

**Summary Report**  
**15<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Geneva, 1 – 2 June 2009**  
(As accepted at the 16<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee)

## **1 GENERAL BUSINESS**

The GEO Co-Chair from the European Commission (EC), Mr Zoran Stančič, chaired the meeting. In his opening remarks, he welcomed the new US Co-Chair, together with the new Executive Committee members from Belize, France and the Republic of Korea. He reiterated the continued strong commitment of the European Commission to GEO and stated that the Commission will remain deeply engaged in the work needed to successfully complete the GEOSS 10-year Implementation Plan. Mr Stančič then referred to a recent meeting at the European Environment Agency on “A global setting for European environmental monitoring and observation” that recognized, amongst the other key actions listed in the conclusions, the need to secure international agreement for the full and open access to data. He then surveyed some of the key issues to be discussed during the two days, including: the GEO Trust Fund; the process for reconciling the targets, work plan and monitoring & evaluation indicators; and the preparations for the 2010 Ministerial.

The new GEO Co-Chair from the US, Ms Shere Abbott, introduced herself. On behalf of the new US administration, she expressed gratitude to the Executive Committee for its efforts to advance the GEO vision. She noted that US President Barack Obama recently stated that scientific and technological innovation move more quickly when insights, costs and risks are shared. She stressed the importance of open access to data as a global public good, and called upon the Member governments to use the upcoming GEO Ministerial Summit to build consensus on a few critical issues that require international cooperation, such as closing key data continuity gaps in significant satellite and in-situ systems. She assured the meeting that the US would remain a committed partner in the full implementation of GEOSS.

The GEO Co-Chair from China, Mr Guoguang Zheng, noted that substantial progress had been achieved since the GEO-V Plenary meeting. He stated that more work is needed on data sharing principles, the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) and work plan implementation. He described China’s efforts to promote GEO and GEOSS at the national level, its continuing commitment to the China Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) and other satellite programmes, and its support to the global agricultural monitoring community.

Mr Philemon Mjwara, the GEO Co-Chair from South Africa, welcomed the new US Co-Chair as well as the new Executive Committee members from Belize, France and the Republic of Korea. He said the meeting documents convinced him that GEO is starting to demonstrate its ability to add value. GEO is moving to a higher level, beyond simply advancing individual Tasks to actually constructing a coherent system of systems. He applauded the work of the Committees and the Secretariat and reflected that GEO was at a stage where courageous leadership would become increasingly important.

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

In presenting the agenda for adoption, the Chair proposed that Item 3 on the forest carbon monitoring Task be considered under Item 6 on Work Plan Implementation and Update. With this change, the agenda was adopted.

## **1.2 Approval of Summary Report of the 14<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2)**

The Summary Report of the 14<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting was adopted without comment.

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

The Chair acknowledged that, as requested by the GEO-V Plenary, the Secretariat is now distributing all Executive Committee documents to the entire GEO community. He invited the Secretariat Director, Mr José Achache, to introduce the document.

The South Africa Co-Chair proposed adding to Action 13.8 on “C4 Chair and Secretariat to draft document on how to improve functioning of Committees” the need to clarify roles and strengthen the relationship between the Secretariat and the Committees. Norway highlighted the need for Committees to add value to the process of advancing the Tasks.

Referring to Action 13.7 on “Executive Committee to actively encourage Members and Participating Organizations to Populate the GEOSS Common Infrastructure”, France stated that GEOSS will not succeed unless a sufficient number of systems are registered; he suggested asking the Secretariat to develop a detailed study and analysis of this issue for the next Plenary. Argentina supported the idea that GEO must focus on implementation.

The Russian Federation requested that the document contain greater detail to make it easier to understand what exactly has been done to close each Action.

Speaking for the EC, the Chair: welcomed the launch of the “GEO News” electronic newsletter under Action 14.1; suggested that Action 13.1 on “*Secretariat to liaise with STC to prepare a paper on how GEO would relate to selected research consortia*” should now be closed, as the new S&T Overarching Tasks are addressing this issue; stressed the need under Action 14.2 to distribute the document on “Secretariat Performance Indicators”; stated that the action “*The Executive Committee should review the Secretariat Performance Indicators in early 2012*”, to be completed in the medium- to long-term, should also be shown in the list of OPEN actions from previous EXCOM meetings, otherwise there is a likelihood that such medium- to long-term actions may be “forgotten”; and noted that the Action concerning Germany’s call from EXCOM 12 for establishing an advisory group of experts on GEOSS had been dropped before being concluded. (This action should have been listed as 12.26 in the Summary Report of EXCOM 12, but was instead listed as 12.19, which duplicated an earlier action.)

The Secretariat Director responded by stating that the situation with Committees has greatly improved. The Committees need to drive implementation of the Work Plan rather than focus on administrative matters. An increase in the registration of components is indeed critical to the success of GEOSS. The document on Secretariat Performance Indicators is available for use when the Secretariat reports at the end of the year. Finally, the Action requested by Germany had been dropped following an error in the numbering of Actions from the Committee’s 12<sup>th</sup> meeting.

