



# TERMS OF REFERENCES

Dec. 2025 Update  
Edited by Dr. Audrey Hasson  
Approved by the Executive Committee

# 1. Introduction

**GEO Blue Planet** is an initiative of the **Group on Earth Observations (GEO)** that focuses on leveraging observation and prediction to inform ocean and coastal decision-making. It operates at the intersection of science, policy, and society, aiming to ensure that Earth Observation (EO) data is translated into **actionable intelligence for a sustainable Ocean**.



The initiative is structured around three **Core Action Areas**:

- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Identifying information needs.
- **Cooperation and Co-design** – Developing knowledge and tools collaboratively.
- **Capacity Development** – Building and transferring capabilities for long-term use.

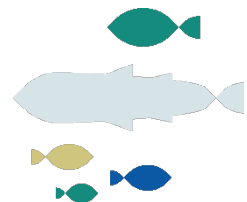
GEO Blue Planet works through a network of experts, partner organizations, and working groups to produce white papers, host workshops, develop decision-support tools, and facilitate training and information exchange.

The GEO Blue Planet **Terms of References** serves as a foundational document that outlines the **organizational structure, roles, responsibilities, and procedures** of GEO Blue Planet. It complements the GEO Blue Planet Implementation Plan and ensures that the initiative operates transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with stakeholder needs.

Created in 2015, the **2025 updated document** reflects:

- Evolving priorities and stakeholder demands.
- Lessons learned from previous operational cycles.
- The need for clearer procedures for working group formation, strategic planning, and resource mobilization.
- A commitment to inclusivity, transparency, and sustainability in governance.

This version formalizes the roles of governing, consultative and operating bodies (Executive Committee, Advisory Committee, Steering Committee, Secretariat, Working Groups), and outlines procedures for membership, decision-making, and reporting.



## 2. Objectives and Scope

### Mission

GEO Blue Planet's mission is to **bridge the gap between ocean and coastal data and decision-making** by ensuring that Observation and Prediction are accessible, understandable, and usable for stakeholders across sectors. It aims to support the development of **actionable intelligence for a sustainable Ocean** through collaboration, innovation, and capacity building.



### Goals

GEO Blue Planet pursues its mission through three **Core Action Areas**:

#### Stakeholder Engagement

- Identify and understand the information needs of decision-makers.
- Host consultations to raise awareness and gather input.
- Facilitate dialogue between scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

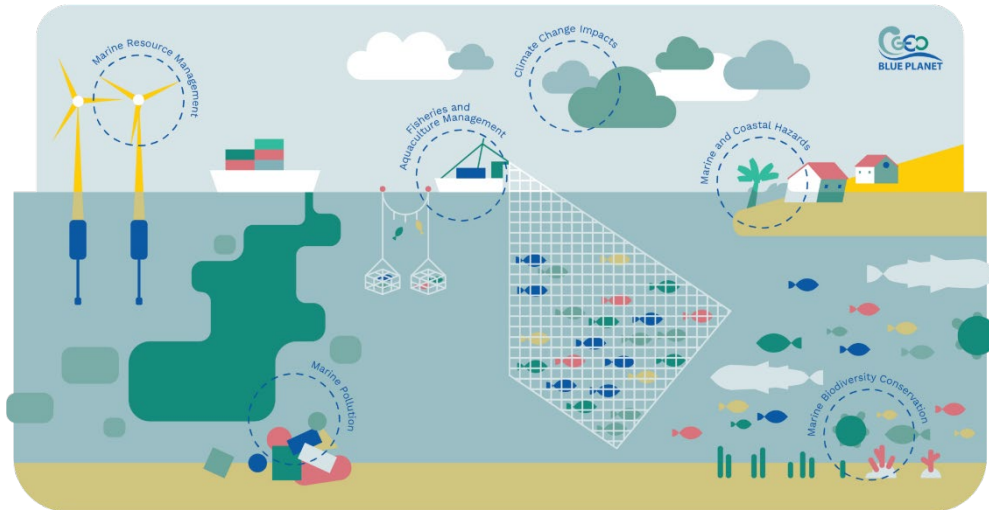
#### Cooperation and Co-Design

- Build expert networks to co-develop and share knowledge.
- Collaborate with users to create intelligence tailored to their needs.
- Ensure that tools and outputs are relevant, usable, and sustainable.

