. It was agreed that a provisional task team be established and include at least one member from the Executive Committee and open its meetings to all GEO Members. Australia and Switzerland will form a provisional task team and start to work as soon as possible. The Secretariat prepared a revised document to reflect the discussions and decisions of the Executive Committee, and Document 6 (Rev.1) was accepted by the Committee.

### **2.4 Secretariat Performance Indicators (Document 7)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document on draft performance indicators and guidelines for applying them. Following a discussion, the Committee agreed to ask the Secretariat, with assistance from the EC, to restructure and revise the document incorporating comments from the meeting and to present this new version to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

**Action 13.5 Secretariat to develop a performance indicators document for 14<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting**

## **3 GEO DOCUMENTS AND BRANDING GUIDELINES (DOCUMENT 8)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. At the suggestion of Germany, the Committee agreed that a sentence should be added clarifying that the logo of a GEO Member or Participating Organization that is financing a publication should be included. It also agreed that the bulleted examples in the document should be removed and the word "produced" changed to "published". With these changes the document was accepted.

**Action 13.6 Secretariat to finalize GEO documents and branding guidelines document**

## **4 STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION WITH PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER BODIES (DOCUMENT 9)**

The Secretariat Director introduced the document. The Executive Committee first reviewed the draft text of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the GEO Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and requested changing "policy" for "decision" in article 1. With that change, the Committee agreed that the Secretariat could move forward and sign this MOU. It also stated that the Secretariat should submit all MOUs to the Executive Committee for its review and approval. The Committee then approved the Secretariat's proposed applications for observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Germany and the US highlighted the risk of creating additional commitments and workload for the Secretariat by signing too many agreements and called for caution to be exercised. The Committee will consider similar future proposals for obtaining observer status on a case-by-case basis.

## **5 REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR (DOCUMENT 10)**

The National Audit Office of the UK presented its report on the audited financial statements of the Secretariat for the year 2007. The auditor stated that the audit revealed no significant weaknesses or errors, and he called it a good result. He suggested that GEO might explore the possibility of seeking private-sector contributions to the Trust Fund, although the rules of engagement with the private sector would need careful consideration. Argentina suggested that greater efforts should be made to encourage more GEO Members to contribute before considering private sector funding. Australia and Uganda recommended exercising care with private funds. The US suggested exploring and reviewing existing codes of ethics developed by other organizations. Germany commented that the Trust Fund “surplus” should be recognized as a permanent asset of GEO, possibly through its transfer into a Working Capital Fund. The Committee welcomed the audit results and took note of the Audit Report and Secretariat responses.

## **6 IGOS-P TRANSITION (DOCUMENT 11)**

Steward Marsh, head of the IGOS-P Theme Teams Leaders Groups, was invited to present the document. He emphasized that the transition of IGOS-P into GEO was a major success story. Recognizing the overlapping mandates and memberships between IGOS-P and GEO, the themes were pleased to find a welcoming home in GEO. The Partnership dissolved itself in May and the transition is mostly complete, with all eight IGOS themes now active within GEO. A next step will be to ensure that the former themes are represented in the GEO committees and recognized as communities of practice by the UIC. The Executive Committee members applauded this success and accepted the proposition that a symposium be organized around the themes at GEO-VI, in 2009. Greg Withee of the US was nominated to chair the programme committee and invited to report to the Executive Committee at a future meeting.

## **7 C4 AND COMMITTEE REPORTS**

China presented the ADC report while the EC presented the CBC report, South Africa spoke for the STC, the US summarized progress in the UIC, and Germany presented the C4 report.

In the ensuing discussion, it was emphasized that the Executive Committee should actively encourage Members and Participating Organizations to populate the GEOSS Common Infrastructure. It was agreed that Executive Committee members should, wherever possible, explore options for becoming Committee Co-Chairs, as this would promote inter-Committee coordination and a focus on high-level issues. The EC Co-Chair emphasized the strategic issue of how the Committees could provide structured input to the Executive Committee and the Plenary. Australia offered to host a future CBC meeting.

Several members concurred that, with the exception of the ADC, the Committees are still struggling to fully define their roles in advancing GEOSS and that Committees should be encouraged to discuss this issue. In this context, it was suggested that the next version of the 2009-2011 work plan should contain a stronger introduction outlining the roles of the Committees in implementing the work plan. It was noted that as the construction of GEOSS advances, the structure of GEO will naturally need to evolve and adapt. The C4 chair agreed to work with the Secretariat to draft a document on how to improve the functioning of the Committees for the next Executive Committee meeting.

