

**6th MEETING OF THE IHO-INTER REGIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE
IHO IRCC-6
PARIS, FRANCE, 19-20 MAY 2014**

IHO Representation in GEO events

Submitted by:	IHB
Executive Summary:	This document reports on the relations between the IHO and the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) and invites the IRCC to consider the appropriate IHO representation in future GEO-related events.
Related Document:	IHO CL 06/2006, IHO CL 26/2014.

Background

1. GEO, the "Group on Earth Observations", is a voluntary partnership of governments and international organizations. It was launched in 2003 in response to calls for action by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and by the G8 (Group of Eight) leading industrialized countries. GEO is coordinating efforts to build a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) in order to exploit the growing potential of Earth observations to support decision making in an increasingly complex and environmentally stressed world. GEO's Members include 90 Governments and the European Commission. In addition, 77 intergovernmental, international, and regional organizations with a mandate in Earth observation or related issues have been recognized as participating organizations. The IHO was recognized as a participating organization in 2006. That same year, the GEBCO programme was agreed as an observer. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Organization (IOC) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) are also participating organizations.
2. GEO meets annually in plenary session. The strategic guidance is provided by a Ministerial Summit which takes place every two or three years. The GEO Secretariat is hosted by the WMO Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.
3. The regional dimension of GEO is based on five regional caucuses: Africa, Americas, Asia and Oceania, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Europe.
4. GEO has been constructing GEOSS on the basis of an initial ten-year Implementation Plan for the period 2005 to 2015, from which successive quadrennial work programmes have been derived. The 3rd Ministerial Summit, which took place in January 2014, agreed a vision to 2025 and initiated the process to develop a new implementation plan for the period 2015-2025.
5. GEO relies mainly on the in-kind contribution of the members and participating organizations to implement its work programme.

IHO relations with GEO

6. The participation of the IHO on GEO is an outcome of the IHO seminar on "The Role of Hydrographic Services with Regard to Geospatial Data and Planning Infrastructure" held in Rostock, Germany, in 2005. The seminar considered that the IHO participation would allow *"to have cognizance of and influence in the myriad of local, national, regional and international activities addressing various aspects of spatial data infrastructure"*.
7. Following the consultation of IHO Member States (CL 06/2006), the Directing Committee applied for the IHO to become a participating organization in April 2006. The IHO was recognized as a participating organization by the 3rd GEO Plenary Meeting, GEO-III, held in Bonn in November 2006. GEBCO was recognized as an observer at that same meeting. This was reported to Member States at the XVIIth International Hydrographic Conference in 2007.
8. The IHO was represented by the National Hydrographer of the host country at the three following GEO Plenary Meetings in South Africa (GEO-IV - 2007), Romania (GEO-V - 2008) and the USA (GEO-VI - 2009). The IHO did not participate in the subsequent Plenary Meetings. GEBCO does not seem to have been involved in any meeting.

9. The current GEO work plan (2012-2015) does not include any explicit reference to the provision and improvement of marine geospatial data infrastructures (MSDI) but there is a direct connection with the provision of MSDI through tasks, IN-02 - Earth Data Sets and SB-01 - Oceans and Society: Blue Planet.

10. The objectives of task IN-02 are:

- *Foster advances in life-cycle data management, including processing, inter-calibration and validation, quality assurance, harmonization, archiving, integration, assimilation, modelling, long-term preservation, digitization, and visualization;*
- *Work to link regional systems and national data infrastructures into global systems to create new information sources within GEOSS;*
- *Promote the application of GEOSS interoperability principles to Earth data sets so that data are easily accessible and readily integrated to meet users' needs;*
- *Support the development and harmonization of global data, metadata, and products commonly required across Societal Benefit Areas.*

