

Draft Report
56th Executive Committee Meeting
Teleconference, 22 November 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chair: Joanna Drake, European Commission.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS AND PROGRESS REPORTING**1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director****1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 56.1 (Rev.1) – for decision)**

Outcome: The Executive Committee adopted Revision 1 of the agenda as distributed.

1.3 Lead Co-Chair Goals and Objectives (Document 56.4 – for information)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for its work, noting the steady progress in most areas, with particular recognition for the engagement during the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and
- Approved the proposal that GEO accept the invitations from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to join the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF) and the WMO / United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Centre of Excellence.

Action 56.1: Secretariat to bring forward detailed information regarding the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) proposal to support a decision by the Executive Committee. **Due: 57th Executive Committee meeting.**

2 SESSION 2: 2020-2022 GEO WORK PROGRAMME**2.1 Executive Committee Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation and Actions (Document GEO-17-1.7b – for information; Document ExCom-56.6 – for decision; and Document ExCom-56.7 – for discussion)**

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Agreed to revise document GEO-17-1.7b as follows:
 - Remove the text “to be included in the annual Lead Co-Chair priorities” from the Recommendations section of the cover note;
 - Add the qualification “if necessary” to the Management Response to Finding 3; and

- Remove the text “Given that much of the infrastructure that underpins GEO’s efforts is, and will likely continue to be, provided by the commercial sector” from the Management Response to Finding 4;
- Agreed to revise document ExCom-56.6 as follows:
 - Add “The EAG will provide complementary input to the ongoing re-evaluation process as discussed by the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team” to the Purpose section;
 - Specify in the introduction to the Deliverables section that the EAG recommendations are intended for review and action by the Executive Committee;
 - Change the term “Determination” in points 1 and 2 of the Deliverables section to “An assessment, with recommendations”;
 - Revise the first task in Table 1 such that the GEO Caucuses will recommend nominees to the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) through their Executive Committee representatives, with the Secretariat proposing additional nominees, the total being limited to 20, and with the final decision to be made by the GEO Co-Chairs; and
 - Change the timing of the first meeting of the EAG to mid-February 2022;
- Requested that the EAG process ensure opportunities for interaction between the EAG and the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT), noting the importance of the independence of the EAG;
- Approved the EAG process, pending confirmation of the terms of reference.

Action 56.2: Secretariat to circulate a revised version of the terms of reference. **Due: end of day 22 November 2021.**

Action 56.3: GEO Caucuses to nominate individuals for consideration for the EAG, respecting diversity of geography, gender, and expertise. **Due: 10 December 2021.**

3 SESSION 3: PLANNING FOR GEO 3.0

3.1 Road to the Post-2025 GEO (Document ExCom-56.8 – for decision)

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for the proposal;
- Agreed with the general concept of the two-step process;
- Indicated that the process must be led by the Executive Committee, and that there needs to be adequate opportunity for GEO Members and the broader GEO community to provide input;
- Suggested that the process include a role for a Working Group, similar to the 2014 Implementation Plan Working Group (IPWG);
- Requested that the GEO Plenary be informed of this activity by the Executive Committee during the presentation of the Executive Committee Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) during GEO-17; and
- Requested that references to “GEO 3.0” be revised to “post-2025 GEO”.

Action 56.4: Secretariat to work with Executive Committee members to prepare a document to provide more details on the process. **Due: 57th Executive Committee meeting.**

Action 56.5: Executive Committee members to provide their ideas on high-level needs that GEO should support post-2025. **Due: 15 December 2021.**

Action 56.6: Secretariat to implement an online collaboration tool to support action 56.5. **Due: 5 December 2021.**

4 SESSION 4: PREPARATION FOR GEO-17 PLENARY

4.1 2020 Financial Statements and Audit Report (Document GEO-17-5.1a – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked Brian Cover for his presentation; and
- Adopted the report.

4.2 2022 Trust Fund Budget and GEO Pledge Campaign (Document GEO-17-5.1b (Rev.2) – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Encouraged the Budget Working Group to continue their efforts on resource mobilization; and
- Approved the Trust Fund Budget for 2022.