In summary, the Chair concluded that Actions 13.8 and 14.3 should be combined and that the document to be prepared should clarify the roles of, and strengthen the relationship between, the Secretariat and the Committees. He requested the Secretariat to include brief explanatory text and links to relevant documents for each Action in future versions of the document and to reinstall the Action from EXCOM 12 requested by Germany. He stated that the Secretariat Performance Indicators document is important for transparency and for helping the GEO community to understand how the Secretariat functions and should be released immediately.

The South Africa Co-Chair supported these recommendations. Concerning the discussion about GEO’s relevant emphasis on implementation vs Committee process, and the existence of different views on the progress GEO is making, he suggested that a “perception survey”, or a closer assessment of various GEO documents, might be useful for understanding why the registration rate is too low. The Chair said that this issue will be revisited during other items on the meeting agenda.

**Action 15.1 – Secretariat to distribute Secretariat Performance Indicators document.**

**Action 15.2 – Secretariat to reinstall Action requested by Germany at the Committee’s 12<sup>th</sup> meeting.**

**Action 15.3 – Secretariat to add more detail to future Review of Actions documents.**

**Action 15.4 – Secretariat to combine Actions 13.8 and 14.3 and produce a document clarifying the roles of, and strengthening the relationship between, the Secretariat and the Committees for the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**

## **2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS AND TRUST FUND**

### **2.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 4)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. He highlighted the issues of forest carbon monitoring; the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Remote Sensing of the Environment (ISRSE-33) held in Stresa, Italy; GEOSS in Africa; the CBC/UIC Call for Proposals; future cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the World Climate Conference – 3; and various GEO workshops. He highlighted the need for more regional and global activities, funding and private-sector engagement for taking GEO to the next level. He invited the newly seconded experts to introduce themselves to the Committee.

France stated that he was quite impressed by the Secretariat’s activities and asked whether the outreach to Iridium and the Ships of Opportunity had yet led to any concrete results.

Australia asked about the process for updating the GEO mailing lists to ensure contact information is kept fully up to date. She remarked that if GEO could bring together multiple initiatives funded by different agencies, for example in Africa, this would be a strong indication of its ability to promote synergies. As for ensuring that the World Climate Conference-3 and GEOSS are mutually supportive, she stressed the need to build links at the highest levels of governments. She also highlighted the need to build stronger relations with the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations. She asked whether the Secretariat planned to be present at the IOC General Assembly where important issues such as free data exchange from the Argo ocean buoys would be discussed.

The US highlighted the importance to the IPCC of robust observations; while the research community whose work is assessed by Working Group I has made great progress in this area, the researchers underlying the Working Group II and III assessments still have unmet needs.

The Secretariat Director responded to the various comments, pointing out that work of the Secretariat with Iridium had bought time for interested agencies to decide through their normal decision cycles whether they would want to make use of this opportunity for the GEO community to extend the capabilities of GEOSS.

The Chair stated that the Committee should acknowledge the work of the Secretariat as described in the document. He thanked the outgoing experts and consultants as well as the governments that second experts, and he welcomed the new experts. The document was then accepted by the Committee.

### **2.2 Financial Statements 2008 (Document 5)**

### **2.3 Report on Income and Expenditure Jan-April 2009 (Document 6)**

The Chair proposed treating Items 2.2 and 2.3 together. He reminded the meeting that the financing level required to ensure that the Secretariat operates at a reliable “cruising speed” has been previously agreed. Regarding staffing, it was important to have the right balance between continuity and change. While regretting the departure of several experts, he anticipated that they would return home as ambassadors for GEO and would ensure a proper handover to the new arrivals.

The Secretariat Director presented the documents. He noted that the total cash income for 2008 was slightly below CHF 3.2 million. He restated that for all of the desired activities to be carried out, the annual “cruising speed” income of about CHF 4.5 million would be required, as mentioned by the Chair. By reducing travel, programs, workshops and other expenditures, the Secretariat had succeeded in balancing income and expenditures in 2008. He emphasized that the minimum budget level, below which the Secretariat cannot operate satisfactorily, is CHF 3.5 million.

Australia explained that the CHF 100,000 it had recently transferred to the Trust Fund constituted its contribution for 2009 and an initial contribution for 2010. The EC stated that it had contributed € 600,000 for 2009 and continues to provide additional indirect support, for example by funding the travel of developing country participants for meetings of the Capacity Building Committee. South Africa questioned the conversion rate used in the table for its contribution and asked the Secretariat to reconfirm the amount.

The US stated that it would increase its 2009 contribution by USD 300,000 to a total of USD 700,000, with the possibility of a further increase later. The US is also providing in-kind support through two seconded experts and is hosting this year’s Plenary meeting. Norway explained that while its 2008 contribution consisted of financing the travel of developing country participants at the November forest monitoring symposium in Brazil, in 2009 it will contribute directly to the Trust Fund. Argentina raised the issue of whether financial support for travel that is requested by the Secretariat but does not enter the Trust Fund should somehow be indicated in the report, perhaps in a separate table.

