

Summary Report
22nd Executive Committee Meeting
Geneva, 12-13 July 2011
(As accepted at the 23rd Executive Committee meeting)

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The meeting was chaired by Mr Philemon Mjwara, the GEO Co-Chair from South Africa. He welcomed the new representative of the GEO Co-Chair from the United States, who reported that the US will provide an update on its GEO representation at the next Plenary meeting. The Chair then presented the draft agenda for adoption. The United States requested that a brief discussion of the Eye on Earth summit be held under the item on Any Other Business. With this the agenda was adopted.

1.2 Summary Report of the 21st Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2 - for acceptance)

The report was accepted without comment as a true reflection of the Committee's deliberations at the previous meeting.

1.3 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3 - for information)

The Secretariat Director presented the document.

The representative from Brazil reported that he was in contact with the organizing committee of the Rio+20 conference. While organizing a GEO side event was relatively straightforward, a more important achievement would be to have GEO cited in a Plenary document. This would require a number of GEO Members to encourage their Rio+20 delegations to pursue this goal.

Germany asked about GEO's potential role at the December climate change conference in Durban. The Secretariat Director explained that he was working with South Africa's GEO team to assure some visibility but, as with Rio+20, it was difficult to attract attention at such large events.

Action 22.1 – Executive Committee with support from Brazil and Secretariat to explore how GEO can engage with, and be visible at, Rio+20.

2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS AND TRUST FUND

2.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 4 - for information)

The Secretariat Director presented the document. He highlighted the Secretariat's work on the new Work Plan, the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI), and the G20's GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring initiative (GEO GLAM).

The European Commission asked for more information about GEO's role in the Planet Under Pressure conference, which the Secretariat then provided. Germany asked about the G20 initiative and the roles of FAO and WMO; the Secretariat Director described the initiative further and the contributions of the various agencies. Italy asked about the recent tsunami meeting in Geneva and the meeting with UNESCO that occurred in Paris on Friday, 27 May. The Secretariat Director said that the meeting was

with Mr Erdelen and represented an additional effort to encourage UNESCO to become more involved in GEO's capacity-building activities.

Brazil noted with satisfaction the progress being made on networking via the GFOI and GEO GLAM activities. He observed that when governments meet to address technical Earth observation issues they are increasingly recognizing GEO's coordinating role and appreciating the GEO model.

China asked about the next steps for responding effectively to the Declaration of the G20 agricultural ministers. Japan applauded the report and the engagement with the G20 and informed the Committee of a GEO-sponsored Second Asia/Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference being organized by the Japan Meteorological Agency from 6-9 December. Italy recalled that GEO has been highlighted in the declarations of the G8 and needs to demonstrate the value it can provide to the G20.

The Secretariat Director confirmed that GEO is being recognized by the G20 as a coordination effort and that the interested partners are now seeking the seed money needed to prepare the requested multi-million-dollar project.

2.2 Report of the External Auditor for 2010 (Document 5 - for information)

The external auditor, Mr Simon Irwin, presented the document. He reported that there are no material errors or problems in the GEO accounts. This was a particularly important result as this was the first audit under the recently adopted IPSAS (International Public Sector Accounting System). GEO is an early adopter of IPSAS, which is a more transparent and reliable approach to financial accounting.

In response to a question from Australia, the auditor confirmed that income is only recorded after a firm written pledge has been received by the Secretariat. In response to Italy's question of whether the evaluation had been performed to verify only that the formal operations were correctly done, he confirmed that the audit was based around "materiality" and did not consider specific transactions. The Chair asked how GEO should ensure that its long-term liabilities were covered; the auditor stressed that there was no one correct or easy answer to this and that GEO should explore its policy options. Australia agreed that GEO needs to consider a plan for ensuring a partial offset against such liabilities. In response to Brazil's query, the auditor explained that making provisions against liabilities can indeed reduce the available budget. The Director emphasized that the current financial management practices in place ensure the existence of a working capital larger than CHF 2 million which, de facto, covers long-term liabilities. The Chair concluded that the Committee should ask the Secretariat to research this issue and that it should remain as an agenda item.

In response to a query from Australia, the auditor confirmed that the financial forecasts needed for decision making are indeed a part of IPSAS and that as implementation of the new system matures these should come on line.

Summing up the discussion, the Chair reiterated the need to start working on a policy for dealing with liabilities. As WMO advances its IPSAS implementation GEO should seek to benefit from these efforts. The Committee agreed with these recommendations.

Action 22.2 – Secretariat to explore the issue of how to handle liabilities and to report its findings next March to the 24th meeting of the Executive Committee, with a view towards eventually establishing a formal policy.