4.3 Review of Nominations to the Programme Board (Document ExCom-56.10 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the recommended slate of nominees for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

4.4 GEO Statement on Open Knowledge (Document GEO-17-4.1 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Capacity Development Working Group, the Data Working Group, and the Secretariat for their work on developing the Statement; and
- Approved the document for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

4.5 GEO Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement (Document GEO-17-5.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Subgroup for its work on developing the Statement; and
- Approved the document for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

5.1 Any Other Business

Outcomes: The Executive Committee approved the following documents that were not discussed but to which no objections were raised, nor changes requested:

- ExCom-56.2: Draft Report of the 55th Executive Committee Meeting;
- ExCom-56.3: Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings;
- ExCom-56.11: Review of Requests to Join GEO as Participating Organizations;
- ExCom-56.12: Review of Applications for Associate Category.

Draft Report

56th Executive Committee Meeting

Teleconference, 22 November 2021

FULL REPORT

Monday, 22 November 2021

Meeting convened at 13:00

Chair: Joanna Drake, European Commission.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS AND PROGRESS REPORTING

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director

Joanna Drake (European Commission), Europe Caucus Co-Chair, opened the meeting and invited the other Co-Chairs to provide their opening remarks.

Li Pengde (China), representative of the Asia-Oceania Caucus Co-Chair, congratulated Executive Committee members and the Secretariat on the opening of GEO Week 2021. He thanked Patrick Child for his leadership during the year and welcomed Joanna Drake as she stepped into the role. Mr Li expressed his appreciation to the Secretariat Director and her team for the efficient and orderly preparations for the key GEO events, both the GEO Symposium and GEO Week. He noted the substantial progress that had been made in the Asia-Oceania Region over the past year, noting as examples, the set-up of a regional capacity development centre, research, and cooperation on support to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), the China disaster response mechanism, and the international research centre on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr Li stated that the Asia-Oceania Region expected to devote more attention to climate change and to urban resilience in future.

Mmboneni Muofhe (South Africa), Africa Caucus Co-Chair, welcomed Joanna Drake to GEO, observing that she was bringing considerable experience from her previous positions that will greatly benefit GEO. He also acknowledged the important roles of the GEO Co-Chairs and other Executive Committee members and thanked them for their commitment despite the meetings being held in often difficult time periods for some regions. Mr Muofhe pointed out the good progress made in the development of the response to the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) and thanked the MTE team for their contribution. He stated that he looked forward to the discussion of the post-2025 GEO, observing that there were many good ideas presented to take GEO forward and which would figure in the preparation of a new mandate from ministers. It is important that GEO take stock and address issues prior to seeking a new mandate. Mr Muofhe noted that resources continue to be a challenge for GEO and encouraged all Members to continue to seek additional resources to support GEO's efforts. He said that he was mindful that the GEO membership continues to grow but the quality of engagement is also being sharpened, which is what GEO is all about. In South Africa, Mr Muofhe pointed to the impact that GEO had had during the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, enabling interventions to be targeted where they were necessary. He concluded by also pointing to the work of the GEO Flagships, noting the advances made by the Global Observing System for Mercury (GOS₄M).

Steven Volz (United States), Americas Caucus Co-Chair, welcomed Joanna Drake, Executive Committee members and the Secretariat staff. He noted that 2021 was a pivotal year, given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report cycle and the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Mr Volz noted that while GEO did not obtain Observer status with the UNFCCC, GEO's input is more relevant than ever. He echoed the comments from South Africa regarding the importance of the MTE report and stated that GEO needs to make some course corrections to be able to make an impact on world issues like climate change.