#### Capacity Development

- Promote information exchange and best practices across regions and disciplines.
- Facilitate targeted training to early careers, operational agencies and other stakeholders.
- Support the transfer and long-term sustainability of developed applications.

These goals are designed to ensure that ocean and coastal data are not only scientifically robust but also actionable and impactful for global and regional policy frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Climate Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and European Union Marine Framework Strategy Directive.



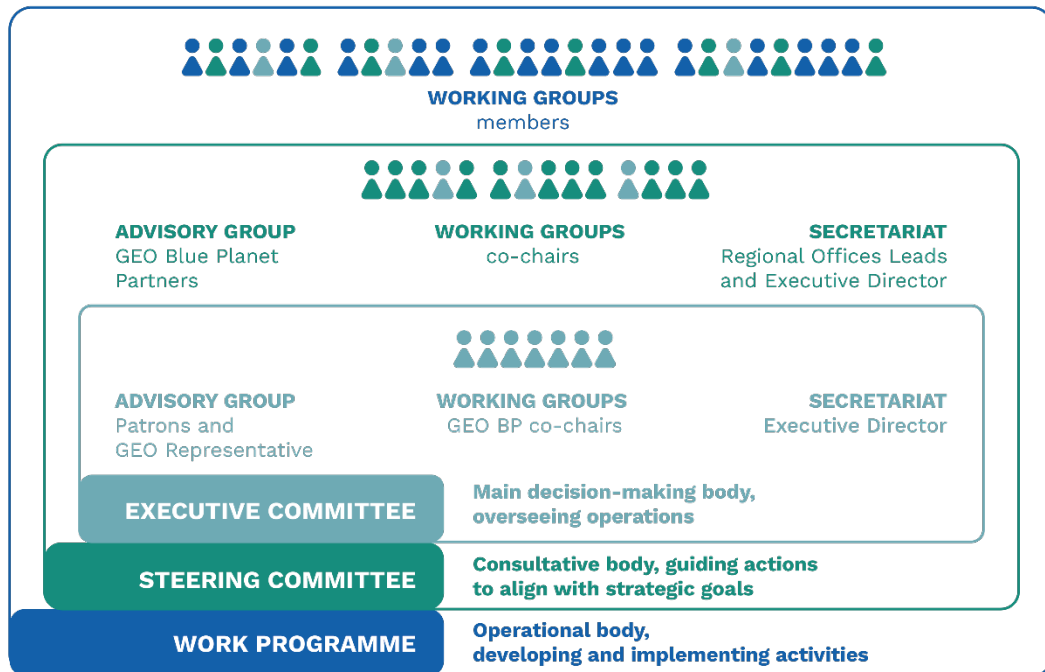
### 3. The Group on Earth Observations

Under the GEO post-2025 strategy, **GEO Blue Planet plays an important role as a convener**, bringing together diverse stakeholders from science, policy, and society to co-design solutions for ocean and coastal sustainability. Conveners are central to **GEO’s mission of delivering user-driven Earth Intelligence**, acting as bridges between data providers and decision-makers. The post-2025 GEO Work Programme is structured into three main categories: Conveners, Research to Operations Pipeline Activities (including Mature Flagships, Flagships, Initiatives, and Pilots), and Enabling Mechanisms.



By leveraging Ocean observation and prediction data, GEO Blue Planet fosters **collaboration across sectors and regions**, ensuring that information is not only scientifically robust but also actionable and policy relevant. As a convener, it facilitates **dialogue between data providers, end users, and decision-makers**, aligning efforts with global frameworks. Through its Working Groups and Regional Nodes, GEO Blue Planet **supports inclusive engagement, capacity development, and the integration of ocean and coastal data** into adaptation and resilience strategies. This convening role is central to GEO’s vision of delivering impact through user-driven, coordinated, and sustained EO efforts.

## 4. Governance and Operations Structure



### Work Programme

The GEO Blue Planet Work Programme, constituted of thematic Working Groups (WGs), is responsible for **developing and implementing GEO Blue Planet’s activities**.