The Secretariat Director said that the net result of these announcements was that the level of pledged resources for 2009 was already reaching CHF 3.5 million. He expressed his gratitude to the US for increasing its contribution. Responding to Argentina, he said that so far the only in-kind contributions being reported were seconded experts, the staff offices provided by WMO, and the costs of hosting the Plenary. He expressed concern that recording all in-kind contributions could be complicated and even misleading. He suggested that it could be possible to keep a separate record of such contributions, but he also noted that drawing a line between contributions to GEO operations and contributions to GEOSS implementation could be difficult.

Australia observed that reporting additional types of in-kind contributions might provide countries with an incentive to channel travel-support funds through the Trust Fund just to make their contribution more visible, which would generate more work for the Secretariat. It might be possible to define a limited number of categories, such as travel support and workshop costs, and to list only these in the financial reports. Argentina suggested the issue deserves further consideration.

The Chair stated that the Committee should return to some of these issues. The Committee accepted the two reports.

The Chair commended the balancing of the budget in 2008. He supported the recommendation of the Secretariat that the minimum budget for maintaining operations should be recognized as CHF 3.5 million, and that a yearly cash contribution of CHF 4.5 million should still be considered as the reliable “cruising speed” level. The Chair also stated the need to look at the ways of reporting contributions, ensuring that contributions to the GEO Trust Fund are not confused with those used for GEOSS implementation.

**Action 15.5 – The Executive Committee to return to the issue of how to report contributions to the GEO Trust Fund (based upon a proposal from the GEO Secretariat / Interim Finance Task Team).**

#### **2.4 Interim Finance Task Team Report (Document 7)**

Australia introduced the document. She explained that the Interim Finance Task Team wrote the document on “Strengthening the financial basis for GEO” in response to issues raised at the GEO-V Plenary meeting. Australia and the US, as well as the EC and the Secretariat, contributed to the report. Part I of the document explores how to strengthen contributions from the GEO community to the Trust

Fund and manage expenditures. Whilst recognizing that GEO is a voluntary body, the document proposes various ways of encouraging more and larger contributions. Part II focuses on how GEO might attract external contributions from development banks, foundations, the private sector, and so forth. She concluded by stating that, like UN bodies, GEO needs to rely for its operational funds primarily on its members.

Argentina suggested that members could be encouraged to make their contributions in a timely manner.

The Chair remarked that the document contains many useful and concrete ideas, some of which can be easily implemented. The main question now was how to raise the level of annual pledges from the current CHF 3.5 million to the required CHF 4.5 million. One possibility would be to focus on the world's major economies in the G8 or G20.

Norway agreed, remarking that some suggestions could be quite challenging. He noted that when countries become more engaged in the actual implementation of GEOSS through Tasks and activities they may be more inclined to contribute to the Trust Fund. This has been the experience of Norway; the new Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariats of GEO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has strengthened Norway's engagement in GEO, since Norway was a major donor for FAO activities on forest monitoring and the GEO-FAO collaboration helped to inform people within the government of the value that GEO can bring.

The Russian Federation raised the issue of why some countries do not contribute. Is it because of financial limitations, or because of a lack of real commitment to GEO? GEO can be difficult to explain and justify internally, and many governments may be willing to invest in GEOSS implementation but not in GEO operations. New strategies are needed, perhaps targeting the G20.

China agreed that the document contains many constructive ideas. He was skeptical that linking cash contributions to GDP would be effective; the idea was rejected by Plenary in 2005 and could have the unwanted effect of discouraging some countries from engaging in GEOSS. Since it is voluntary, contributing to GEO should be viewed as a great honor. Expanding the membership of GEO could help to increase contributions.

The South Africa Co-Chair said that if the Executive Committee wanted to bring this document to the Plenary, then Norway's suggestion of explaining more effectively how GEO operations contribute to GEOSS implementation, and how the two are different, could be useful. The fact that cash contributions have improved to CHF 3.5 million is a positive sign, and it may be possible to achieve the target budget by encouraging existing contributors to increase the level of their support. Regarding external funding, the idea of getting the Secretariat involved in writing grant proposals may not be effective. However, the Secretariat could interact with aid agencies and the private sector on an exploratory basis. The private sector may be interested in GEO Exhibitions, contributing to GEOSS implementation or using GEOSS for research and development. Clearly, rules of engagement may soon be needed.

The Secretariat Director responded by suggesting that developing a preliminary budget based on early contributions and pledges would have negative effects. He proposed instead that the Executive Committee confirm that CHF 3.5 million is the absolute minimum level of cash contributions on which GEO can operate and inform Plenary of what the remaining needs are for ensuring that all GEO operations are fully funded. He noted that strategic partnerships with UN bodies or the private sector could help to attract funding to GEOSS implementation but probably not to the Trust Fund.

Australia reiterated that the purpose of the exercise had been to "think outside the box" on ways to raise money for the Trust Fund, not for GEOSS implementation. She suggested that working with the UN agencies on GEOSS implementation could help to build credibility for GEO as an entity.