Joanna Drake welcomed Executive Committee members, noting that this was her first Executive Committee meeting as GEO Co-Chair. She said that while she has only been in her new role as Deputy Director of the Directorate-General Research and Innovation (DG-RTD) since 1 October, she came from DG Environment where GEO is also quite important. She looked forward to speaking with Executive Committee colleagues and learning from their experience and said that she was pleased to take on the role of Lead Co-Chair, however briefly, in a collaborative spirit with the other Co-Chairs and members. Ms Drake also noted that she arrived early in the mandate of the Secretariat Director. Turning to the documents for the meeting, she noted the good progress that had been achieved on most of the Lead Co-Chair objectives and was pleased that the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) had recognized the contributions from GEO. She expressed the view that progress on climate change will depend to a great extent on how monitoring is managed and thus there is an opportunity for GEO to contribute. She concluded by observing that much of the meeting would focus on the future of GEO and said she looked forward to discussions on the Expert Advisory Group process and the plans from the Secretariat for the post-2025 GEO.

Yana Gevorgyan, Secretariat Director, thanked the Chair for coming to the Secretariat offices for the meeting. She said that the Secretariat is entrusted to keep GEO on track and that it is key that it partner closely with the Executive Committee members. She thanked Executive Committee members for their contributions and feedback and looked forward to strengthening the relationships individually and collectively with them. Regarding the GEO Week 2021, Ms Gevorgyan noted that this was the first time an entire GEO Week was designed to be delivered online and that all the initial objectives for the Week had been met. She thanked the Secretariat staff for their hard work and creativity. Ms Gevorgyan highlighted several new events and features of the GEO Week 2021, including the Youth Track that would aim to create a GEO Youth Community of Practice to allow for systematic and regular engagement of the Youth in GEO, and connected to call for youth engagement by the UNFCCC SBSTA plenary.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 56.1 (Rev.1) – for decision)

The Chair reviewed the meeting agenda and asked if there were any objections or additions from members. No issues were raised.

Outcome: The Executive Committee adopted Revision 1 of the agenda as distributed.

1.3 Lead Co-Chair Goals and Objectives (Document 56.4 – for information)

The Secretariat Director presented some highlights from the Secretariat Operations Report. These included:

- The Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRR-WG) is taking up the idea of an EO Toolkit, which was first introduced in GEO in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the EO4SDG Initiative;

- GEO was invited to join the [Risk-informed Early Action Partnership](#) (REAP), a new partnership currently funded by the United Kingdom and whose Secretariat is hosted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies;
- The opening of a path for GEO contribution to UNFCCC via its subsidiary bodies;
- Good participation at the Earth Information Day at COP26 and other related events;
- Progress being achieved on the Resilient Cities and Human Settlements priority, noting continued good engagement with UN-Habitat;
- The Secretariat is renewing GEO's engagement with the Ramsar convention in support of GEO Wetlands;
- Positive relationship with WMO, with frequent interaction on a number of files; GEO was invited by WMO to participate in the Systematic Observation Financing Facility (SOFF) and in the joint WMO-UNDRR Centre of Excellence for climate and disaster resilience;
- The Secretariat is looking to associate more closely with the WMO delegation for future climate COPs, and asked GEO Members to support these efforts through their delegations;
- Restated the request for GEO Members to broaden their delegations to include a wider range of institutions, especially on the user side;
- A new virtual secondment provided to the Secretariat from ITC on impact plan design, which will involve working directly with GEO Work Programme activities to help them understand and measure the impacts their work is having; and
- On commercial sector engagement, noted the success of the Industry Track as part of GEO Week, but noted that new mechanisms will be needed to engage small, medium, and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs), especially regarding issues arising in the Programme Board Private Sector Subgroup.

Turning to future directions, the Secretariat Director observed that COP26 marked a significant advance for GEO, noting that the Secretariat co-organized or participated in more than 15 events and engaged in bilateral meetings with numerous governments and other partners, promoting GEO activities across key areas of the Paris Agreement. GEO was mentioned in the Research and Systematic Observation conclusions for the first time since 2007, a first step towards a mandate for GEO. GEO was also involved in the National Adaptation Plans technical working group supporting matters related to Least Developed Countries under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation. As COP27 will be hosted by Egypt, the Secretariat Director recommended that GEO focuses its efforts on priorities for Africa, that it engages with ministerial delegations in advance of the meeting with the aim of securing a mandate under UNFCCC subsidiary bodies, and that it ensures GEO participation through another delegation (given the lack of observer status).