Working Programme duties include:

- To develop and implement GEO Blue Planet’s activities;
- To report and update the Secretariat and Steering Committee on activities;
- To present on Working Group activities at international meetings; and
- To directly support GEO Blue Planet’s stakeholders and end users including the Advisory Committee.

All WGs Co-chairs represent the Work Programme in the [Steering Committee](#).

The GEO Blue Planet co-chairs represent the Work Programme in the [Executive Committee](#).

### Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is responsible for **shaping GEO Blue Planet’s strategic goals**, suggesting opportunities, identifying partners and, where possible, contributing resources. **The Steering Committee ensures that GEO Blue Planet activities remain consistent with its strategic goals.**

Steering Committee duties include:

- To promote GEO Blue Planet aims and activities and expand its profile and prominence;

- To review the yearly GEO Blue Planet and Working Group Implementation Plans;
- To review progress, impact and provide guidance to Working Groups activities;
- To assist the [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#) in identifying new stakeholders that would contribute to and benefit from GEO Blue Planet;

The Steering Committee is composed of members of the [Advisory Group](#), the Working Groups co-chairs – representing the [Work Programme](#) and the [Secretariat](#).

The Steering Committee is headed by the GEO Blue Planet co-chairs.

## Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the **main decision-making body** for GEO Blue Planet. It is responsible for overseeing the operations and activities of GEO Blue Planet.

Executive Committee duties include:

- To review and endorse updates in the [GEO Blue Planet Terms of References](#);
- To endorse the yearly GEO Blue Planet Implementation Plan;
- To provide guidance to the [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#) on day-to-day operations and activities;
- To coordinate with the GEO Secretariat;
- To identify and support additional partnerships and funding opportunities.

The Executive Committee is composed of the [GEO Blue Planet co-chairs](#) – representing the Work Programme, [the Patrons](#) and a [GEO Secretariat representative](#) – representing the Advisory Group, and the GEO Blue Planet [Executive Director](#).

## Advisory Group

The Advisory Group offers **programmatic guidance** to ensure GEO Blue Planet’s strategic goals align with international priorities, reflect end-user needs, and are supported through resource mobilization.

Advisory Group duties include:

- To advise on alignment of user-requested thematic activities with priorities of international bodies and organizations for policy-relevant and other information;
- To provide connections with organizations/stakeholders that relay end-user needs; and
- To support resource mobilization to ensure sustainability of the [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#) and its activities.

The Advisory Group is composed of ex-officio members of the **[GEO Blue Planet Partner Organizations](#)**. They are regional to global organizations forming a comprehensive representation of the Ocean Observation value chain.

The Advisory Group is part of the [Steering Committee](#) and is represented by GEO Blue Planet Patrons and a GEO Secretariat Representatives on the [Executive Committee](#).



## Other Bodies and Entities

### GEO Blue Planet Secretariat

The GEO Blue Planet Secretariat coordinates and supports the global GEO Blue Planet Initiative. It is distributed across several offices. More information below.

### GEO Blue Planet Working Groups

The GEO Blue Planet Working Groups are stakeholder-driven teams that form around available expertise and resources to design and implement activities supporting the initiative's core action areas. More information below.

### GEO Blue Planet Community

The GEO Blue Planet Community includes all members of all GEO Blue Planet groups and committees. Members are recipients of quarterly newsletters to ensure smooth communication.



### GEO Blue Planet Partners

The GEO Blue Planet Patrons are regional to global organizations that collectively represent the entire ocean observation value chain. Members of these organizations typically contribute to the Work Programme by providing specialized input in thematic areas. They are represented in the [Advisory Group](#) as ex-officio members.

### GEO Blue Planet Patrons

GEO Blue Planet Patrons provide financial and in-kind support to the Secretariat and its activities. As part of the [GEO Blue Planet Partners](#), they are represented in the [Advisory Group](#) as ex-officio members and serve as the [Advisory Group's](#) representatives on the [Executive Committee](#).

