



Terms of Reference (version 3.0)

GEO Blue Planet Initiative

Adopted on November 19, 2020

Note: These Terms of Reference (ToR) serve as an Addendum to the GEO Blue Planet Implementation Plan, as submitted to the Group on Earth Observations (GEO). Both the Implementation Plan and the ToR will be reviewed on an annual basis by the GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee, and updates submitted to GEO for approval as necessary.

1. Overview of the Governance of Blue Planet

The governing bodies of GEO Blue Planet include:

- Advisory Board: responsible for providing the strategic direction for Blue Planet, advocating for Blue Planet and providing resource mobilization advice.
- Steering Committee: main decision-making body, responsible for coordinating Blue Planet's activities, identifying and, where possible, contributing resources.
- Management Committee: responsible for managing the daily operations and activities of Blue Planet.
- Secretariat: provides scientific and technical coordination for the GEO Blue Planet Advisory Board, Steering Committee and Management Committee, as well as logistical support for GEO Blue Planet activities, and implements stakeholder engagement activities.

1.1 Details of the governing bodies

This section provides information about the roles and responsibilities and *modus operandi* of the governing bodies. Participation in the Advisory Board, Steering Committee and Working Groups will not be remunerated. Attendance of Advisory Board and Steering Committee members at symposia, workshops and events will generally be funded by the members themselves, although opportunities for travel funding will be sought by the Steering Committee, particularly for members from developing countries.

1.1.1 Advisory Board

The Advisory Board is the high-level advisory body and provides provide oversight and strategic direction to the Steering Committee and staff. The Advisory Board will meet quarterly via teleconference, and if possible once yearly in person. Advisory Board duties include:



- To provide strategic direction and oversight
- To provide connections to relevant activities such as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development
- To support resource mobilization
- To ensure responsiveness to global stakeholder needs

The Advisory Board will be composed of high-level individuals representing foundational ocean observing organizations and users. Nominations will be invited via an open call sent out to ocean observing organizations and high-level user representatives (i.e. UN Groups, World Bank). Self-nominations will be welcome. The Steering Committee will review nominations and select a maximum of 10 members to serve terms of 3 years, with the potential for two one-year extensions (not to exceed 5 years in total).

1.1.2 Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the main decision-making body, responsible for coordinating Blue Planet's activities. Steering Committee duties are:

- To promote the aims and objectives of Blue Planet and expand its profile and prominence;
- To review and endorse the Implementation Plan and Annual Work Plans of Blue Planet;
- To monitor and evaluate institutional effectiveness of Blue Planet against aims and objectives outlined in the Implementation and Annual Work Plans;
- To represent stakeholder and shareholder interests;
- To provide guidance and support to Blue Planet activities and monitor their progress;
- To coordinate the production of deliverables for reporting to the GEO Secretariat;
- To work with the Blue Planet Secretariat and the GEO Secretariat to identify new stakeholders and shareholders that would contribute to and benefit from Blue Planet.
- To identify opportunities for collaboration between stakeholders/shareholders.
- To facilitate and coordinate relevant activities and mobilise resources when opportunities arise, in concert with the Advisory Board.

The Steering Committee will, as far as possible, operate by consensus. Decisions requiring a vote will be decided by simple majority of the votes cast. The quorum for a valid vote is participation of one half of the voting members of the Steering Committee. Votes may be held at meetings or by appropriate electronic means. These procedures will apply, for example, to make any changes to the Terms of Reference. The Steering Committee will meet in person at least once yearly and via teleconference on a bi-monthly basis.

The Steering Committee will consist of up to 35 contributing shareholders and stakeholders. Contributing shareholders, as defined here, are those organizations that contribute resources for the overall coordination of GEO Blue Planet (e.g. Secretariat, publications, Symposia, etc.) and/or the production of new services (specifically as Blue Planet products). Stakeholders are those organizations that contribute to, or benefit from,



the GEO Blue Planet Mission and Objectives, and in particular the Working Groups and projects, either from the provider or user end. It is anticipated that between one third and half of the Steering Committee will consist of representatives of user communities and that major ocean observing communities that are GEO participating organizations will have representatives on the Steering Committee.

Steering Committee members will be elected by the existing Steering Committee, from among the nominations received following an open call. Nominations can be made by the Advisory Board, stakeholder and shareholder organizations, or members of the community. Self-nominations will be welcome. In their decision, existing Steering Committee members will take into account the contributions of the shareholder organisations being represented, the relevance of the stakeholder organisations being represented, the sector being represented, the balance between “providers” and “users”, geographical representation and gender balance.

Steering Committee members will serve a 3-year term with the potential for two one-year extensions (not to exceed 5 years in total). Steering Committee members must attend at least one Steering Committee meeting every six months or make alternate plans to meet with the Secretariat to remain on the Committee.

The term may be shortened if the member is representing an organization and changes positions or if the member is unable to make the required time commitment. Three Co-Chairs will be elected by the Steering Committee members, and will serve terms of three years, with the potential for two one-year extensions (not to exceed 5 years in total).

Steering Committee Co-Chairs may appoint “*ex-officio*” and “*emeritus*” members to support the work of the Advisory, Steering and Management Committees.