The Chair proposed that the discussion be captured and incorporated into the report and presented to the Plenary by the Interim Finance Task Team. Summarizing the discussion, he said it is important: to

avoid strict links to GDP; to broaden the GEO community; and to maintain a clear distinction between financial and in-kind contributions. Key recommendations endorsed by the Executive Committee included ensuring a stable budgeting process, a clear understanding that cash contributions to the budget should be least CHF 3.5 million and ideally CHF 4.5 million, with additional in-kind contributions valued at around CHF 2.0 million, and an invitation to all GEO members to contribute. At the same time, it is important to promote GEOSS success stories at the Plenary and Summit and other key events, such as meetings of the G8 and the G20. External funding sources should be explored, but with care. He proposed that the Committee ask the Interim Finance Task Team to continue working on the document and to revisit this issue of raising funds from external sources at the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee in September.

The Committee then discussed how best to capture the ideas from the discussion. The Chair summarized the discussion by asking that the recommendations with wide support – presenting success stories at key events, encouraging more contributions from members, indicating clearly the required budget levels (between CHF 3.5 and 4.5 million, together with in-kind contributions of CHF 2.0 million), ensuring a stable budgeting process and so forth – be placed into a preamble to a paper summarizing the discussion. Links to GDP should be avoided. More discussion will be needed on the issue of funding from external sources. The new paper will be considered at the next meeting of the Executive Committee, with a view to finalizing it in readiness for presentation to Plenary.

**Action 15.6 – The Interim Finance Task Team, led by Australia, and supported by the Secretariat, to draft a short paper with a preamble setting out the agreed recommendations, followed by a summary of current views and discussions for the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee.**

## **2.5 Report of the External Auditor (Document 8)**

The document was presented by Mr Graham Miller of the UK's National Audit Office. He stated that the audit of the Trust Fund's 2008 financial statement, which was based on the terms of reference accepted at the GEO-III Plenary and completed in accordance with international standards, found no weaknesses. Mr Miller noted that the income realized from voluntary contributions, plus the interest realized, resulted in a small excess of income over expenditure. The 2008 end-year cash balance is sufficient to cover the remaining liabilities and cash flow requirements in 2009. The year 2008, however, saw lower than expected voluntary contributions. The dependence on a small number of contributors can lead to risks later in the year.

WMO is transitioning to the IPSAS accruals-based accounting framework that is being adopted by the entire UN system. This will facilitate year-to-year comparisons and impact the presentation of the GEO financial statements. It will also show all assets and liabilities on the balance sheet, including, for example, after-service medical benefits. The auditor recommended that GEO adopt the IPSAS system sometime after 1 January 2010.

The Chair expressed his pleasure in the audit report. He observed that, given that GEO's finances are administered by WMO, it will be necessary to transition to the new accounting system. He proposed that the Committee take note of the audit report and accept the recommendation of moving to the new system and requested the Secretariat to prepare a report to the Plenary on this transition. Australia welcomed the transparency that the new accruals-based standards will provide. The Committee accepted both the report and the recommendation.

**Action 15.7 – The Secretariat to prepare a report to the Plenary on the transition to the IPSAS accruals-based accounting system.**

### **3 FOREST CARBON MONITORING ACTIVITIES**

This issue was addressed together with Item 6.

### **4 REPORT OF THE M&E WORKING GROUP (DOCUMENTS 10 AND 11)**

Mr Charles Baker, co-chair of the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group, presented the report. He summarized the history of the Group's formation and mandate and reported on its first meeting, held in Geneva in March. The second meeting will take place from 22 – 24 July 2009 in Geneva. He asked the Executive Committee to approve the Working Group's terms of reference. He also asked for guidance on several issues: how best to work with the GEO Secretariat to coordinate monitoring, how the Group's membership of the evaluation teams should be determined, whether the Working Group should initiate some early efforts to recruit evaluators in advance of the Plenary to ensure that the evaluation is completed within one year, and whether the Executive Committee would serve as the interface with the Plenary and review the evaluation report for factual accuracy.

Australia said that the document did not make it clear how information in addition to that relating to the progress of Tasks was gathered, noting that Tasks are only a part of GEOSS, and that many other contributions to GEOSS are being made. She wondered how one quantitatively assesses where GEOSS adds value and ensures that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Mr Baker said that the Committees will contribute to the evaluation of the transverse areas. The Committee that the M&E Working Group needs to work most closely with is the User Interface Committee (UIC) because the ultimate value of GEOSS is to the users. In addition, each Societal Benefit Area (SBA) will have been evaluated at least once by the year 2014; the year 2015 could then be treated as a special year for providing summary conclusions on all of the SBAs.

Norway welcomed the clarification that the M&E exercise is about GEOSS, and not GEO. France observed that, since the purpose is to correct things that are not going well, it would be best to have light but quick evaluations to ensure that all issues are addressed in time. The South Africa Co-Chair said that the exercise is about monitoring, evaluation – and learning. He agreed rapidity was important, but also recognized the constraints facing the Working Group. Mr Baker remarked that most Tasks are currently incomplete so it is difficult to monitor outcomes very quickly.

The Chair said it was good that the first evaluation exercise leading up to the 2010 Summit was being driven by the Cape Town Declaration. He asked if, for the 2010 Ministerial, there would be value in having an extra, independent entity take part in this evaluation exercise. He suggested that the terms of reference could be modified to give a clearer picture of how the Working Group intends to carry out its functions and to show the stronger correlation with M&E Framework. There should also be a clear statement that the Group's mandate will run until 2015.