### GEO Blue Planet Regional Nodes

GEO Blue Planet Regional Nodes are informal networks of regional [GEO Blue Planet Community](#) members designed to support coordination and collaboration on region-specific topics. While they do not carry out specific and planned actions, they facilitate communication among members and provide a unified response to [regional GEOs](#) and other relevant initiatives including within the [Advisory Group](#).

## 5. Secretariat and Operational Support

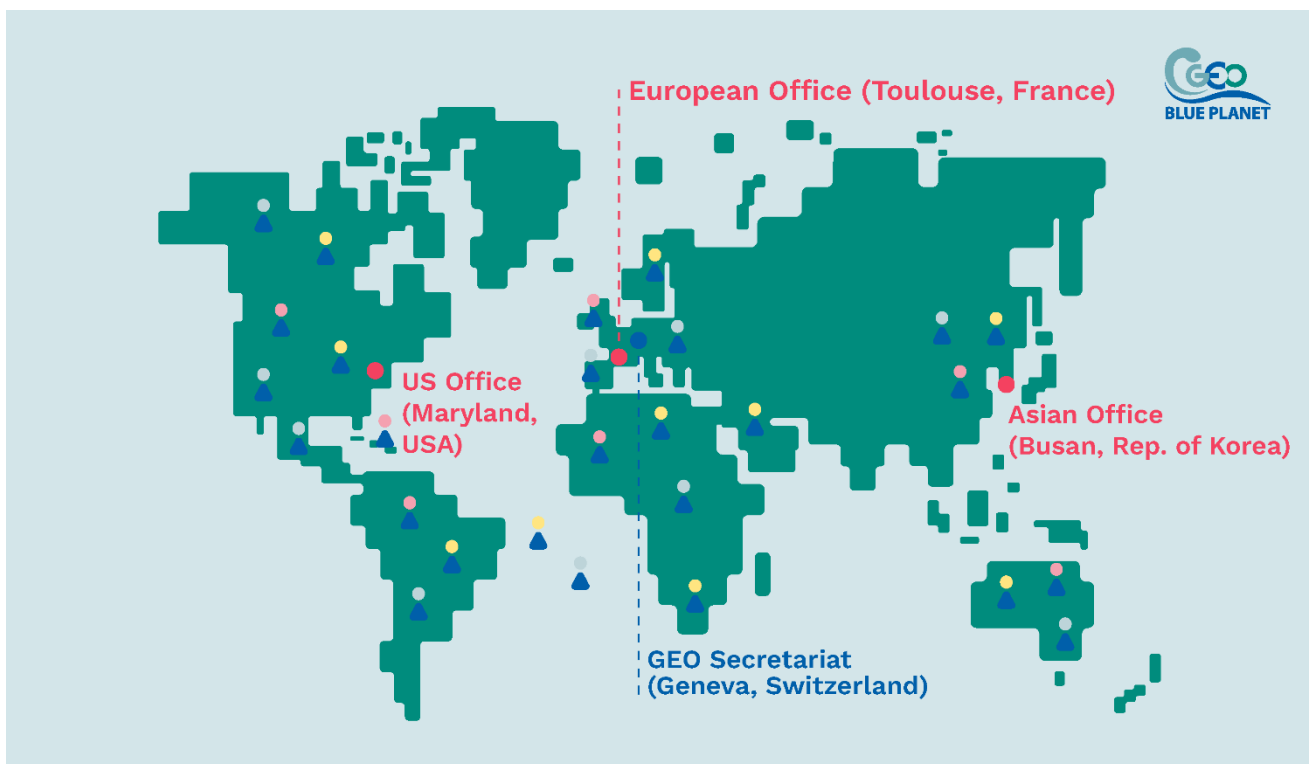
### Secretariat

The GEO Blue Planet secretariat is responsible for managing the **daily operations** and overseeing **activities of GEO Blue Planet**. It plays a central role in coordinating communications, supporting working groups and committees, and ensuring alignment with GEO Blue Planet's Core Action Areas and strategic goals.