Ms Gevorgyan concluded by requesting Executive Committee approval for GEO to join the WMO/UNDRR joint Centre of Excellence for Climate and Disaster Resilience, the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF), and the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP).

The Chair, speaking for the European Commission, recognized the valuable work by EO4Health regarding the pandemic response and expressed the hope that it would continue in the next GEO Work Programme. She stated that the Commission was preparing a dedicated call for proposals under Horizon Europe that will focus on promoting collaboration among GEO, WMO, and GCOS. She also underlined the importance of stepping up work with SMMEs.

Japan expressed their appreciation for the Secretariat activities, noting the support provided on DRR. Japan drew attention to their ongoing collaborations with UNESCO, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and their support to the Asia Water Cycle Initiative (AWCI), which is one of the activities under Asia-Oceania GEO. Japan recommended that the DRR-WG recognize good practices coming out of the AWCI.

South Africa acknowledged the Secretariat Director's presentation, especially noting the strengthening partnership with WMO and the stronger GEO presence at global events. South Africa supported GEO in taking up the invitations to join the new bodies, which will help GEO to gain recognition from other organizations, saying that it is important to continue to cultivate such relationships.

China stated that the Secretariat had done great work, especially in its engagement at COP26, and its cooperation with other organizations. China encouraged the Secretariat to make more efforts to invite developing countries to join in GEO activities.

The United States acknowledged the good work being done by the Secretariat during the pandemic and the positive and productive build-up to COP26. It concurred with the remarks from South Africa.

France recommended that formal acceptance of the REAP proposal be deferred until more details can be provided. The United States agreed and suggested that such information be brought forward to the next Executive Committee meeting.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for its work, noting the steady progress in most areas, with particular recognition for the engagement during the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and
- Approved the proposal that GEO accept the invitations from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to join the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF) and the joint WMO-United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Centre of Excellence.

Action 56.1: Secretariat to bring forward detailed information regarding the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) proposal to support a decision by the Executive Committee. **Due:** **57th Executive Committee meeting.**

2 SESSION 2: RESPONSE TO MID-TERM EVALUATION

2.1 Executive Committee Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation and Actions (Document GEO-17-1.7b – for information; Document ExCom-56.6 – for decision; and Document ExCom-56.7 – for discussion)

The Secretariat Director suggested that it would not be necessary to present the full Executive Committee response to the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) as the document had been circulated previously and agreed by Executive Committee members. She proposed that if there were any outstanding comments or questions, these could be addressed at this time.

Germany stated that it had been a member of the Executive Committee Response Advisory Group (ERAG) and was generally in agreement with the content but noticed one sentence in the final version that had been inserted at a later stage. Germany suggested that the statement, which regarded information provided by the commercial sector, was not entirely correct and

could be misleading. It was proposed that the first part of the sentence be deleted. On a second point, regarding the terms of reference of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG), there should be a role for the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT) in the process. Germany noted that such a role was already included in the MTE response document and the relevant sentence could simply be copied into the EAG document.

Japan observed that the evaluation process is very important and the EAG will have a key role in the development of the next concept of GEOSS. The process to organize the EAG should, therefore, be careful and transparent. A concern was expressed that the timeline proposed was too tight and thus the initial meeting should be one month later.

France supported the MTE response but suggested that reference to possible changes to the Rules of Procedure should clearly state that changes would only be “if necessary”. France also indicated some concerns with the EAG mandate and composition. The EAG must be only an advisory body to the Executive Committee, not one that takes decisions. The reference to a “strategic think tank” was unclear, and the reference to “indigenous peoples” should be revised to “a diversity of culture”. France agreed with Japan that the start of the EAG should be delayed.

The United States concurred with Japan and France on the timeline but would not recommend a specific date. The United States also concurred with France on the reference to diversity, expanding the notion to also include diversity of opinion and expertise. The EAG needs to be independent, not dominated by experts working on the existing infrastructure components. It was also requested that the reference to the Lead Co-Chair priorities be deleted from the second recommendation of the Plenary document, as this is only an internal operating practice.