2.3 Report on Income and Expenditure, January to June 2011 (Document 6 - for information)

The Secretariat Director presented the document. He highlighted the fact that the Executive Committee had earlier recognized CHF 3.5 million as being the minimum budget level at which the Secretariat can operate, and that the current level of expected resources was only slightly above CHF 3 million. This poses a danger for Secretariat operations in 2011.

Italy, supported by Germany, asked to see more detail about sub-items in order to better understand the evolution from the old accounts to IPSAS. Australia said the document should have more information on performance against budget, including what cuts had been made, in order to better understand how the contribution level is affecting programme delivery. The Secretariat Director said that the Secretariat would reintroduce the table it had used before IPSAS containing end-of-year forecasts. The European Commission said it would like to see the funds that it contributed outside the Trust Fund for developing country travel and other purposes included in the report. The Chair summed up the debate by saying that the new statements were useful for recording what has happened in the past but that the forward-looking component should be reintroduced.

Italy asked the United States what kind of contribution it expected to make for 2011. The US responded that it expected to make contributions at historical levels but it was not able to make a formal commitment.

The Secretariat Director said that responding to the various requests would take some time as the Secretariat had to depend on inputs from the WMO, and its finance department was currently overloaded due to IPSAS implementation. He also noted that IPSAS will not recognize the EC in-kind contributions that do not enter the Trust Fund; nevertheless, a dedicated table could be produced by the Secretariat. The Secretariat will seek to produce the requested tables and information in September.

Australia enquired whether IPSAS required that cash flow be reported on a milestone basis. The Secretariat confirmed that it is reported on an accrual basis, which is less useful for planning and forecasting.

Japan reported that despite the disasters that struck the country this year it will maintain its contributions to the Trust Fund for the next three years.

3 2009-2011 WORK PLAN PROGRESS REPORT (DOCUMENT 7 – FOR INFORMATION)

Ms Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat presented the report. She highlighted key outputs and activities in various areas of the Work Plan involving new products and information and major data-sharing and capacity-development efforts.

Brazil congratulated the Secretariat on assembling the report and acknowledged the efforts of the entire GEO community. The report showed results from all areas and effective cross-fertilization.

China applauded the good results and wondered whether this wide array of outputs that together constitute GEOSS could somehow be presented and communicated in a simplified format such as a map or diagram.

Australia welcomed the report. She noted that it was more positive and optimistic about the progress made than was the Evaluation Report, probably because the information for the Work Plan Progress Report is obtained from the people responsible for each task while the Evaluation Report is based on a survey of the community at large. A different template could be considered to ensure a more realistic picture.

The Chair observed that the two questions raised were related and could be reflected in the new 2012-2015 Work Plan.

Brazil suggested that the apparent contradictions between the two reports mostly reflected the problems with the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) cited in the Evaluation Report, which is just one Task. Germany said that the report shows great progress but is too positive and does not highlight the challenges or contain enough milestones; a short management summary would be useful. Russia said the report contains a great deal of useful information: he suggested trying to include more quantitative information about how many users GEOSS has in the next report. Italy said that with

2015 approaching it would be useful to have easy-to-understand information on how far the Work Plan is from reaching the 2015 Targets. Japan said it would be useful to analyze how and why some Tasks have such good results.

Ms Massacand responded that many of these comments would be addressed by the new Work Plan. The new Work Plan Management System will start making it possible to use keywords to get a better understanding of how effective the Work Plan is in promoting cross-fertilization between Tasks. A report about progress made over a particular time period and a report about progress against targets are two different things; a decision should be made on what kind of reports should be emphasized for next year. Milestones and other details are included in the Task sheets while the Progress Report is kept at a high level for Plenary. Information on users could be required as part of the Task sheets in the new Work Plan.

The Chair observed that the next day's discussion of the 2012-2015 Work Plan would be a useful follow-on to this discussion.

4 REPORT OF THE DATA SHARING TASK FORCE (DOCUMENT 8 - FOR INFORMATION)

The report was presented by Ms Helen Wood as Co-Chair of the Data Sharing Task Force (DSTF). She noted that the Task Force is responding to the new terms of reference approved at the Executive Committee's last meeting and that it is coordinating with the Architecture and Data Committee (ADC) and the Sprint to Plenary activity to maximize the number of data sets in the GEOSS Data-CORE (Collection of Open Resources for Everyone).

The Chair recalled that the Committee had been concerned that GEO should avoid imposing obstacles that unnecessarily hinder the ability of data providers to contribute to the Data-CORE.

Brazil commended the work of the Task Force and said that it had fully addressed his earlier concerns. It had defined what a license for GEOSS Data-CORE resources should look like and developed a list of acceptable alternative licences, signalling to the GEO community that there are many ways to be fully consistent with the Data Sharing Principles. The work of the Task Force is going beyond the data actually available via the GCI; the Committee should explore how to make good use of this work and the effort to make all available data more visible and accessible to the GEO community.

