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GEO-7 Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (IMAG) Meeting Summary, May 8, 2025

The Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (IMAG) met for its seventeenth virtual call to discuss the following agenda items:

1. Review and feedback on the progress in the development of the SPM
2. Review and feedback on the review editing process
3. Review and feedback on the draft validation report of the IMAG
4. Any other business

On these items the IMAG decided:

- To participate in an iterative testing of the SPM figures to provide targeted input on the visual representations for the SPM.
- The Secretariat, in collaboration with the Tyndall Centre will conduct a simple survey by the end of June and a follow-up webinar thereafter for the iterative testing.
- To improve the drivers, pressures systems figure by including an accompanying explanatory paragraph.
- The unidirectionality of the SPM from the chapters and the executive summaries must be maintained.
- The Secretariat will circulate the Final chapter Review Editing Report with the IMAG, once it has been finalized.
- On elaborating further on the section on horizontal issues in the Validation Opinion Report.
- To provide comments on the new version of the validation opinion report, specifically on the recommendations
- The Secretariat will capture outreach activities for promoting the GEO-7 report during the World Environment Day in Jeju under the outreach section of the Validation Opinion Report.
- The Secretariat will compile and share a list of the most relevant and potentially contentious elements with the IMAG, once it is finalized.

Rapporteur	**Signature**
Ana Julieta Calvo Obando	ANA JULIETA CALVO OBANDO (FIRMA) PERSONA FISICA, CPF-01-1206-0574. Fecha declarada: 23/07/2025 08:21:07 AM Esta es una representación gráfica únicamente, verifique la validez de la firma.

Summary of the meeting

The meeting was chaired by the co-chairs of the Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (IMAG).

Review and feedback on the progress in the development of the SPM

The assessment co-chairs provided the IMAG with an update on the progress made in the development of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) of the GEO-7 report. The assessment co-chairs explained that the SPM is structured into three main parts and that an enhanced narrative structure has now been developed to cohesively convey the overarching story of the report. This narrative will comprise approximately 1,000 words and will integrate key findings of the GEO-7 main report. In addition to that, each part of the SPM will have dedicated word limits: approximately 4,000 words for Part One, 8,000 words for Part Two, and 2,500 words for Part Three. The assessment co-chairs remain confident that effective collaboration with Coordinating Lead Authors (CLAs) will ensure this word count is achieved. A series of virtual meetings between the assessment co-chairs and CLAs has already taken place, fostering robust communication and coordination among them.

The assessment co-chairs explained that Part One of the SPM is comparatively shorter than the other sections and contains three key messages. One of these messages highlights the existence of four interconnected global environmental crises and to support this message, a figure is currently being developed to visually illustrate the inseparability of these crises, emphasizing that none of them can be addressed in isolation. Within Part Two of the SPM, the assessment co-chairs aim to elaborate on the causal relationships between the drivers and the pressures. In this regard, a conceptual figure has been developed to illustrate the complex interlinkages. Additionally, the assessment co-chairs are making a concerted effort to reinforce the interlinkages among five critical systems. Moreover, the assessment co-chairs stressed the growing coherence between the scenario analyses and the solution pathways presented in the report. Furthermore, the assessment co-chairs informed the IMAG that a new figure is currently under development to further illustrate the deep interconnections among key systems addressed in the GEO-7 report.

In addition, the assessment co-chairs provided an update on the status of Chapter 21, which focuses on accelerating transformation. The assessment co-chairs acknowledged the inherently complex and integrative nature of the chapter's scope. Despite the initial challenges faced in the chapter, the assessment co-chairs expressed confidence that a strong and coherent final version of both the chapter and its executive summary will be delivered. The assessment co-chairs also reported on the ongoing efforts to improve alignment and integration across the regional Chapters 8, 19, and 20, which were previously developed in relative isolation from one another.
The co-chairs indicated that the aim is to have a complete SPM draft prepared no after that the following Wednesday. This timeline has been set to allow all contributors to review the draft ahead of the upcoming meeting in the Republic of Korea. The expectation is that a robust draft of the SPM will emerge from the Korea meeting, with the understanding that authors will still have an additional month post-meeting to refine and finalize the text.