Greece agreed with the United States on the need for the EAG to be independent but suggested that there needs to be a standard method of interaction between the EAG and the GIDTT. It is important to keep the GIDTT engaged. Regarding the MTE response, it was suggested to reword the references to SMMEs as a call to the SMMEs, as countries might not know how to engage these companies. The Secretariat Director responded that perhaps the latter point could be brought back for discussion at a future Executive Committee meeting rather than trying to address it in the document itself.

China emphasized the importance of involving GEO Members in the EAG. It was suggested that the EAG should include members that are nominated by GEO Members and others. As the timeline is very strict, would it be possible to extend it. China also asked whether a clear definition of the GEOSS infrastructure should be provided in the terms of reference.

South Africa agreed with the concern regarding the EAG timeframe. It supported the recommendation from Japan and the United States to delay the start by one month. South Africa also supported involvement of the GIDTT but emphasized the importance that the EAG remain an independent body.

The Secretariat Director responded that on the request for deletion of text, which had been added during the comment period by Australia, Australia had agreed to its removal. Regarding the role of the GIDTT, the Director agreed that there needs to be interaction between the GIDTT and the EAG throughout the process, but it is important that the independence of the EAG be maintained.

The United States proposed a clarification that the GIDTT continues in its current function and some of its members may be members of the EAG in individual subject matter expert capacity, but not as representatives of the GIDTT.

South Africa and the United States proposed an open and pragmatic nomination process. GEO Executive Committee Members can nominate individuals to the EAG through their regional Caucuses. The Secretariat may also nominate individuals. The final decision should be made by the Co-Chairs. Nominees must include users and others who rely on the technologies, not just the implementers of the technologies.

Australia and Japan concurred.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Agreed to revise document GEO-17-1.7b as follows:
 - Remove the text “to be included in the annual Lead Co-Chair priorities” from the Recommendations section of the cover note;
 - Add the qualification “if necessary” to the Management Response to Finding 3; and
 - Remove the text “Given that much of the infrastructure that underpins GEO’s efforts is, and will likely continue to be, provided by the commercial sector” from the Management Response to Finding 4;
- Agreed to revise document ExCom-56.6 as follows:
 - Add “The EAG will provide complementary input to the ongoing re-evaluation process as discussed by the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team” to the Purpose section;
 - Specify in the introduction to the Deliverables section that the EAG recommendations are intended for review and action by the Executive Committee;
 - Change the term “Determination” in points 1 and 2 of the Deliverables section to “An assessment, with recommendations”;
 - Revise the first task in Table 1 such that the GEO Caucuses will recommend nominees to the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) through their Executive Committee representatives, with the Secretariat proposing additional nominees, the total being limited to 20, and with the final decision to be made by the GEO Co-Chairs; and
 - Change the timing of the first meeting of the EAG to mid-February 2022;
- Requested that the EAG process ensure opportunities for interaction between the EAG and the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT), noting the importance of the independence of the EAG;
- Approved the EAG process, pending confirmation of the terms of reference.

Action 56.2: Secretariat to circulate a revised version of the terms of reference. **Due: end of day 22 November 2021.**

Action 56.3: GEO Caucuses to nominate individuals for consideration for the EAG, respecting diversity of geography, gender, and expertise. **Due: 10 December 2021.**

3 SESSION 3: PLANNING FOR GEO 3.0

3.1 Road to the Post-2025 GEO (Document ExCom-56.8 – for decision)

The Secretariat Director opened the item, noting that the path toward the post-2025 GEO begins today. The engagement with the GEO community and the directions of the 2023-2025 GEO

Work Programme, starting with the GEO Symposium, pave the way towards this. Most importantly, the discussions around integration, the critical “nexus areas” that GEO can support, will shape the GEO Work Programme and the future GEO. Further, the Industry Track and other engagements that GEO is making are all part of the content with which GEO is moving to its post-2025 future.