The European Commission also endorsed the DSTF report and stated that it would continue to contribute to the effort to populate the Data-CORE with the data resources from its FP7 projects.

The Chair questioned the DSTF recommendation concerning the 2012-2015 Work Plan Task; he felt the work on data sharing should perhaps not be embedded as in a Work Plan Task but rather be addressed more broadly as data sharing is fundamental to GEOSS. Ms Wood confirmed that the intention of the Task Force is to provide comments, and not a recommendation, on the creation of a Task in the 2012-2015 Work Plan; she suggested that data sharing be dealt with at a very high level and that the Committee explore how to address data sharing through the 2012-2015 Work Plan. Italy agreed that this issue should be picked up in the discussion of the new Work Plan.

5 GLOBAL FOREST OBSERVATION INITIATIVE (GFOI) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (DOCUMENT 9 - FOR INFORMATION)

Mr Gary Richards, Chair of the GFOI Task Force, presented the document. He described the diversity of views within the Task Force and the complexity of the political environment. The Committee's views on the zero-order draft Implementation Plan were needed so that the Task Force could move forward. The current planning GFOI phase is to be succeeded by the start of operations in 2013 to be continued from 2014 onwards. An institutional home for a mature GFOI is yet to be decided.

Brazil congratulated the GFOI team and supported the proposed plan. He noted that many of the challenges and issues will only become clear as the work unfolds. Brazil is supporting the effort by approaching its contacts at the IPCC and FAO and putting the GFOI on the agenda of Brazilian institutions. It is essential that organizations such as IPCC and FAO feel some ownership of this initiative.

The United States congratulated the Task Force and cited two concerns. He noted that the proposed budget and staffing were quite large and there was a risk that the project could compete for resources with the GEO Secretariat. He asked how the proposed staff size was determined and what the rationale was for proposing a separate trust fund.

Mr Richards confirmed that the FAO and the IPCC are key partners. The proposed staff size of seven is a best guess about the needs of the early intensive phase of activity. A separate trust fund might be necessary to accommodate the wishes of potential funders such as foreign aid providers for accountability.

Italy asked whether there were already indications of potential financial contributions and what was the minimum level required. Mr Richards said that developing countries have received millions for forest-carbon-related activities and that in the long-term funding should not be a problem; the main challenge may be the three-to-five year window from now until 2015.

The United States asked what the expectations were of the governments represented on the Committee. Mr Richards said that no assessment has yet been made but that a number of countries leading the GFOI effort have already expressed interest in contributing.

China asked for more information about the products that would be generated and how an effective relationship between scientists and the Earth observation community would be assured. Brazil explained that the focus is not on generating products but on providing data to governments so that they can generate their own national inventories.

The European Commission recalled that GEO is also developing a Global Carbon Analysis and Information System and said there should be a link with the GFOI.

The Secretariat Director said that GFOI will provide data, methodologies and tools to empower governments to generate reports on their forests. He commented that if Plenary approves this project it could mark an early transition to the post-2015 era and position GEO for a broader role of developing end-to-end tools. The question of whether it was appropriate for the project to have as many staff as the GEO Secretariat was a valid one, and answers to this and other questions should be anticipated.

Italy highlighted the technical challenges of monitoring forest carbon and underlined that the current Executive Summary did not clearly specify the role and added value of GEO's work, the gaps and milestone of the GFOI, and cooperative links with other international institutions. This needs to be clarified up front, considering the delicate policy issues behind the application of consistent and comparable methods for tracking forest carbon and of protocols for data collection, processing and integration. Activities to improve these methods and national forest-information systems are not the domain of GEO but of other UN and intergovernmental bodies and initiatives, which involve national institutions responsible for delivering data and information required to fulfil international obligations. GEO's work should explicitly refer to its core mission of facilitating access to space data from different systems and to integrating them with in situ data. Therefore, the Executive Summary should be revised accordingly, making better use of the information contained in the full text, thus making GFOI more easily understandable to GEO's Member countries and Participating Organizations, and facilitating their decision to participate in the initiative.

Mr Richards said the Task Force understood the sensitivities and has been working successfully with relevant organizations to ensure that GEO's contribution complements theirs; this outreach effort will continue. Italy and Brazil noted that the executive summary of the document should be improved to

better communicate the purpose of the project and the role of GEO, particularly in coordinating wall-to-wall satellite data on biomass and forest cover.

The Secretariat Director said the role of GEO is to facilitate access to the data provided by space agencies and others and to provide the tools for governments to search and retrieve data at various resolutions. Although GEO does not itself produce methodologies, governments need to understand how the choice of methodology affects the costs and accessibility of data. Working with the IPCC, GEO can also assist with intercomparing methodologies.