The Chair proposed asking the C4 to look at how it delivers on the implementation of the Work Plan and how it reports and delivers input to the Executive Committee and GEO Plenary. This issue should then be discussed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee. GEO needs to find ways of getting everyone more deeply involved in the process.

**Action 13.7** The Executive Committee should actively encourage Members and Participating Organizations to populate the GEOSS Common Infrastructure.

**Action 13.8** C4 chair and the Secretariat to draft document on how to improve functioning of Committees

## **8 WORK PLAN**

### **8.1 2007-2009 Work Plan Progress Report (Document 12)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. The US suggested that the “traffic light” system for color-coding the degree of progress made on each Task should be further adapted and, together with other Committee members, expressed satisfaction with the report. The discussion turned to the Targets Task Team (T3), its terms of reference and the need to ensure that the construction of GEOSS drives the design of the Tasks and not the other way around. Germany suggested introducing milestones against which progress could be measured. Ongoing work on performance indicators should also be used to report. The Chair concluded by emphasizing the need to improve the management process. The Secretariat was mandated to improve the grading of tasks (in %) to report to Plenary with the recommendation that these be primarily used for the new Work Plan.

### **8.2 2009-2011 Work Plan Version 1 (Document 13)**

Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat introduced the document. She outlined the guidelines that were followed for producing the new work plan. She explained that version 1 of the draft plan emphasizes the cross-cutting nature of GEOSS, the IGOS-P themes, the GEO early achievements and data sharing. Version 1 also consolidates existing and new Tasks into a smaller number of “overarching tasks”. Comments from experts who are participating in the technical review are due by 8 August. Version 2 will then be distributed on 1 September for an official review, with comments due by 3 October. Version 3 will be submitted six weeks in advance of GEO-V for acceptance by the Plenary.

The US and Germany commented that the draft work plan was a major improvement over the 2007-2009 plan. The Secretariat Director stressed that the first part of the work plan seeks to fill the remaining gaps in data gathering and dissemination systems while the second part focuses on user needs and end-to-end services. The discussion turned to the challenge of allocating the new Tasks to the four working Committees for monitoring. The CBC, for example, clearly needs to ensure that the “system of systems” is operational in developing countries. Russia recommended producing more written materials to assist users and explain GEOSS to them; this could be highlighted in the new work plan and assigned to the Secretariat.

Australia believed that the draft work plan succeeds in highlighting the importance of interoperability. The US noted that a number of Tasks are contributed by governments and organizations and simply need to be recognized and monitored by GEO, while others require GEO’s active engagement. He suggested creating a Task on global carbon tracking, with forest monitoring as a sub-Task. The meeting then discussed the challenges of analysing the gaps in the system of systems and of inventorying the multitude of existing in-situ observation systems.

Returning to the visibility of GEO and how to help users to understand it better, Germany suggested that GEO should support the scientific and technical follow-up to key global conferences, such as those of the G8 and the UNFCCC. To do so, and to reach out to other user groups as well, he urged the convening of more technical conferences.

The discussion concluded by affirming the approach taken in version 1 of the work plan, the need for an introductory text outlining the philosophy behind the plan’s structure, and a stronger definition of the Committees’ roles in monitoring progress, regarding the Executive Committee and Plenary and guiding GEOSS implementation. The Executive Committee will provide ideas and texts to the

Secretariat to be incorporated into version 2. The C4, Committees and Secretariat were encouraged to continue thinking these issues through.

**Action 13.9 Secretariat to report to Committees on the discussion of the Work Plan and the role of Committees**

**9 TARGET TASK TEAM (DOCUMENT 14)**

Johnson Owaro of Uganda, co-chair of the Target Task Team, introduced the document. He stated that the Target Task Team (T3) met in Geneva on 25-26 June and will meet there again on 4-5 September to continue working on the 10-year targets for GEOSS. The Secretariat then distributed a written report it had drafted under the guidance of the T3 as an attachment to Document 14. Germany, supported by Norway, welcomed the work of the T3 but urged it to accelerate its pace, for example by holding an early break-out meeting. The EC representative, who participates in the T3, highlighted the progress the T3 was making as well as the challenges it faces. The Secretariat Director clarified that while the 10-year Implementation Plan for GEOSS is legally binding, the annexed targets are not and can be updated.