Ms Gevorgyan noted that there is increasing momentum for GEO in recent years: recognition of the need for greater international collaboration to tackle global challenges; recognition of the role of Earth observations in support action; rising standing of GEO within the Earth observations ecosystem; and increasing calls to accelerate action. In response to these circumstances, Ms Gevorgyan proposed that GEO build on this momentum to seek renewal of GEO’s mandate in 2023, a mandate based on GEO strategic mission based on key policy needs that represent the top priorities for GEO Members, and an operating model integrating communities and resources. Following that step, through 2024-2025, GEO should develop a results-driven, impact-oriented portfolio of projects built on GEO’s current work plus new commitments to address gaps. The Secretariat Director then proposed a schedule for the first step leading to a Ministerial Summit in 2023, noting key milestones and opportunities for engaging and seeking input from the GEO community and other stakeholders. Ms Gevorgyan concluded by requesting approval of the two-step approach.

Japan emphasized that the process needs significant involvement of stakeholders and the Executive Committee, plus consensus of the GEO community. Japan agreed with the proposal but requested the addition of further opportunities for input from the GEO community. It proposed that a working group of Executive Committee members and the Secretariat be established, similar to that used in the Implementation Plan Working Group (IPWG) of 2014. This process should work in parallel with the EAG process.

South Africa agreed with Japan, noting the importance of strong leadership by the Executive Committee. It was also suggested that there be engagement of Executive Committee members in the development of the March 2022 document.

Germany agreed with the two-step process. A detailed proposal for consultation was requested.

The United States agreed that the Executive Committee needs to lead the process and suggested that the 57th Executive Committee meeting be used to frame the strategic objectives of the process.

France stated that it would like to see GEO continue its commitment to the existing engagement priorities. France volunteered to be involved in the process.

China agreed that it was time to focus on strategic goals but suggested postponing the process for a year. China asked whether it would be best to wait for the EAG process to conclude first.

The European Commission asked how flexibility could be built into the process given that circumstances might change before the strategy is put into place.

The United States suggested that it wasn’t necessary to wait, that the response to the MTE and the EAG process could continue while the Executive Committee started work on the next phase. GEO needs to focus on both strategy and execution, in parallel. The Executive Committee should be focused on strategy, while the Programme Board focuses on execution.

The Secretariat Director reminded Executive Committee of the MTE finding that the GEO Work Programme is difficult to understand and that it was hard to find tangible milestones. The previous 10-year Strategic Plan was completed as one large exercise. It did not identify specific

timelines or deliverables that GEO would work toward. The Secretariat has deliberately not recommended adopting another 10-year strategy but consider working on five-year increments. Regarding parallels with the IPWG, the Director noted that that group met in person five times per year which may not be feasible under the current restrictions.

China requested clarification on the role of the proposed working group. The United States responded that there would not be consensus on this until the March 2022 Executive Committee meeting, although members will be engaged in the development of the initial document.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat for the proposal;
- Agreed with the general concept of the two-step process;
- Indicated that the process must be led by the Executive Committee, and that there needs to be adequate opportunity for GEO Members and the broader GEO community to provide input;
- Suggested that the process include a role for a Working Group, similar to the 2014 Implementation Plan Working Group (IPWG);
- Requested that the GEO Plenary be informed of this activity by the Executive Committee during the presentation of the Executive Committee Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) during GEO Plenary-17; and
- Requested that references to “GEO 3.0” be revised to “post-2025 GEO”.

Action 56.4: Secretariat to work with Executive Committee members to prepare a document to provide more details on the process. **Due: 57th Executive Committee meeting**.

Action 56.5: Executive Committee members to provide their ideas on high-level needs that GEO should support post-2025. **Due: 15 December 2021**.

Action 56.6: Secretariat to implement an online collaboration tool that may be used to support action 56.5. **Due: 5 December 2021**.