China commented on its national efforts to monitor forests and carbon and the various challenges that it faces in linking space and in-situ networks, integrating data with various resolutions and interacting with forest experts.

The United States questioned whether new donor funding would indeed be required and asked how the expert peer review process would work. Mr Richards answered that the GFOI would pursue an IPCC-style approach incorporating both expert and government reviews was widely accepted. The planned “commitments” event for 2012 can best be viewed as a coordination meeting rather than as a donors meeting; it will explore what space agencies are able to contribute on a sustainable basis and what governments expect from an operational forest monitoring system. He agreed with the US characterization of the process as having two steps, first matching supply and demand, and then funding the necessary work. Advance negotiations and the full use of available diplomatic channels and relations will be essential.

The Chair concluded that the initiative was broadly welcomed but that the Task Force should better articulate the role of GEO and address concerns around an operational system, the size of the staff and budget, and the role of donors when it drafts the next version of the document.

Action 22.3 – GFOI Task Force to produce a revised document for the GEO-VIII Plenary meeting.

6 REPORT OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION WORKING GROUP

6.1 Report of the Second GEOSS Evaluation and Preparations for the Third (Document 10 – for acceptance)

This item was discussed together with item 6.2

6.2 GEOSS Implementation Performance Indicators (Document 11 – for acceptance)

Mr David Langlois, Co-Chair of the Evaluation Team, presented the document via a Webex telephone and computer link-up. He described the methodology used to evaluate the GEOSS architecture and data issues and summarized the findings. He noted that users tended to evaluate the progress made more critically than did experts involved in the GCI. The Evaluation Team found serious problems with the GCI, including that users could not retrieve data from the GCI in the experiment that was performed. He also recommended that GEO consider creating a permanent monitoring and evaluation team.

Brazil said the Evaluation Report supported the comments that he and others had made earlier about the problems with the GEOSS Common Infrastructure. He considered it unlikely that the strategic targets in this area would be achieved by 2015. He agreed that the technology used for GEOSS was a full generation behind the times and that the OGC standards cannot be scaled up to the level of a GEOSS. He believed the design of the GCI was fundamentally flawed and could not be fixed.

Mr Langlois said that the Evaluation Team did not draw such a strong conclusion. He recommended taking a detailed look at the GCI before deciding whether it can simply be tweaked or whether it

should be redesigned from scratch. Japan noted that recommendation 8 contained a number of specific proposals. The Chair thanked Mr Langlois, who then dialled off.

Mr Charles Baker, Co-Chair of the Monitoring and Evaluation Work Group, reminded the meeting that a GEO Co-Chair had coordinated the preparation of an Executive Committee management response to the previous year's evaluation report and suggested that the Committee may wish to repeat this approach for GEO-VIII.

Germany said that the ADC should have a chance to work with and respond to the Evaluation Team recommendations. Brazil recalled that he had hosted a meeting for this purpose but that the ADC lacked the resources for ensuring an effective response; it had settled instead on the "Sprint to Plenary" as a quick fix. The Chair remarked that since a formal report is now available the ADC may be able to respond more fully.

Recognizing that technology evolves, the European Commission is funding research projects to ensure that GEO's work on the GCI remains at the cutting edge. However, rather than criticizing the agencies building the GCI, it is more appropriate for GEO to recognize their efforts. In the short term, the ADC's Sprint to Plenary will address some of the identified issues. Following the GEO-VIII Plenary, GEO should then look at how best to evolve the GCI making full use of the 2012-2015 Work Plan and in particular the proposed Infrastructure tasks.

Italy noted the divergence of views on the way forward for the GCI and said that it was important for the Committee to reach a determination of the nature of the problem and the likely solutions. The Chair agreed and proposed that a group of experts be asked to assess the report and related initiatives such as the EC-funded research project and Japan's gaps software.

Brazil noted that the R&D project will require several years of work before generating results, so that the related GEO target may not be fully achieved by 2015.

The United States reported that it has discussed these issues with its own technology experts. GEOSS was conceived in 2003 and is based on 2004 architecture, and it continues to develop in that old framework. While the public sector may work at a deliberate pace that is sometimes slower than what the private sector can do, the ADC should be invited to respond concerning how and when GEOSS can transition to a more up-to-date architecture.

Japan proposed that the next step was to design a process for addressing the evolution of the GCI architecture by 2015. Italy said that it was important for this issue to be prepared well in time for decisions by the Plenary.

The European Commission proposed that the ADC be invited to comment on the report at its September meeting, which would assist the Executive Committee with drafting its management response in time for the deadline for Plenary documents.

Brazil suggested that since the Committee agreed that the transition to new technologies will take time, this point should be included as a positive and candid statement in the management response to the Evaluation Report.

The Chair agreed that the Co-Chairs will proceed along these lines to draft the management response.