Mr Baker responded that the Working Group did consider bringing in an independent organization such as the World Bank to work alongside the GEO team, but this idea was not well received by the GEO-V Plenary, so it is no longer being considered. It should be possible to find enough high-quality evaluators from within the GEO community.

France acknowledged the various points that had been raised but highlighted that making an evaluation can be difficult. It might be useful to consider drafting more general evaluation questions and focus on determining, for example, whether all relevant communities and organizations are included in GEOSS implementation. Mr Baker said that such questions would indeed be addressed by the first evaluation.

Australia supported an earlier comment that the evaluation should focus on GEOSS implementation as a whole and not just on the targets. She noted that the User Interface Committee focuses on identifying requirements rather than on whether these requirements have been met. A light and general evaluation in 2010 would be a good way to start, with the process continuing until 2015.

Mr Baker clarified that the UIC will not do the evaluation team's work for it, but will simply serve as a source of contacts and information about users. The evaluation team will also rely on the Task sheets.

The Russian Federation remarked that the focus should be on gathering independent evaluations from the user communities in the nine SBAs. Various national and international bodies should be surveyed about their views on the benefits of GEOSS. Mr Baker confirmed that this would be done.

China noted the links between the targets and the monitoring process. Although the Target Task Team has not finalized its work, the evaluation needs to begin as soon as possible. Given the approach of the Ministerial Summit, the evaluation should target high-level decision makers.

Uganda noted that much of the discussion was focusing on what would be needed from the first evaluation. Both the monitoring and the evaluation processes should be robust. They will benefit from the conclusion of the work of the Target Task Team and from the reconciliation process. Given the rapidly evolving situation over the next several years, it may be a good idea to set some milestones.

The Chair stated that the Executive Committee would need to provide guidance on fine-tuning the Working Group's terms of reference.

Argentina emphasized the need to evaluate whether GEOSS is contributing to serving users.

The US stressed the importance of evaluating how GEOSS outcomes meet GEO's long-term goals and vision; the Cape Town Declaration offers many steps on the way that should be evaluated to ensure that GEOSS is moving in the right direction.

The Secretariat Director asked if there had been an assessment of the resources that the M&E Working Group would require. Mr Baker responded that no additional burden of work would be placed on the Secretariat, and that the Group would take responsibility for identifying and working with the evaluators.

The Chair suggested that remaining uncertainties about the process were not a major problem. The Plenary had provided a mandate and the work must move ahead quickly to show concrete results by mid-2010. The Executive Committee should fine-tune the terms of reference and then closely monitor the process. The Group should report back to the Committee's next meeting, which can decide on how best to advise the Plenary.

The Chair from South Africa reiterated that the Ministerial Summit will want to see a higher level evaluation that identifies gaps and any problems in the general direction of GEOSS implementation.

Mr Baker confirmed that once the revised targets are finalized they will be reflected in the Working Group's plan, as will the overarching Tasks. France said that the first evaluation should consider the implementation process, and not GEOSS itself, as GEOSS is not yet ready. Norway said that the evaluation should consider how the numerous Tasks link up to create GEOSS.

With regard to the Framework Document (Document 11) The Chair asked Mr Baker to take note of the comments of the Committee and, together with the other members of the M&E Working Group, to update the Framework document accordingly.

Following several rounds of editing and comment, the M&E Working Group's terms of reference were adopted by the Committee.

**Action 15.8 -- The M&E Working Group to update the Framework Document and submit this to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**



## **5 TARGET TASK TEAM (T3) REPORT (DOCUMENT 12)**

The document was presented by Target Task Team co-chair Mr Greg Withee. He noted that the number of targets had been greatly reduced to only 14 to create a concise, 10-page paper. The Team was being guided by GEO's various existing declarations and documents and by extensive consultations. The Team would meet immediately after the conclusion of the Executive Meeting to further improve the text.

The US remarked that the targets as currently drafted were very broad and that some detailed outputs could be added to make it possible to evaluate them. Mr Withee confirmed that putting two or three outcomes under each target would help to demonstrate how they would be met and this was being done.

France applauded the work and said it was useful for explaining GEOSS to people outside the GEO community. He suggested it might be useful to indicate progress on relevant Tasks.

The Chair asked how the Task Team would conduct its gap analysis and provide a framework for identifying linkages across SBAs. He also said that it remained the European Commission's view that the reference to a global carbon monitoring system should be strengthened within the Climate SBA.

The Russian Federation advocated the need for manuals and other technical documents to assist users of GEOSS. Norway emphasized the importance of short and concrete descriptions of the targets. Mr Withee assured the Committee that their comments would be addressed at the upcoming meeting of the Task Team.

The Chair said that the document is on the right track. The Task Team should update it and distribute it over the summer (mid-year) months to GEO Principals for feedback by September. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will review the updated document. It will then be distributed to the entire GEO community in advance of the GEO-VI Plenary meeting.