4 SESSION 4: PREPARATION FOR GEO-17 PLENARY

4.1 2020 Financial Statements and Audit Report (Document GEO-17-5.1a – for decision)

Brian Cover, Chief of the Finance and Budget Section of WMO, presented the financial statements and audit report for 2020. He began by noting that GEO had an overall improved financial situation, largely due to increased contributions, much of which will be received and implemented in coming periods. At the same time, expenditures were reduced due to fewer meetings and less travel under the pandemic restrictions. The increased cash balance remained sufficient to cover all long-term employee benefit liabilities as well as net current liabilities, along with operating expenses for the first few months of the 2021. However, there remained many pledged contributions that have not yet been received. The external audit provided an unqualified or “clean” opinion. Mr Cover concluded that GEO’s financial position was strong and suggested that GEO consider how best to balance the adequacy of funds being held versus spending some of the money to benefit Members.

The United States asked about the appropriate level of cash reserves that should be maintained. Mr Cover responded that a balance must be found between ensuring that long-term liabilities are covered while using the money to deliver the organization’s mandate.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked Brian Cover for his presentation; and
- Adopted the report.

4.2 2022 Trust Fund Budget and GEO Pledge Campaign (Document GEO-17-5.1b (Rev.2) – for decision)

Lawrence Friedl (United States), chair of the Budget Working Group (BWG), presented the item on behalf of the BWG. He reminded members that the GEO Trust Fund supports the operations of the GEO Secretariat, as distinct from contributions that GEO Members provide to GEO Work Programme activities. The proposed budget was based on the 2016-2025 GEO Strategic Plan, the 2022-2023 Concept of Operations, special short-term spending for the MTE response and preparation for the post-2025 GEO, and on consultation with the BWG. Planned expenditures (including in-kind secondments) are CHF 6.7 million, which includes CHF 1.0 million for short-term staffing funded by savings in the Working Capital Fund and exceptional contributions from the GEO community. Turning to the Pledge Campaign, Mr Friedl noted that financial contributions to the Trust Fund increased to CHF 3.9 million, which is above the yearly average of CHF 3.2 million. Despite this increase, the BWG expects expenditures in 2021 to exceed contributions by CHF 2.4 million. Based on these various factors, the BWG has set the goal for the 2022 [Pledge Campaign](#) at CHF 1.1 million above the current projected contributions. Mr Friedl concluded by requesting that the Executive Committee approve the proposed 2022 GEO Trust Fund Budget for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

The United States said that they supported the proposed Budget and encouraged the BWG to continue its resource mobilization efforts.

The European Commission concurred with the Budget, agreeing that there was a need to fund the short-term contracts.

China asked whether the Budget could be increased for training and involvement of developing countries in meetings.

Germany indicated their agreement with the Budget.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Encouraged the Budget Working Group to continue their efforts on resource mobilization; and
- Approved the Trust Fund Budget for 2022.

4.3 Review of Nominations to the Programme Board (Document ExCom-56.10 – for decision)

Craig Larlee, GEO Work Programme Coordinator, presented the review of nominations to the Programme Board and the Secretariat recommendation of the slate of nominees. The terms of 10 Programme Board members (out of 32) would be completed at the end of 2021, while 11 nominations were received. Two current Programme Board members, Cambodia and UN Environment, did not reapply. Three Participating Organizations that were not members of the Programme Board in 2021 – COSPAR, Eurisy and Plan4all – expressed interest in joining. As it was not possible to accept all nominees, the Secretariat recommended that IEEE not be included in 2022, in part because it continues to be represented through its Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society.

South Africa and China stated that they supported the proposed slate.

The European Commission welcomed Eurisy and Plan4all as new Programme Board members.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the recommended slate of nominees for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

4.4 GEO Statement on Open Knowledge (Document GEO-17-4.1 – for decision)

Douglas Cripe, Senior Scientist, presented the item on behalf of the Capacity Development Working Group. He reminded Executive Committee members that the Statement was originally conceived in terms of Open Science and its initial development was led by ITC and the Capacity Development Working Group. Executive Committee had asked that the Statement be reviewed by the Data Working Group and that the GEO community be consulted further on the content. Feedback received from the consultation included concern with the strong emphasis on science, while GEO as an organization looks at the entire information value chain from observations to applications. In response, the Secretariat proposed revising the document to become a Statement on Open *Knowledge*. This reformulation was intended to align more closely with the GEO Vision and Mission, and with the Canberra Declaration in providing evidence-based information for decision making. The Open Knowledge Statement was presented to the 21st Programme Board meeting in September 2021, where the Board endorsed the refocus on open knowledge. However, several revisions were requested to the sections dealing with traditional knowledge, open infrastructure, open hardware, licences, and the Board requested inclusion of references to open standards. The Programme Board recommended that GEO Plenary approve the Statement on Open Knowledge as guidance to the GEO Work Programme and to the GEO community.