Secretariat duties include:

- To provide overall support and coordination to the [GEO Blue Planet Community](#);
- To provide scientific and logistical support to the [GEO Blue Planet Work Program](#);
- To sustain and develop partnerships of the [Advisory Group](#);
- To assist the [Steering Committee](#) in the reviewing of GEO Blue Planet activities;
- To facilitate the coordination between Regional GEOs and [GEO Blue Planet Regional Nodes](#);

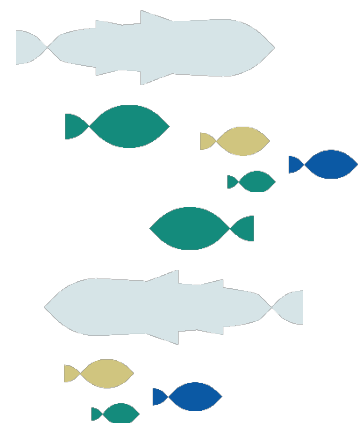
The Secretariat is composed of an **Executive Director** and **Regional Offices**. The Executive Director serves as the primary point of contact for the [Executive and Steering Committees](#), as well as the [Advisory Group](#). Each [Working Group and Regional Node](#) is assigned a designated Secretariat member as a principal point of contact.



## Operational Support Mechanisms

Administrative and logistical support is provided through:

- **Weekly Secretariat meetings** to discuss global, [Working Groups](#), and [Committees activities](#).
- **Daily correspondence** via email and chat to ensure smooth operations.
- **Secretariat leads** assigned to each [Working Group](#) to:
  - Schedule meetings, usually every month.
  - Monitor progress and alignment with Core Action Areas and strategic goals.
  - Facilitate connections with other groups and funding opportunities.
- **Outreach and communications** support, including production of the newsletter and maintenance of the GEO Blue Planet websites and social media.
- Organization and communication of GEO Blue Planet **events**.
- Representation of GEO Blue Planet in international meetings.
- **Support to operational updates** including [Terms of References](#) and [Implementation Plans](#).



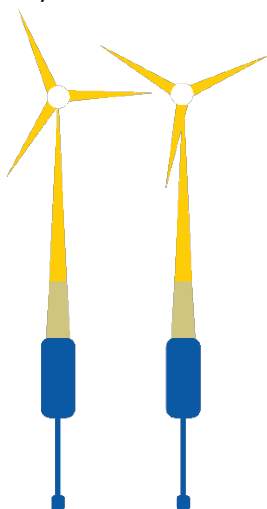
## 6. Working Mechanisms

GEO Blue Planet operates through a structured framework of Thematic **Working Groups**. These thematic groups are formed based on **stakeholder demand and resource availability** and are tasked with developing and implementing activities aligned with GEO Blue Planet’s core action areas: stakeholder engagement, cooperation and co-design, and capacity development.



Each **Working Group** is composed of representatives from academia, public institutions, private sector, NGOs, and UN bodies, and is led by three co-chairs—one of whom must be an early career professional. Groups may be subdivided into Action Groups or Task Teams to address specific actions or deliverables.

Working Groups develop **Terms of References** that can be updated on a rolling basis and an **Annual Implementation Plan**. Both Documents are reviewed by the **Steering Committee** and formally endorsed by the **Executive Committee**.



Working Groups Terms of Reference include information on:

- Background and Rationale
- Objectives and Alignment
- End-User Identification and engagement
- Membership Composition and Roles
- Secretariat Coordination and Support

Working Groups Annual Implementation Plan include information on:

- Previous Year Report
- Updated Actions and Priorities
- Resource Needs

## Decision-Making Processes

GEO Blue Planet’s decision-making is guided by a principle of **consensus** across its governing bodies. When consensus cannot be reached, decisions are made by a simple majority vote, with a quorum requiring participation from at least half of the voting members.

The **Executive Committee** serves as the main decision-making body, responsible for approving strategic documents, new **Working Groups**, and operational plans. The **Steering Committee** provides guidance and reviews progress, while the **Advisory Group** offers strategic input aligned with international priorities. Regular meetings and structured review processes ensure transparency and accountability.

As GEO Blue Planet does not receive direct funding for its core activities, financial support for specific initiatives or deliverables is typically provided by external funders. In such cases, **the funder retains final decision-making authority over the scope, priorities, and use of the allocated resources**. This underscores the importance of aligning proposed activities with funder expectations while maintaining the initiative’s strategic direction.