11. The objectives of task SB-01 are:

- *Provide sustained ocean observations and information to underpin the development, and assess the efficacy, of global-change adaptation measures (such as those related to vulnerability and impacts of sea-level rise);*
- *Improve the global coverage and data accuracy of coastal and open-ocean observing systems (remote-sensing and in-situ);*
- *Coordinate and promote the gathering, processing, and analysis of ocean observations;*
- *Develop a global operational ocean forecasting network;*
- *Establish a global ocean information system by making observations and information, generated on a routine basis, available through the GEOSS Common Infrastructure;*
- *Provide advanced training in ocean observations, especially for developing countries;*
- *Raise awareness of biodiversity issues in the ocean.*

12. The maritime dimension of GEO is mainly represented by the "Blue Planet initiative", endorsed at GEO-IX and sponsored notably by the IOC GOOS Project Office and the Partnership for Observation of the Global Oceans (POGO - forum created in 1999 by the directors and leaders of major oceanographic institutions around the world to promote global oceanography). The bathymetric component seems absent or taken for granted.

13. The 10th GEO Plenary Meeting and 3rd GEO Ministerial Summit were convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 13 to 17 January 2014 to decide on the future of GEO at the end of the initial ten-year period (2005-2015). Considering the importance of that milestone, the Directing Committee decided to participate in order to:

- Promote the activities of the IHO, notably in relation with the GEBCO programme and the development of MSDI;
- Raise awareness on the need to improve global coverage and availability of survey;
- Promote coordinating and bridging the various programs and initiatives dealing with the observation of the Earth at the national, regional and international levels (including the UN initiative on global geospatial information management - UN-GGIM), in order to make better use of existing arrangements, avoid duplication, address gaps and improve the overall efficiency;
- Strengthen the engagement with developing countries in line with the development of the IHO capacity building programme.

This was achieved through a report on IHO activities relevant to GEO which was presented in the Plenary Meeting and two statements which were delivered during the Ministerial Summit.

14. The participation of the IHO in GEO is in line with two strategic directions:

- Strengthen the role and effectiveness of the IHO;
- Raise global awareness of the importance of hydrography.

It comes under task 1.1.20 of the 2013-2017 Work Programme (Co-operation with other organizations when their

agendas have relevance to the programme of the IHO).

IHO participation in the next GEO events

15. According to the GEO governance framework, an evaluation of the first phase of the implementation of GEOSS will be made to assess the progress against the targets of the Implementation Plan. The evaluation is expected to take place from May 2014 to May 2015. The GEO Secretariat has invited GEO members and participating organizations to nominate members for the Evaluation Team which will be set up to conduct the evaluation. Member States which may be interested in nominating an expert were informed by IHO CL 26/2014. The deadline for nominations is 30 April 2014.

16. Japan will host the 7th GEOSS Asia-Pacific Symposium in Tokyo, from 26 to 28 May 2014. The symposium will address the theme of "Benefits for Society from GEOSS evolution - towards addressing sustainable development goals". One of the topics to be discussed at the symposium will be "Ocean observation and society - towards realization of Blue Planet in the Asia-Pacific Region". Noting that the IHO theme for the 2014 World Hydrography Day – "*Hydrography – Much more than just nautical charts*" - is relevant to this topic, the Directing Committee has invited the Chair of the Regional Hydrographic Commissions (RHCs) that include countries of the Asia-Pacific region, i.e. EAHC, NIOHC, RSAHC and SWPHC, to consider being represented in the session on Ocean Observation and Society.

17. The 11th GEO Plenary Meeting (GEO-XI), will be held in Libreville, Gabon on 13 and 14 November 2014. This will offer an opportunity to focus on GEO-related activities in Africa and a presentation of IHO activities in Africa would be welcome. Five RHCs are concerned: EAHC, MBSHC, NIOHC and SAIHC.

18. Other GEO-related events may be announced later this year or early 2015.

Proposals

19. IRCC is invited to

- a. **Note** this report;
- b. **Consider** the appropriate IHO representation in future GEO events, taking into account their regional dimension;
- c. **Take** any other actions as it considers appropriate.