Mr Baker described the proposed plans for future evaluations and an initial set of GEOSS implementation performance indicators. He underlined the decreasing trend of attendance by members of the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group in the meetings and activities. He stated that the Working Group requested the Committee to forward the second evaluation report to the Plenary together with its response to the findings and recommendations, approve the plans for the third evaluation, approve the initial set of performance indicators, and help to identify members for both the Evaluation Team and the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group. The Committee agreed to all recommendations.

Turning to the performance indicators document, Australia welcomed the indicators and asked for a clarification. The EC expressed concern about whether GEO had sufficient resources for this level of monitoring and evaluation given the heavy demands for resourcing GEOSS. Germany supported the report but noted that the lack of resources could make it necessary to scale back the third evaluation. He suggested adding a new indicator on contacts with UN organizations.

Russia said that the formal summary of the Evaluation Report only discussed activities and not conclusions and practical results; this information should be added. The Secretariat confirmed that the approach taken in 2010 was to provide the Plenary with a couple of pages on process, the Executive Committee's management response and the underlying Evaluation Report.

China noted the importance of practical indicators for architecture, which could include an indication on the data that is actually shared. Indicators about users would also be appropriate. Brazil said it might be premature to design performance indicators for GEOSS, as decisions about sharing data are made at the national level.

The United States said it could support all of the Working Group's recommended actions, with perhaps some adjustments to the performance indicators. The US has provided leadership for the Working Group for the past few years and plans to step down as co-chair at GEO-VIII.

Mr Baker suggested that Russia's concern about the summary could be addressed at the Plenary. He recognized China's concerns about measuring the success of GEOSS but said the Working Group had been unable to find readily available sources of data for other indicators. Responding to Brazil's comments, he said that the willingness of countries to contribute data could be seen as an indicator of the success of GEOSS. He proposed that the indicators only be used internally within the Executive Committee for the coming year so that the work could continue.

The Chair agreed with the EC's earlier remark that GEO needed to limit the investments it makes in monitoring and evaluation. Mr Baker proposed that the Committee ask the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group to evaluate the proposal for a semi-permanent evaluation team and report back; the Chair agreed.

Action 22-4 – GEO Co-Chairs to prepare a management response to the second evaluation after receiving a response from the ADC's September meeting.

Action 22-5 – Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group to evaluate the proposal for a semi-permanent evaluation team and report back to the Executive Committee at its 24th meeting.

7 PROCESS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF THE GEO SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR

The issue was discussed by the Committee *in camera*.

8 2012-2015 WORK PLAN (DOCUMENT 12 – FOR INFORMATION)

This item was discussed together with item 9.

9 INTERIM REPORT OF THE GAP ANALYSIS STRATEGY TEAM (DOCUMENT 13 - FOR INFORMATION)

The Secretariat Director introduced the document, noting that there was a clear request from the community to improve the Work Plan management and reporting process. Ms Massacand then made a detailed presentation on Version 1 of the new Work Plan. She described the history of the process, the focus on achieving the 2015 strategic targets, the incorporation of technical comments from the entire GEO community, the inputs from the Work Plan Symposium, and the Plan's three-part structure and improved management system.

The Chair noted that a number of suggestions have been made concerning gap analysis, leading to the question of whether this work should be integrated into the Work Plan or managed separately by a task force. He therefore proposed introducing document 13 under agenda item 9 into the current Work Plan discussion.

Mr Douglas Cripe of the Secretariat presented the Interim Report of the Gap Analysis Strategy Team. He summarized the progress made over the past several months, noting that the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group and the Science and Technology Committee had worked together to refine the strategy and address concerns about resources. The Team seeks clarification on whether gap analysis will be positioned in the Work Plan as an independent task or perhaps implemented by a working group to be appointed by Plenary, similar to the current Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group.

Italy said that the proposed Work Plan management structure was much more complex than the simplified structure the Committee had hoped to see. The Secretariat Director explained that this complexity resulted from the demands of the community.

The European Commission said the current version (Version 1) was much more in line with its views than was the previous Version 0. The EC favoured a light and simple management structure and agreed that each section of the Work Plan could be managed using a different approach. It accepted the Architecture and Data Committee's views on how the infrastructure section should be managed. The body that manages the institutions section should be built on the evolution of the current committees. The proposed single board for the SBAs section may be too big and unwieldy; individual boards for each SBA might be more appropriate, combined with a mechanism for ensuring cross fertilization. The reporting mechanism should involve the Secretariat but also engage the people implementing each task. Milestones and deliverables for guiding GEOSS towards an operational system are needed. Comprehensive gap analysis as proposed, though recognized as important, will simply not be effectively carried out in the short time remaining prior to 2015. It will be more important for the post-2015 period and should therefore be removed from the Work Plan and incorporated into the post-2015 process.