In terms of overall coherence, the co-chairs emphasized the importance of maintaining a clear line of sight between the SPM, the executive summaries, and the main assessment chapters. This alignment is essential to ensure consistency of narrative and messaging across all levels of the report. Additionally, the assessment co-chairs stressed the need to preserve an appropriate level of scientific confidence in the key findings communicated.

During the discussion, the IMAG expressed confusion regarding one of the key graphics presented. Specifically, IMAG members were unable to discern the intended narrative that the assessment co-chairs described and raised concern on the structure of the figure. In response, the assessment co-chairs acknowledged that the figure's message was not immediately clear to all viewers and clarified that an explanatory paragraph will accompany the graphic in the final report. They expressed appreciation for IMAG's input and assured members that their comments would be carefully taken into consideration during the revision process. The Secretariat announced that the Tyndall Centre (a GEO collaborating Centre) would be providing strategic support for enhancing the communication

effectiveness of SPM, with a particular focus on assisting with the development and refinement of graphic elements. The Secretariat proposed developing a simple survey or alternative rapid feedback tool by the end of June, enabling IMAG members to provide concise yet targeted input on the visual representations. The IMAG further suggested testing the clarity of the figure by including an accompanying explanatory paragraph, to evaluate whether this additional context would resolve any remaining confusion among readers.

IMAG members raised important questions regarding the integrity of the agreed unidirectional relationship between the main assessment report and the SPM. In response, the assessment co-chairs reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the unidirectionality principle. They emphasized that all content included in the SPM must be fully supported by the corresponding executive summaries and chapters of the main report. They also acknowledged that, during the drafting process, some gaps between the SPM and the underlying chapters had been identified. As a result, the assessment co-chairs are actively revisiting and refining the relevant sections of the main chapters and their summaries to ensure a robust and traceable line of sight from the main report to the SPM. The Secretariat also responded that robust version control mechanisms are in place, facilitated through a collaborative digital platform. The Secretariat explained that, in some instances, assessment co-chairs and authors had identified key messages that were either underemphasized in the chapters or absent from the executive summaries. While such messages may be eligible for inclusion in the SPM, adjustments are being made to ensure that these elements are elevated appropriately within the chapter structure itself – either by repositioning content or enhancing its visibility, while maintaining full alignment with the principle of unidirectionality and traceability.

The IMAG welcomed the clarification on unidirectionality and expressed appreciation for the progress being made in developing the SPM and enhancing the clarity of its narrative. Lastly, the IMAG expressed its appreciation for the iterative testing of the figures initiative and welcomed the opportunity to participate.

Review and feedback on the Review Editing Process

The Secretariat delivered an update on the review editing process for the GEO-7 report, noting that a total of 56 review editors were engaged in the process. These individuals were selected with deliberate attention to disciplinary expertise, gender parity, and regional diversity, comprising 30 male and 26 female reviewers. Each review editor was assigned to a specific chapter and worked in pairs, organized according to their respective areas of specialization. This team-based structure enabled the editors to cross-reference their assessments and collaboratively review the associated noted and content for each chapter. The Secretariat emphasized that the principal role of the review editors was to ensure the quality of the review process. It was mentioned that the chapter authors are now engaging with the feedback provided by the review editors.

In terms of specific developments on the review editing process since the First Order Draft (FOD), the Secretariat reported that review editors specializing in Indigenous and Local Knowledge were appointed to address comments in the newly incorporated IK&LK chapeaux. This inclusion of the chapeaux followed prior approval from the IMAG. Additionally, designated review editors were appointed for the chapeau addressing the global environmental crises and the SPM.