## Coordination with External Partners

GEO Blue Planet maintains strong coordination with **external partners**, including GEO Blue Planet Partner Organizations, other UN agencies, and regional GEOs. Partnerships can be formalized through Memoranda of Understanding or Letters of Agreement. The **Secretariat** plays a key role in sustaining and developing these partnerships, facilitating stakeholder engagement, and ensuring that **Working Groups** are connected to relevant funding opportunities and policy frameworks. Collaboration with external experts and organizations is essential for co-designing tools, transferring applications, and maintaining long-term operational capacity.

## Indicative Communication and Meeting Regularity

Body	Communication and Meeting Frequency
<b>Executive Committee</b>	Monthly (virtual); additional communication via email or Microsoft Teams as needed.
<b>Steering Committee</b>	Three times per year, with rotating time zones (Americas, Europe-Africa, Asia-Pacific).
<b>Advisory Group</b>	Participates in Steering Committee meetings; standalone meetings on an ad hoc basis.
<b>Working Groups</b>	Monthly; may also meet in sub-groups (Action Groups or Task Teams ...).
<b>Regional Nodes</b>	Communication and standalone meetings on an ad hoc basis
<b>GEO Blue Planet Community</b>	Participates in their respective Committee and/or Working Groups meetings; meets in person at GEO Blue Planet Symposia.
<b>Secretariat</b>	Weekly meetings; daily correspondence via email and chat.

# 7. Membership and Participation

## Criteria for Membership or Affiliation

GEO Blue Planet is an **open and collaborative initiative** that welcomes participation from **individuals and organizations who share its mission** of advancing the use of ocean and coastal observations for informed decision-making. Membership is inclusive and does not require legal registration; instead, participants contribute through in-kind or dedicated resources from their home institutions. Interested parties may join by contacting the [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#).

## Selection Processes

Participation is contribution-based, with no formal selection process—everyone is welcome to join. Selection for committee roles considers diversity in geography, expertise, career stage, and gender to ensure balanced representation. It is advised that co-chairs rotate every 2 years. Co-chairs are usually 3 people, one of which shall be an early career member.



Committee Role	Selection Process
<b>GEO Blue Planet co-chairs</b>	Elected by the WGs co-chairs.
<b>Working Group co-chairs</b>	Elected by WGs members.

## Specific Rules

Only the [Advisory Group](#) is composed of ex-officio members representing the [GEO Blue Planet Partner Organizations](#). Members have full rights and obligations of the group they serve and will cease their appointment once they change status within their home organization. [GEO Blue Planet Partner Organizations](#) may formalise partnership through Letters of Agreement or Memoranda of Understanding with GEO Blue Planet and may contribute financially to become [GEO Blue Planet Patrons](#). GEO Blue Planet Patrons represent the Advisory Group at the [Executive Committee](#).

Members of the distributed [Secretariat](#) are not elected. Instead, it is the responsibility of each host institution to appoint and allocate staff time specifically for GEO Blue Planet secretarial activities. The designation of the Executive Director, who leads the [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#), is proposed through mutual agreement among the participating offices and formally endorsed by the [Executive Committee](#).

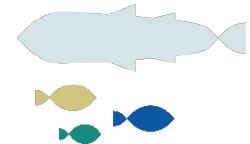
Members of GEO Blue Planet do not receive direct funding from the initiative to carry out their duties; their contributions are made through in-kind support or resources provided by their home institutions. However, institutional backing is essential for maintaining continuity, operational capacity, and strategic engagement. In parallel, the initiative’s governing bodies—particularly the [Advisory Group](#)—actively pursue external funding opportunities to support Secretariat staff and strengthen the Secretariat’s ability to deliver on its mandate.

In-person attendance at symposia, workshops, and events is generally self-funded by members. However, GEO Blue Planet Committees actively seek **opportunities to secure travel support**, with particular attention to enabling participation from early career professionals and representatives from developing countries.