Germany also found the management structure to be rather complicated. He thought the task descriptions should be more specific, and he asked to be able to see comments from reviewers in an annex. Japan supported the idea of a single Board for the SBAs section that would monitor and encourage cross-cutting activities; he observed that the Rules of Procedure would have to be revised to reflect the eventual management changes.

Brazil was supportive and asked why the board for the infrastructure section did not include task leads. He noted that some tasks led by six or seven GEO Members or Participating Organizations clearly show the GEO added value while others led by just one organization may not give adequate visibility to Members directly contributing to the Task.

The United States considered snow and ice cover to be a high priority and asked whether Arctic monitoring should not have a separate entry. The US also supported simplifying the management structure. Its principle concern was that there may be too many management layers for the second section. For the SBAs section a board or forum could be created, perhaps as an extension of the Work Plan Symposium to allow task leads to interact twice a year. Though supportive of the comprehensive approach to gap analysis, the US viewed it as too resource-intensive unless a country decides to step forward to provide resources and lead the exercise.

Australia also agreed that the management structure was complex but observed that this in part reflected the underlying complexity of GEOSS implementation. She said that the current committees offer good value and that they should transition into the new management structure. She agreed that gap analysis is critical but should look ahead to 2015. Task ID-05 on "Catalyzing Resources for GEOSS Implementation" should be integrated back into Tasks ID-02 and ID-03. Responding to

Brazil's comment about single-organization tasks, she noted that THORPEX is very pleased to be recognized as a GEO task.

China said that the document seemed reasonable. He observed that the results of the Evaluation Report suggested that it would be difficult to achieve some of the strategic targets and that adjustments may have to be made to the Work Plan.

Italy said the management structure proposed for implementing GEO is fine but that the Committee's earlier discussion on the GCI should be reflected in the relevant Work Plan Tasks. The proposed Institutions and Development implementation groups are too numerous. One Institutions and Development Board would be sufficient and could develop its own appropriate working modalities for addressing the various issues. It is important, however, that reporting to the Executive Committee and to the Plenary be carried out only by one Implementation Board to avoid the proliferation of reporting mechanisms. Regarding the report on the comprehensive approach to gap analysis, Italy emphasized the need for the identification of gaps and GEO-specific contributions and milestones to take place first within each Task, thus facilitating GEO's evaluations. The SBAs Implementation Board seems to be the most suitable structure for ensuring that specific as well as comprehensive gaps are identified and dealt with.

Germany said that while simplifying the structure was a good idea, other governments not represented on the Committee may have other ideas. He suggested speaking with various UN organizations about the Work Plan and what tasks they considered to be important.

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Brazil agreed with Italy that each of the three sections of the Plan should have just one board. Gap analysis should wait until the Work Plan is completed in 2015 and it becomes clearer what datasets have been successfully delivered. In addition it can be hoped that the financial crisis will end by 2015 and many more new Earth observation missions and investments will be initiated.

The United States said that tasks are where the real work takes place and they represent GEO's key innovation. The SBA board would be unwieldy with 40 people but perhaps having nine members, each representing an SBA, plus the Secretariat staff could work. It is important to avoid creating a C4-like structure that could appear to compete with the role of the Executive Committee. The new management entities could be called committees to avoid having to create new terminology.

Italy said that simplifying the management structure would also free up the Secretariat for more strategic support of the Executive Committee and the Plenary.

The Chair said that by 2015 it should be possible to say how much progress has been made towards GEOSS. In an initial phase, work on gap analysis could be integrated into each task and not maintained as a separate process.

The Secretariat Director said that his understanding of the debate so far was that there should be one board for each of the three sections of the Work Plan, task leads can become board members, changes will be needed to the Rules of Procedure, gap analysis should be postponed and/or integrated into each task, and there is to be no replacement for the C4.

Ms Massacand said that the current proposal would result in an SBA board of around 20, not 40, members. It should be noted that there is often just one task per SBA so that Task teams and Communities of Practice will implement most of the SBA tasks. Hence the board would be a complementary structure. The Work Plan tries to take into account the evaluation reports; it will remain a living document and continue to evolve over the multi-year period. The rationale for an activity becoming a stand-alone task or a component of a task is based on the targets, e.g. carbon is outlined in the targets document and thus becomes a task, and on whether there are real synergies with other activities. In response to Germany's earlier comment she confirmed that the review comments

submitted by the community were available in an on-line log, along with an indication of how comments were incorporated (see ftp://ftp.earthobservations.org/TEMP/2012-2015_WorkPlan_V1/).

The European Commission reminded the Executive Committee that the Work Plan had been submitted to the Committee as an information document only and that it has been circulated for comment to the entire community; the EC will be presenting its official views in writing.

