

OceanObs'09 Conference GEO Statement

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) commends the OceanObs'09 conference for demonstrating the progress that has been made over the past 10 years in ocean observations and for identifying the work that still needs to be accomplished. The joint community vision emerging from this conference calls for “an integrated global marine ecosystem and climate observing and information initiative”. This initiative is to provide information for the sustainable management of resources, forecasts of variability, and various assessments of the oceans. Such a vision is fully in line with the goal of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), which is “to realize a future wherein decisions and actions for the benefit of humankind are informed by coordinated, comprehensive and sustained Earth observations and information”.

GEOSS is establishing interoperability between Earth observation systems. As a result, these systems will work more efficiently together and generate more complete information in response to the cross-cutting needs of decision makers. GEOSS addresses the societal benefit areas of disasters, health, energy, climate, agriculture, ecosystems, biodiversity, water, and weather – all of which affect, and are affected by, oceans and coastal areas. Clearly, coordinated ocean observation systems are vital to the ongoing development and success of GEOSS.

The Group on Earth Observations has a long record of working with the ocean community and has recognized CEOS, POGO, GCOS, GOOS, IGBP, WCRP as well as WMO and IOC, the two members of JCOMM, as Participating Organizations. GEO is supporting the coordination of ocean-related activities and projects in the areas of disasters, ecosystems, biodiversity and aquaculture. The GEO Work Plan comprises activities which involve the ocean science community and has consultations with SCOR and CoML. It is a consistent advocate for the need to ensure the continuity and sustainability of critical global oceanographic measurements, such as those provided by satellite altimetry and the Argo floats. It has also supported the creation of a coastal zones Community of Practice.

The present governance approach to oceans observations, however, leaves much to be desired. A greater effort is needed to advance the coordination, across countries and disciplines, of ocean and coastal ecosystems observations and studies. A major push to coordinate such studies would demonstrate the ability of marine observing systems to provide reliable information and support to decision makers who must address such issues as climate- and weather-related disasters, sustainable fisheries management, biodiversity conservation and oceans-mediated pathogens and pollutants.

Benefiting from high-level Ministerial support and its broad, cross-cutting mandate, GEO offers an attractive framework for the further development of a comprehensive, sustained and global oceans observation “system of systems”. As an integral part of GEOSS, an oceans observation network would draw on the data and products generated for the nine societal benefit areas. In turn, GEOSS would be strengthened dramatically by more coherent oceans and coastal areas observations.

We look forward, therefore, to seeing the ocean community playing a more active role in the development of GEOSS. We agree in principle with the idea of “establishing a Working Group” comprising all the key actors of the ocean community to implement the OceanObs’09 outcomes. At the same time, we strongly believe that this implementation needs to contribute to building a more synergistic GEOSS. Unnecessary and unwanted duplications must be avoided. We look forward to our continued collaboration with the oceans community and to an opportunity to inform Ministers attending the GEO Ministerial Summit in Beijing in November 2010 about the important progress being made in oceans observations.