## Roles and Responsibilities of Members

All Members of GEO Blue Planet are serving on **committees and/or working groups** and play an active role in shaping and implementing the initiative's activities. Members responsibilities include:

- attending meetings as often as their availability allows,
- contributing to Working Groups Activities (when applicable),
- promoting GEO Blue Planet's mission within their networks,
- collaborate within GEO Blue Planet across disciplines and sectors,
- provide input on strategic documents,
- help identify opportunities for partnerships and resource mobilization.



With the support of [GEO Blue Planet Secretariat](#), **Working Group Co-chairs** are also requested to

- To coordinate Working Group members to establish objectives and activities compiled in WG terms of references.
- To support and monitor progress of [Working Group](#) activities in coordination with the [Secretariat](#).
- To coordinate reporting to the [Steering Committee](#) and [Secretariat](#)
- To represent the Working Group at the [Steering Committee](#).
- To establish Agendas, moderate and produce minutes of the [Working Group](#) meetings in coordination with the [Secretariat](#).

**Executive and Steering Committee members** have additional duties such as reviewing progress, guiding thematic activities, and ensuring alignment with GEO Blue Planet's core action areas.

## 9. Communication and Outreach

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GEO Blue Planet's communication strategy is designed to foster transparency, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement across its global network. It relies on regular updates to share progress, highlight activities, and promote events through

- Its website with monthly targeted articles and event announcements,
- Quarterly newsletters,
- Regular communication through social media.

The Secretariat coordinates communication across [Working Groups and Committees](#), ensuring that outputs such as meeting minutes, implementation plans, and outreach materials are accessible.

GEO Blue Planet is regularly represented by its [Secretariat](#) and members at international meetings. Each year, the initiative hosts booths, sessions, and side events at GEO meetings and other major global

events to showcase its activities, engage with stakeholders, and promote ocean and coastal observation efforts.

Strategic messaging aligns with GEO's broader goals, emphasizing the value of ocean and coastal observations for decision-making. GEO Blue Planet also engages with external partners and regional nodes to amplify visibility and ensure that its work reaches diverse audiences worldwide.



## 10. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

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### Internal Processes

GEO Blue Planet thrives to apply a structured, multi-tiered approach to monitor and evaluate the performance and impact of its activities.

Each year, the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat compiles a comprehensive **Implementation Plan** that integrates the annual plans of both the **Secretariat** and its **Working Groups**. This consolidated **Implementation Plan** is reviewed by the **Steering Committee** to assess progress against defined objectives, relevance to stakeholder needs, and alignment with GEO Blue Planet's core action areas. Based on this review, the **Steering Committee** provides recommendations to the **Executive Committee**, which makes decisions regarding the continuation, adjustment, or strategic redirection of activities.

In addition to the **Implementation Plan**, strategic documents such as the **Terms of References** for **Working Groups** and the initiative are periodically evaluated on a multi-year basis to ensure they remain responsive to evolving priorities and stakeholder demands. This ongoing review process supports transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement across the initiative.

### Impact Assessment of Activities

GEO Blue Planet is committed to monitoring the impact of its activities by regularly reviewing key indicators such as meeting attendance and participation, website traffic, and external feedback. In addition, GEO Blue Planet collaborates with GEOValue to apply the Group on Earth Observation Impact Assessment Toolkit (GITA) for developing case analyses that demonstrate the benefits and added value of GEO Blue Planet initiatives.

## Reporting Requirements and Timelines

Body		Deliverable	Deadline
<b>Working Groups (WG)</b>	<b>Groups</b>	WG Implementation Plans	End of Year
<b>Secretariat</b>		Secretariat Implementation Plan	End of Year
<b>Secretariat</b>		Compiled GEOBP Implementation Plan	End of Year
<b>Steering Committee</b>		Review GEOBP Implementation Plan	Q1
<b>Executive Committee</b>		Endorse GEOBP Implementation Plan	Q1
<b>Secretariat</b>		Impact Assessment for GEO Sec	Q1
<b>Working Groups (WG)</b>	<b>Groups</b>	WG Terms of References	As needed
<b>Secretariat</b>		GEOBP Terms of References	As needed
<b>Steering Committee</b>		Review Terms of References	As needed
<b>Executive Committee</b>		Endorse Terms of References	As needed