**Action 15.9 – The T3 to update the "GEOSS Strategic Targets" document and distribute this to GEO Principals for comment. The next meeting of the Executive Committee to then review the updated document.**

## **6 2009-2011 WORK PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND UPDATE**

### **6.1 2009-2011 Work Plan Progress (Documents 9 and 13)**

The document was presented by the GEO Secretariat's Work Plan Coordinator, Ms Alexia Massacand. She noted that the report was organized around the overarching Tasks. It highlights key lines of GEOSS implementation and seeks to support the work of the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group.

Secretariat expert Mr Giovanni Rum then described the progress being made on forest carbon monitoring. He cited the strong leadership roles played by Australia and Norway as well as the engagement of Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the UK and FAO. The objective of the Task is to demonstrate the feasibility of yearly mid-resolution, wall-to-wall monitoring of changes in forest carbon.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the comprehensive report and acknowledged the excellent work of the GEO community. The South Africa Co-Chair observed that the report now provides a much better sense of the progress being made on GEOSS implementation. The US complimented the new effort on forest carbon monitoring, emphasized the need to add value to other ongoing activities in this field, and noted that, despite the major policy needs in this area, the monitoring system was still in a research phase. Norway noted that important progress often occurs in small steps.

Speaking on behalf of the EC, the Chair asked for clarification about those Tasks marked in yellow (indicating that more progress is needed) and in particular the Science and Technology Tasks, where the EC was of the view that recent progress made on the two overarching tasks had been excellent.. Ms Massacand explained that these Tasks were still in the planning stage but that progress was expected to be made shortly. The Chair expressed satisfaction with the forest carbon monitoring activity within the context of a global carbon monitoring initiative.

The Chair concluded by asking the Secretariat to take note of the discussions under this agenda item and to report again on progress at the Committee's next meeting.

## **6.2 GCI/IOC Task Force (Document 14)**

The Co-Chair of the GEOSS Common Infrastructure Initial Operating Capacity (GCI/IOC) Task Force, Mr Alan Edwards, presented the document. He emphasized that the GCI Concept of Operations document identifies various GCI "User types", including GEOSS-Experienced Users and Issue-Oriented Users. He described the recent evaluation of 117 users conducted by the User Interface Committee, with critical support from the US Environmental Protection Agency, during ISRSE-33 in Stresa. Many of these users fit into the two "user type" groupings mentioned previously. Importantly, 86% of the interviewed users would consider visiting the GCI again; although only 39% said that it was easy to use. He noted that of the nearly 200 approved components now registered, most involved catalogues and links to web sites rather than actual data sets. This currently creates difficulties in discovering and accessing data and meeting the needs of users. He asked the Executive Committee to extend the mandate of the Task Force for another three months so that it could report to the Committee's September meeting.

The Chair proposed that the Committee agree on extending the mandate of the Task Force and asking it to present its recommendations to the September meeting of the Committee, so that they could be reviewed in advance of the Plenary.

France emphasized the need for more systems to be registered and to find a way to ensure that data available through the GEO Portal would be quality-assured so that they could be trusted by users. The US congratulated the Task Force. The Secretariat Director said that GEOSS was likely to include GEOSS-verified data and non-GEOSS-verified data and stressed the importance of an early release of the Digital Elevation Model, even prior to completing a comprehensive quality control of the product. In this respect, he observed that the user assessments conducted at ISRSE-33 by the User Interface Committee had moved the IOC process forward dramatically.

Australia asked whether the Portal would include access to real-time data sets, which would be essential for meeting the needs of many SBAs, such as disaster mitigation, weather and water, and she queried how this would be dealt with.

Mr Edwards noted the strong links between the GCI/IOC and the work of the Data Sharing Task Force. It is important to establish a baseline for the GCI so that an identifiable working system with content can be promoted to the world as soon as possible.

Responding to additional queries, Mr Edwards said that providers may be registering links rather than actual data due to concerns over the data sharing principles or because of the enormous amount of work required to register huge data sets. He also highlighted the benefits of targeted user testing.

The Russian Federation suggested that the Secretariat distribute a document reporting on the current status of the GCI and explaining the need for more components to be registered and for testing and feedback from Members. This would increase buy-in and awareness.

The Chair stressed that GEO could not afford failure in this area. The Committee asked the Task Force to continue working for another three months, to take note of the Committee's views, and to submit recommendations to the Committee's September meeting before reporting to the GEO-VI Plenary.

**Action 15.10 – The IOC-TF to submit "Recommendations for Long-term GEOSS Common Infrastructure Operations" to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**

### **6.3 Data Sharing Task Force (Document 15)**

Mr Edwards presented the document. He noted that the Cape Town Declaration called for GEO to reach a consensus at its 2010 Ministerial Summit on the practical steps for implementing the GEOSS Data Sharing Principles. The Data Sharing Task Force (DSTF), which builds on the work of the Data Sharing Task Team, would therefore support GEO in reaching its objectives for the 2010 Ministerial Summit. The DSTF held its first meeting in May, during which it prepared draft terms of reference. These draft terms of reference include the DSTF objectives, which are: to submit an updated draft of Implementation Guidelines for the GEOSS Data Sharing Principles to the Plenary in 2009; to interact with GEO Committees and Task Teams on their data-sharing opportunities and needs and to work to promote harmonization of data-sharing procedures consistent with the Data Sharing Principles; to prepare an action plan to implement the Data Sharing Principles and to enable the development of working procedures for data sharing within GEOSS; to produce documentation to support adoption of the Implementation Guidelines and the action plan by the 2010 GEO Ministerial Summit; and to consider possible recommendations for improving the principles for data sharing within GEOSS.