Responding to the comments on gap analysis, Mr Cripe said he understood that, although it would be removed from the Work plan as a Task in its own right, gap analysis would nevertheless be pursued through a phased-in approach by individual Tasks, with a full-scale effort starting in 2015.

Australia noted that gap analysis was currently in Version 1 and that comments from governments would be submitted over the coming weeks. She recalled that the Gap Analysis Strategy Team is working on methodologies and cautioned against losing this work.

The Chair closed the debate.

Actions 22-6 – Secretariat to draft changes to the Rules of Procedure to reflect the management structure presented in Version 2 of the Work Plan and present these to the Plenary.

10 REPORT OF COMMITTEES (DOCUMENTS 14 - FOR INFORMATION)

Mr Cripe presented the report on behalf of the co-chairs of the four GEO committees. He highlighted the Science and Technology Committee's request to the Executive Committee that it take note of work on a data citation standard that the STC has been developing based on the model used for datasets generated under the International Polar Year research program. The STC plans to invite comments on the standard from the other committees at the September co-located meetings and would then like to present the concept to Plenary in Istanbul.

Brazil stated his view that this work was not limited to GEOSS and did not need to be carried out by GEO. Australia said that it could be a good thing and would add value if GEO became a catalyst for a standard that was broadly used, including outside of GEOSS. The United States appreciated the concept being presented and suggested that the work of ICSU and others on this topic be fully reviewed and incorporated; given the crowded agenda for GEO-VIII it would be best to delay action and take more time to consider the best approach. Germany confirmed that the proposal built directly on the work of ICSU and others and said that GEO could have a coordinating role; it could promote the concept and in this way add value to it. Japan said the data citation issue is particularly important for scientists who want recognition for the datasets contributed to GEOSS.

The Secretariat Director agreed that the issue may not be sufficiently mature for the next meeting of the Plenary. ICSU and other GEO Participating Organizations were working on it and GEO should follow the issue.

The Chair concluded that the issue of a citation standard was of interest but should be addressed at a later date.

11 UPDATE ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S POST-2015 WORKING GROUP (DOCUMENT 15 - FOR INFORMATION)

Mr Peter Colohan of the United States made an oral report on the first meeting of the Executive Committee's Post-2015 Working Group, which took place immediately before the Executive Committee meeting. He noted that the discussion was marked by a great deal of consensus and had focused on four issues: the future scope of GEOSS, GEOSS governance, institutional arrangements for GEO, and resources for GEO.

The discussion had reflected a common understanding of what needs to be achieved by 2015. Because the post-2015 GEOSS will continue to evolve, a structure is needed that will allow for flexibility. In 2005 the GEO community was not ready to position GEOSS as an integrated operational system, but for post-2015 it may be possible to move more in this direction. The post-2015 scope of GEOSS will need to be further considered, as will the boundary between data and information products. It is difficult to interest political leaders in the concept of GEOSS as an interoperable database: they are much more interested in the end results and findings that result from the data.

Regarding institutional arrangements, the group believed that the current hosting arrangement with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) was a good one. The standing arrangements and service-level agreement could be revisited to make any necessary improvements. The general consensus was that GEO should neither be delinked from a UN host nor transformed into a UN body. The current balance is useful and creating new administrative arrangements a challenge. Other hosts could be considered, however, if they come forward.

Decisions on governance and resources should follow the decision on the scope of GEOSS. The group considered that, while GEO probably cannot move to mandatory financial arrangements, it would benefit from strengthening the current voluntary arrangements in a way that stimulates more contributions of resources.

The discussion of the appropriate post-2015 governance model was marked by the widest range of views. The group recognized that GEO had been created in an innovative manner. It discussed the pluses and minuses of the present arrangements for the GEO Co-Chairs, the Executive Committee, the caucuses, and the Plenary.

The group proposes to meet again in Istanbul immediately before the GEO-VIII Plenary meeting. The Secretariat could be asked to prepare a discussion paper for approval by the Working Group and presentation to the Istanbul meeting of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee could then propose to the Plenary that it establish an open-ended Post-2015 Working Group open to all GEO Members and Participating Organizations.

Brazil confirmed that the Working Group discussion was marked by broad agreement on institutional and resourcing issues. His own view was that the target for Secretariat resources should be a regular staff of 20-25 people, plus seconded experts, and a budget of CHF 7-9 million. There was no broad agreement on governance but many of the critical issues were identified. He considered that the current arrangements were unsatisfactory, in that real decision-making took place in the Executive Committee, which excluded non-members from meaningful engagement with the most critical issues. Other issues are the role of the GEO Co-Chairs and the fact that they do not rotate. He asked that the briefs from Brazil, Germany/Italy and Japan be included in an annex to the discussion paper.