In reflecting on the SOD review editing process, the Secretariat acknowledged several operational challenges. For example, some review editor notes lacked sufficient clarity or were ambiguously worded, making it difficult for authors to determine the priority and intent of the feedback. There were also instances where review editors stated their agreement with the authors' responses but added that changes in the text would nonetheless be beneficial – without providing specific guidance. In other cases, review editors' comments included unclear suggestions or exceeded their evaluative role by proposing new or modified content, which falls outside the mandate of their

responsibilities.

To address these issues, the Secretariat implemented a series of targeted interventions. These included follow-up meetings and direct communications to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and limits of review editors. Additional guidance was provided by the lead review editors, emphasizing that the primary function of review editors is to assess whether and how authors have adequately responded to reviewer comments, and not to suggest new content or engage in rewriting. The Secretariat was also asked to improve coordination between review editors and CLAs. As a result, review editors were formally introduced to the respective CLAs to support a collaborative and constructive review process. To further enhance the clarity and relevance of the review editors' feedback, supplementary orientation materials and reference documents were shared.

The Secretariat additionally provided the IMAG with an updated on the current status and timeline of the review editing process. The Secretariat indicated that the final Review Editors' Report for the SPM will be complemented and ready for submission to the IMAG and MESAG by 15th of September.

Additionally, the IMAG raised a specific point regarding the nature of the comments being reviewed. It was observed that a few review comments extend beyond purely scientific or data-driven issues and instead address policy-related aspects. The IMAG inquired as to whether the review editors had encountered difficulties navigating this tension and how such cases were handled.
In response, the Secretariat acknowledged that several comments indeed reflect policy-level viewpoints, which has led to ongoing discussions between authors and review editors. These conversations are expected to continue until the 22nd of May deadline, and the Secretariat is facilitating targeted consultations between review editors and the respective author teams. In some instances, the resolution lies in authors persuading review editors of the appropriateness of their responses, while in others, the review editors are able to convince authors to consider revisions. Such exchanges, according to the Secretariat, are a normal and constructive part of the iterative review process.

The Secretariat further explained that some outstanding comments, while insightful, would require substantial revisions to the GEO-7 report, potentially altering its scope or direction. In these cases, the Secretariat and the assessment co-chairs are working together to respond diplomatically, referencing the parameters outlined in the scoping document and reaffirming the thematic priorities that were collectively agreed upon at earlier stages of the assessment.

IMAG expressed its appreciation for the Secretariat's updates but also voiced ongoing concerns regarding the complexity of multiple processes taking place in parallel and emphasized the importance of continuous oversight by the Secretariat to prevent any misalignment or unintended compromise in the final outputs.

Review and feedback on the draft validation report of the IMAG

The IMAG recalled that during its last in-person meeting in September, it had agreed to develop a Validation Opinion Report as part of its mandate to assess the implementation of the GEO-7 process. The timeline for preparing this report had already been discussed in previous sessions. It was reiterated that the current draft of the validation report is being finalized with the aim of completion by September. This would allow sufficient time to incorporate the forthcoming Review Editors' Report. The Secretariat expressed appreciation to the IMAG members for their constructive comments and edits on the draft validation opinion.

In response to this feedback, a recommendations section has been incorporated into the draft. However,

the Secretariat noted that, in follow-up discussion, there was a suggestion to separate the recommendations into a standalone document. This separation would help ensure the clarity and integrity of the validation opinion itself and would allow for collaboration with MESAG, to develop a collective set of recommendations for future GEO processes.
For the time being, the Secretariat has included the recommendations section within the main document to facilitate IMAG's review and input. IMAG members were encouraged to provide feedback on both the content and format of these recommendations to help shape the structure of the eventual joint document.

The IMAG expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's update and inquired whether the four draft recommendations currently included reflect the full extent of what the Secretariat envisions, or whether additional points should be considered. In response, the Secretariat encouraged members to consider broader, horizontal issues. With respect to the edits made based on previous comments, the IMAG conveyed satisfaction with the revisions and noted that the text was much improved. However, it highlighted that the section on horizontal issues requires further refinement, particularly in terms of how these issues are framed and concluded. Although no final proposal was presented at this stage, the IMAG stressed the importance of collective thinking in finalizing that part of the report. The IMAG further emphasized that the sections on horizontal issues and recommendations are central to the overall validation report. IMAG members appreciated the Secretariat's decision to shift the terminology from "challenges" to "horizontal issues", nothing that the latter better captures the systemic and cross-cutting nature of the matters addressed. While "challenges" could imply unresolved problems, the terms "horizontal issues" reflects that these matters have been acknowledged and addressed effectively during the GEO-7 process.