Mr Edwards reported that the DSTF is composed of individuals named by GEO Members and Participating Organizations, with administrative support provided by the GEO Secretariat. It consists primarily of government representatives and the Task Force co-chairs nominated at the meeting which were from China, India, Italy, Japan, the US, and a representative from the Task Team. (It was noted that the Indian and Italian nominations were provisional, as they required formal agreement from their organizations for their nominations.)

The Committee welcomed the progress being made by the Task Force and encouraged it to continue its work.

The Chair stated that the Committee took note of the draft DSTF terms of reference and asked the DSTF to use them as it continued its work in the near term. The final draft terms of reference should be presented to the next Committee meeting for discussion, before being sent to GEO-VI for formal adoption.

**Action 15.11 – The DSTF to submit draft terms of reference to the next meeting of the Executive Committee for formal discussion.**

### **6.4 Committee and C4 Reports**

Mr Mmboneni Muofhe presented the C4 report on behalf of the South Africa Co-Chair. He noted that although the C4 was created to improve information sharing across the Committees, it still does not have formal terms of reference; the C4 has requested that these be written. He brought up the issue of how the Committees can contribute to the coordination of the overarching Tasks, for example by identifying “mentors”. The C4 was concerned about the links between Tasks, Committees, Communities of Practice and the Secretariat.

The Secretariat Director said that the C4 does not have terms of reference because it was conceived as an informal coordination mechanism for sharing information across the Committees. He questioned the apparent view of some C4 members that the C4 should become more involved in administrative and management issues. France agreed, and stressed the need for the C4 to remain light and informal and avoid duplicating the mandates of other GEO bodies.

The Chair suggested that establishing terms of reference could actually help to clarify the C4’s proper role. He recommended asking the GEO Co-Chairs to prepare terms of reference which would maintain a light structure, not create a new committee, and help in the co-ordination of the committees, creating a forum for discussion.. The US Co-Chair volunteered to take on this task and to submit a document to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

**Action 15.12 – US Co-Chair to draft terms of reference for the C4 and submit them to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**

### **6.5 Reconciliation Process (Document 16)**

Ms Massacand reported on the recent March/April meeting on the reconciliation process. This process was launched at the GEO-V Plenary, which recognized the need to ensure that the work plan update, the targets update and the monitoring & evaluation process took full account of one another. The reconciliation meeting had identified a number of inconsistencies and addressed them. She stated that the reconciliation process is making good progress and is on track.

The Chair welcomed the work that had been done and asked whether the Work Plan would now be distributed to the GEO community for consultations on the Work Plan update. Ms Massacand confirmed that it would be and presented the schedule for the Work Plan update, including technical and official reviews. The schedule was accepted by the Committee.

The Russian Federation asked how new changes could be included in the Work Plan and urged that this be well explained. The Secretariat Director confirmed that a letter has been circulated explaining that a new cycle for updating the plan is being initiated and inviting comments from the GEO community. In addition, the work plan management document would be improved to help people better understand this process.

### **6.6 Management of Overarching Tasks (Document 17)**

Ms Massacand presented the document. The management of overarching Tasks needs to be soft and respect the fact that the providers of various systems and services in the sub-Tasks retain control over the management of their own components. The Capacity Building Committee and the Architecture and Data Committee are making efforts to foster interaction within the overarching Tasks. The Communities of Practice have also been instrumental, while the Secretariat experts support coordination as part of their daily work. As host of the GEO-VI Plenary, the US is organizing a Symposium in Washington DC that will help to strengthen the Communities of Practice and their role in Task coordination. It would be possible to organize such a symposium every year to report on the Communities' progress and to promote interaction.

Australia said that such symposia would be a good initiative and should be co-located with Plenary meetings. The Chair agreed, as this would reduce costs.

## **7 ROLE OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND OBSERVERS (DOCUMENT 18)**

Mr Muofhe presented the document on behalf of the South African Co-Chair. The guidelines for recognizing Participating Organizations were established in 2006. An underutilized option is that of observer status. Organizations that are part of larger bodies should contribute through their “mother organizations” or their national GEO. It may be appropriate that only Members and Participating Organizations that are intergovernmental can be invited to serve as co-chairs of committees.

On behalf of the EC, the Chair said that this was a very good paper, although some elements are perhaps still missing: there is no distinction between Participating Organizations and Observers and what are the expectations for Observers. With regard to section F, bullet point 3, (limiting the co-chairs of committees to GEO Members and intergovernmental Participating Organizations), he stated that it was the view of the EC that this bullet point should be removed from this document. The role of POs in committees should be addressed in the terms of reference of the committees. The Chair also noted that the text on the process should be very light, as Annex C of the GEO Rules of Procedure already sets out how the process works and this process should not be revisited. It would also be useful to further clarify what GEO Members expect from Participating Organizations.