Australia agreed that the governance issue will require the most work. She suggested that the discussion paper should reflect the combined views of the Executive Committee and should not include an annex with the earlier statements from Brazil, Germany/Italy and Japan. The European Commission said her understanding was that the discussion paper was for the Executive Committee and that the future task force or working group would be open to all GEO participants.

The Committee held a lengthy discussion on the best way to move forward and engage the entire GEO membership in preparing the post-2015 period. Some proposed that the issue remain with the Executive Committee into 2012 to avoid opening up an unwieldy conversation before the Committee has had time to prepare for a coherent process and a fruitful Plenary debate. Others recommended that the issue move to Plenary at GEO-VIII to ensure full transparency and an open process. A middle path would be to establish the open-ended Working Group in November without a discussion of substantive issues, and then forwarding an Executive Committee discussion paper to the Working Group in early/mid-2012.

Italy raised the issue of governance as it concerns intergovernmental organizations that are a part of GEO and the importance of ensuring that they feel included in the debate. Brazil raised the issue that

the Committee's membership will change after GEO-VIII, effectively excluding departing members from the discussion if the issue were not forwarded to the Plenary in Istanbul. Russia noted that sensitive issues would be involved that would require engaging ministries of foreign affairs; it was important to consider lessons learned and the fact that GEO's non-legal status made it difficult for countries like Russia to contribute funds. The Secretariat Director recalled the many difficulties of the multi-year debate that led to GEO's establishment in 2005.

Australia noted that it was unfortunate that the Committee got such a late start on the issue; she recommended preparing a paper built on the existing Secretariat paper that would frame the discussion, present a list of key questions and issues, and propose an open process that would start in 2012. Italy said that the European caucus had discussed the issue and preferred an open process. Brazil said that there was no choice but to open up the issue at Plenary. The US said that the Plenary should be asked to focus on process at this stage and not substance. The EC and Germany agreed.

The Chair questioned why it would not be possible for the Committee to meet the challenge of consolidating the existing papers and discussion and preparing a document for Plenary. Russia said that draft terms of reference for the new open-ended Working Group should be provided to the Plenary. The United States said that another option would be to allow the group to establish its own terms of reference. Australia suggested that the Executive Committee report to Plenary on its work, submit a document with terms of reference for the open-ended Working Group, and then commit to delivering a discussion paper on substantive issues to the Working Group in early 2012.

The Chair summed up the discussion and noted the importance of presenting the emotionally charged issue of GEO's future in the correct way. The governance and institutional arrangements for GEO will need to be based on what GEOSS will look like and how it will evolve post-2015, so that "form follows structure".

Action 22-7 – Secretariat to draft two documents: (i) a Plenary document establishing an open-ended Post-2015 Working Group and setting out its draft terms of reference, to be approved for submission to the Plenary by the Executive Committee in September via email, and (ii) a substantive Executive Committee discussion paper with annexes setting out key questions and issues concerning the post-2015 period for review at the Istanbul meetings of the Executive Committee and its Post-2015 Working Group.

12 UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-VIII

The Secretariat Director presented the information note that will now be circulated to the GEO community concerning registration, hotels and other logistical arrangements for the Istanbul conference. The European Commission reported that it has met with representatives of the Government of Turkey and will provide Turkey with as much support as possible. The Committee endorsed the arrangements and the progress being made.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The United States reported on the Eye on Earth conference, which will take place in Abu Dhabi from 12-15 December 2011, and on US efforts to ensure that the conference and GEO are mutually supportive. As part of this effort, the US proposed that the Executive Director of UNEP (which is co-convening the event together with Abu Dhabi) be invited to address the GEO-VIII Plenary.

The Secretariat Director observed that this was not the first time that another initiative arose that appeared to duplicate GEO. Italy agreed these initiatives may not always be successful. However, he agreed with the US proposal and observed that inviting high-level speakers from key international GEO Participating Organizations may help to revitalize the Plenary process. He suggested that UNEP's Executive Director could be asked to speak not only about the results of the Eye on Earth

conference but also on the Global Environment Outlook reports, which can benefit from GEOSS data and products, and perhaps about Rio+20.

The US noted the importance of UNEP's work and the need for coordination amongst intergovernmental mechanisms. Given that the Eye on Earth deals directly with GEO's mandate, it would be helpful to engage UNEP, which is already a GEO Participating Organization, to ensure that the conference contributes to GEOSS.

Chile announced that it will host the third GEOSS in the Americas Symposium in Santiago on 5-7 October with support from the Americas caucus and the GEO Secretariat. The Symposium will focus on geological hazards, hydrometeorological hazards, water resources, and agriculture.

The four GEO Co-Chairs made brief closing remarks and the Chair adjourned the meeting.

Action 22-8 – Secretariat to coordinate with the Government of Turkey to issue an invitation to the UNEP Executive Director.

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