An “*ex-officio*” member is usually invited to serve in such a position because the initiative needs their expertise or influence in that position, by virtue of the position served in their home organisation. The member has full rights and obligations of the committee they serve and will cease their appointment once they change status within their home organisation.

An “*emeritus*” member is usually a former GEO Blue Planet member who is invited to stay on board as a non-voting member in an advisory capacity. This is an honorific title in recognition of the member's active participation, financial contribution, or continued strong interest in the initiative.

1.1.3 Management Committee

The Management Committee is responsible for overseeing the daily operations and activities of Blue Planet.

Management Committee duties are:



- To provide guidance to the Secretariat on day to day operations and activities;
- To review progress on activities between Steering Committee meetings;
- To identify and support additional partnerships and funding opportunities;

The Management Committee is composed of the 3 Steering Committee Co-Chairs. A small number of members-at-large (preferably no more than 3) may be appointed by the Steering Committee to fill gaps in geographical representation and/or expertise. The Management Committee will operate via regular e-mail correspondence and conference calls with the Secretariat will be held on average every two weeks.

1.1.4 Secretariat

The GEO Blue Planet Secretariat provides scientific and logistical support for GEO Blue Planet activities. The Secretariat also provides coordination support for activities and developing partnerships. The GEO Blue Planet Secretariat reports to the Steering Committee and Advisory Board. Unlike the Steering Committee and Advisory board who are voluntary participants, Secretariat members must be funded to support GEO Blue Planet.

The Secretariat currently consists of two offices – a US and a European office. The Secretariat Executive Director is currently based at the US office. Additional offices may be established based on interest and available funding.

The duties of the Secretariat:

- To provide overall support and coordination to the GEO Blue Planet network;
- To support and manage GEO Blue Planet activities as required;
- To support and manage global stakeholder engagement activities;
- To support the Steering Committee in the coordination of GEO Blue Planet deliverables;
- To provide logistical support to the Advisory Board;
- To promote GEO Blue Planet in the international arena;
- To interface with and report to the GEO Secretariat on behalf of GEO Blue Planet;
- To support the organisation of GEO Blue Planet Symposia;
- To manage the GEO Blue Planet website, social media and other communications.

2. Overview of GEO Blue Planet Activities

GEO Blue Planet supports and promotes activities that are aligned with the initiative's mission.

GEO Blue Planet's mission is to advance and exploit synergies among the many observational programmes devoted to ocean and coastal waters; to improve engagement with a variety of users



for enhancing the timeliness, quality and range of services delivered; and to raise awareness of the societal benefits of ocean observations at the public and policy levels.

GEO Blue Planet supports and promotes internal and external activities in three cross-cutting areas and ten thematic areas.



2.1 Supported Activities

GEO Blue Planet supported activities are those whose formulation, funding and implementation are directly supported by the GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee or Secretariat. These activities include working groups and fixed-term projects. Supported activities will be identified as GEO Blue Planet activities on the website and in other outreach materials.

Process

- The GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee will solicit and review proposals for working groups and projects on an ongoing basis.



- Proposals will be selected based on applicability to stakeholder needs, cost/benefit and GEO priorities.
- For activities that require funding, GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee, Secretariat and activity leaders will work to apply for and secure funding for the activity.
- Regular updates on progress will be requested by the Blue Planet Secretariat for the website and monthly Steering Committee updates.
- Activity objectives, milestones and deliverables will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Steering Committee.

2.2 GEO Blue Planet Promoted Activities

GEO Blue Planet promoted activities are those that support the mission of GEO Blue Planet but are not actively supported by the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat or Steering Committee. Promoted activities will be listed as related activities on the GEO Blue Planet website and other outreach materials.

Process

- The GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee will review requests for activity endorsements on an ongoing basis.
- Activities will be selected for endorsement by the Steering Committee based on applicability to GEO Blue Planet's mission.
- Selected activities will be asked to provide informal updates to GEO Blue Planet (e.g. by giving a presentation at a GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee Meeting or GEO Blue Planet Symposium, or by providing a new article for the GEO Blue Planet website).

3. GEO Blue Planet Network

GEO Blue Planet works is a network of ocean and coastal-observers, social scientists and end-user representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups, including international and regional organizations, NGOs, national institutes, universities and government agencies.

The relationships within GEO Blue Planet are:

Observers: observers are those who are interested in learning about the work of GEO Blue Planet. Observers will receive a monthly update on GEO Blue Planet activities and are encouraged to attend GEO Blue Planet symposia, workshops and webinars that are of interest.

Affiliated Organizations: affiliated organizations are stakeholders whose activities support the mission of GEO Blue Planet but are not actively supported by the GEO Blue Planet staff.



Partner Organizations: partner organizations are stakeholders who have activities whose formulation, funding or implementation are directly supported by the GEO Blue Planet staff.

4. Adoption and review of the Terms of Reference

Version 3.0 of these Terms of Reference were adopted by the GEO Blue Planet Steering Committee on November 30, 2020. This document will be reviewed at least on an annual basis by the Steering Committee.