Japan extended its appreciation to the Capacity Development Working Group and the Secretariat for their work on the Statement and welcomed the analysis prepared by the Data Working Group on the connections with the CARE and TRUST Principles. Japan encouraged GEO Members to provide more contributions to capacity development activities in GEO.

China stated that it was very good policy to make knowledge open. Data can be open, but it is not always free. China encouraged Members to open more of their data.

The United States agreed with the change from open science to open knowledge. It was noted that the statement is to be used as guidance to the GEO Work Programme and the GEO community and drew attention to the distinction between knowledge developed through GEO Work Programme activities, which is expected to be open, while still accepting a role for the commercial sector.

France welcomed the text which is in line with France's strategy on open science. France thanked the Secretariat for their efforts to incorporate modifications proposed during the consultations and Programme Board review and stated that they supported the current version of the Statement.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Capacity Development Working Group, the Data Working Group, and the Secretariat for their work on developing the Statement; and
- Approved the document for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

4.5 GEO Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement (Document GEO-17-5.3 – for decision)

Nathalie Pettorelli (United Kingdom), chair of the Programme Board Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Subgroup, presented the item on behalf of the Subgroup and the Programme Board. She began by noting that the EDI Subgroup was created in early 2020 and that its initial discussions highlighted a need for GEO to establish and widely promote its vision and commitment to EDI through a formal statement. A draft EDI statement for GEO was discussed and approved by the Programme Board in early 2021 and was approved by the Executive Committee for consultation at its 54th meeting. The EDI Statement expressed GEO's commitment to supporting the development of a dynamic, diverse, and inclusive Earth observations community in which everyone is valued, respected, and given the opportunity to participate. The Statement was structured around five pillars that outlined a vision for equality, diversity, and inclusion in every aspect of GEO. During the consultations that were conducted as part of the 2021 GEO Symposium, the EDI Subgroup found that members of the GEO community generally identified well with the five pillars and there was a general feeling that the actions articulated for each pillar were appropriate. Ms Pettorelli stressed that the Statement is only a starting point for mainstreaming EDI discussions in GEO and for unveiling/addressing issues related to accessibility, representation, transparency, and environmental justice.

Costa Rica recommended acceptance of the Statement and proposed that it be posted on the GEO website. It also drew attention to the report of the EDI Subgroup that highlighted the significance of language barriers for some regions, noting the use of multiple languages in AmeriGEO.

China stated that they supported the Statement.

South Africa said that the Statement was long overdue.

The United States endorsed the Statement and thanked Costa Rica for their intervention, adding that it was important that GEO Members practice the principles in the Statement.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Subgroup for its work on developing the Statement; and
- Approved the document for presentation to the GEO-17 Plenary.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

5.1 Any Other Business

The dates for the Executive Committee meeting in 2022 were agreed as follows. The Executive Committee considered that the 57th session will be virtual and the 58th session would be in person should the global health situation permit.

57th Meeting of the Executive Committee: 15-16 March 2022

58th Meeting of the Executive Committee: 12-13 July 2022

The dates for GEO Week 2022 are 31 October to 4 November.

Outcomes: The Executive Committee approved the following documents that were not discussed but to which no objections were raised, nor changes requested:

- ExCom-56.2: Draft Report of the 55th Executive Committee Meeting;
- ExCom-56.3: Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings;
- ExCom-56.11: Review of Requests to Join GEO as Participating Organizations;
- ExCom-56.12: Review of Applications for Associate Category.

Meeting adjourned at 16:15