The T3 intends to submit an interim report on the six- and ten-year targets to GEO-V and have the final results accepted by GEO-VI. The Committee agreed on the need to inform the T3 of its discussions and to encourage it to explore the possibility of accelerating its process. Uganda emphasized the need to have additional active members to share the work load.

**Action 13.10 Secretariat to inform T3 about the Executive Committee's discussion and recommendations**

**10 PROCESS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND OBSERVERS (DOCUMENT 15)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document which was prepared following a request by the EC to clarify the rules of procedure. He outlined two alternative approaches:

- Option A – in the interest of saving time at Plenary meetings, the Executive Committee should as a practical matter only forward to the Plenary those submissions that it determines meet the technical criteria for becoming a Participating Organization or an observer.
- Option B – in the interests of transparency, all submissions from candidates should be presented to the Plenary meeting.

China presented a clarifying letter explaining its views. A discussion ensued, with Committee members indicating their support for either Option A or Option B. It was agreed that reaching a consensus would not be possible at this meeting and that the Co-Chairs should work together on this issue and report to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

**11 UPDATE ON DATA SHARING PRINCIPLES IMPLEMENTATION (DOCUMENT 16)**

Michael Rast of the Secretariat introduced the document. He explained that this new version of the guidelines took account of comments from GEO-IV as well as from the Committees. Distributed to all GEO members in early June, this newest version separates the white paper (which now serves as a background reference document and does not require further negotiation) from the implementation guidelines. The task team will further define the guidelines over the coming two years with the aim of having them adopted by GEO-VII in 2010.

The EC, Germany and the US all recognized the progress that has been made, noting the complexity and importance of the task. The Secretariat Director stated that he would send out a reminder

extending the final deadline for contributions to the next version of the guidelines, to be distributed in September. He noted that many people are counting on GEO to move this critical issue forward.

**Action 13.11 Secretariat Director to send letter extending deadline and reminding Principals of the importance of Task Team on data sharing principles implementation**

## **12 PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-V**

The Secretariat Director explained that, due to the costs and pressures of the Sichuan earthquake and other major natural disasters, China is no longer able to host GEO-V in November.

Romania has made an offer to host this year's annual Plenary on the same dates (19-20 November), as described in the letter that was circulated to the Committee members. He noted that one benefit of meeting in Bucharest would be to engage the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in GEO. The EC stated that it fully supports the Romanian offer and noted Romania's enthusiasm for GEO. The Committee endorsed the offer of Romania. It then discussed whether the Committees are likely to hold meetings in Bucharest immediately before or after the Plenary, and determined that they were. The Secretariat Director confirmed that a letter would now go out to the GEO community informing them of the decision to meet in Romania. The discussion concluded by addressing the possibility that Romania and others would be interested in organizing an exhibition of their activities during the Plenary.

**Action 13.12 Secretariat to circulate letter announcing that GEO-V will take place in Bucharest, Romania, on 19-20 November 2008**

## **13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The US noted that in 2006 it had volunteered to lead the development of performance indicators for GEOSS and that draft indicators had been distributed as a document at GEO-IV. The Secretariat Director suggested that the Committee might consider mandating the Secretariat to work with the Task Team to ensure that a strong output would already be available for the next Plenary; this would complement the documents presenting the new work plan, performance indicators, and the IOC.

The meeting then turned to the closing statements. The EC Co-Chair, serving as Chair of the Executive Committee meeting, expressed satisfaction in the meeting's good balance between administrative and strategic issues. He applauded the contribution and leadership of the US Co-Chair, who would soon be stepping down; he presented him with a commemorative plaque on behalf of the Committee and the Secretariat.

The China Co-Chair highlighted the importance of the new 2009-2011 work plan, improved financing for GEO and the IGOS-P transition.

The South Africa Co-Chair said that the meeting marked the shift from operational to strategic issues. He acknowledged the work of the Secretariat and of his fellow Committee members, thanking in particular the outgoing US Co-Chair and the EC Co-Chair in his capacity as chair of the meeting.

The US Co-Chair thanked everyone present for their generous words. He stated that he was bullish on the future of the GEO Secretariat, and he applauded the volunteerism demonstrated by the Committee members. He said that observations are key to all scientific research and understanding as well as to human well-being. He pledged to follow GEO's progress closely in the years to come.

The EC Co-Chair concluded by asking the Committee to recognize the contribution and departure of Michael Rast from the GEO Secretariat. He then adjourned the meeting.