Australia suggested that what differences, if any, there should be between intergovernmental and nongovernmental Participating Organizations should be further discussed. She stressed the importance to GEO of strengthening relations with UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

The Committee requested the South African Co-Chair to fine-tune the paper based on the discussion and present it to the next meeting for adoption by the Committee before submitting it to the Plenary.

**Action 15.13 – The South African Co-Chair to fine-tune the paper and present it to the next meeting for adoption by the Committee.**

## **8 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP (DOCUMENT 19)**

The Chair introduced the document on behalf of the EC, reminding the meeting that the GEO-V Plenary had asked the Executive Committee to draft a paper on the possible expansion of the Executive Committee's membership. The Committee had agreed that the EC would write the first draft of this options paper. The Chair said that the document was drafted as a neutral text setting out four possible options. The four options were maintain the status quo, expand representation from Asia by one Committee member, split Asia and Oceania into two regions with a net increase of Committee members, and add one additional member from each region.

An extensive discussion followed, focusing in particular on whether or not the Committee should present a preferred option to the Plenary rather than a list of possible options. The concern was expressed that, since the Plenary works by consensus, it may be difficult for an unguided Plenary debate to reach a conclusion. Another proposal was to delay the issue until 2010 or 2011. The potential financial implications of expanding the Committee were also cited.

The Committee decided that the best approach would be to start by reducing the number of options to the two: i) expand representation from Asia by one Committee member and ii) add one additional member from each region. The revised document would also include an introductory text about the Committee's actions, including reference to the status quo, and an explanation of how these two options would impact GEO governance. This revised draft will be considered by the next meeting of the Executive Committee, which will look to see if it is possible to identify one preferred option and decide how to present the issue to the Plenary.

**Action 15.14 – EC Co-Chair to prepare a new draft document on Executive Committee membership for the next Executive Committee meeting.**

## **9 PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-VI (DOCUMENT 20)**

The US Co-Chair presented the US plans for hosting the GEO-VI Plenary. Responding to a query from China, she confirmed that a GEO Exhibition will be organized next door to the Plenary meeting room. The Committee thanked the US for its generous offer to host the Plenary.

The Russian Federation queried whether interpretation would be provided and was informed that, as this is not GEO practice for Plenary meetings, interpretation would not be offered.

## **10 PREPARATION OF 2010 MINISTERIAL SUMMIT (DOCUMENT 21)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. The document had been requested by the GEO-V Plenary and was based on consultations with the Committees. The C4 document focuses on the process and criteria for selecting mid-term achievements. The view of the Secretariat is that the process should not begin too early, as the most suitable achievements will be contingent on real progress and on world events. The Members must play the critical role of providing political guidance

to the selection process. He suggested that the Executive Committee or a group that it appoints take the lead on this issue.

The Chair said that in his view it is never too early to start working towards the Ministerial.

The South Africa Co-Chair said that the process on how to identify the kinds of achievements that were appropriate, and what kind of preparatory team was needed, should start soon. Australia suggested that the achievements could be focused on strategic targets.

The Chair proposed setting up a dedicated Task Force and asking the Secretariat to invite governments to provide representatives for this effort; in addition, it was important to finalize what country would host the Ministerial Summit so that the host country's Minister could write directly to other Ministers encouraging them to participate.

China and Korea stated that discussions about their respective offers to host the 2010 Ministerial were continuing and a conclusion would be announced by the time of GEO-VI. The Secretariat Director informed the meeting that Turkey has written a letter offering to host the Plenary and Summit in 2010 or 2011. The Chair stated that the Committee should take note of this offer, which demonstrates Turkey's commitment to GEO. He also noted that the outcome of the GEO-V Plenary was to welcome the offers from Korea and China. The Chair asked the Secretariat to inform Turkey that a decision on hosting the 2010 Ministerial would be taken at the GEO-VI Plenary meeting.

**Action 15.15 – Secretariat to write letter to Turkey concerning its offer to host a GEO Plenary.**

**Action 15.16 – Secretariat to write to GEO Principals asking them for nominations to a 2010 GEO Ministerial Task Force.**

## **11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Secretariat Director announced the receipt of a letter that morning from Guinea expressing its desire to become a GEO Member. The total number of Members is now 79.

Mr. Withee, as Chair of the organizing committee, reported that the GEO IGOS Symposium, now scheduled to be held the day after the GEO-VI Plenary meeting, was on track. The agenda had been finalized, most of the speakers had agreed to come, and the venue for 19 November, the Baird Auditorium in the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, was firm.

The Committee decided to hold its next meeting on 21-22 September in Geneva.

In her closing remarks, the US Co-Chair thanked the Executive Committee members for their constructive engagement. The South Africa Co-Chair expressed his pleasure at GEO becoming a highly functional body. The China Co-Chair thanked the Chair and the Secretariat and looked forward to 2010. The Chair announced that, due to EC staffing rules, he expected to be transferred to another position in the near future and that this would therefore be his last GEO meeting. He applauded the Secretariat and urged everyone to continue working together for the common goal of GEOSS implementation.