Finally, the IMAG reiterated its responsibility to deliver a clear verdict on whether the GEO-7 process was implemented in accordance with established objectives and procedures, and whether all requirements were met to a satisfactory standard. To advance this process, IMAG members will have a two-week period to review and submit comments on the latest version of the Validation Opinion Report.

Any Other Business

GEO-7 Meetings:

The Secretariat informed the IMAG that a coordination meeting is scheduled to take place on 20th of May. The coordination group comprises the co-chairs of the bureau of both the IMAG and the MESAG, the assessment co-chairs, and the co-chairs of the ad hoc open-ended group. During this coordination meeting, the IMAG will be expected to provide a progress update on its ongoing work.

The Secretariat confirmed that the next major milestone will be the SPM and Validation Opinion meetings, scheduled to take place from 2nd to 6th of June in the Republic of Korea. These meetings will serve as a critical opportunity for final discussions on the SPM and the validation of the scientific credibility of the GEO-7 process by the MESAG. The Secretariat also noted that meeting week coincided with World Environment Day, and several outreach activities are being planned in conjunction with this global event. These activities will be captured under the outreach section of the Validation Opinion Report.

In addition, the Secretariat announced that a joint meeting between IMAG and MESAG will be held on 24th of June. Invitations to this meeting have already been circulated. During this session, the assessment co-chairs are expected to present the outcomes of the SPM meeting and the IMAG to provide feedback on the status of the Validation Opinion Report. A discussion will also be held on the proposal to separate the recommendations section into a standalone document.

Regarding the review and approval meeting on the SPM, the Secretariat informed the IMAG of the change in schedule and location. Initially, the meeting was expected to take place in the United Arab Emirates in November but that was not successful and s a result, the meeting has been relocated to

Nairobi, with the new dates set for the 27th to 31st of October. Despite this challenge, the review timeline for the SPM remains unaffected. Member States will still have a 10-to-15-week period to review the document, and a two-week window will be provided for the assessment co-chairs, authors, and the Secretariat to process and respond to submitted comments ahead of the session. The Secretariat stated that it is in the process of formally notifying Member States of the revised meeting dates and venue. It will also be issuing a letter requesting Member States to nominate their official representatives for the October meeting.
Given financial constraints, the Secretariat will be able to support the participation of only one delegate from each developing country, and this support may be provided on a first-come, first-served basis, with attention to regional and gender balance.

Finally, the Secretariat will encourage Member States that maintain embassies in Nairobi to consider appointing their Deputy Permanent Representatives or other in-country diplomatic personnel to attend the review and approval meeting in person.

CPR-briefings:

The Secretariat recalled that the IMAG had previously recommended that the Secretariat provide regular updates to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) regarding the progress of the GEO-7 production process. In line with this recommendation, the Secretariat has ensured consistent reporting to the CPR. To date, briefings to the CPR have been conducted in December and April, with an additional session scheduled for June. These briefings have proven to be highly beneficial, allowing the Secretariat to inform Member States about key developments in the GEO-7 process. Notably, the Secretariat was able to mobilize Member States to facilitate the participation of national reviewers, ensuring that review comments were submitted from capital-level authorities.

The Secretariat also noted strong expression of support from Member States. There have been calls to ensure that GEO-7 is referenced in the Ministerial Declaration at the upcoming United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Additionally, Member States have recommended to schedule the launch of the GEO-7 on the first or second day of UNEA, to ensure that the report can meaningfully inform and influence the policy discussions that took place in the Republic of Korea.
The Secretariat further indicated that the upcoming June briefing will be used to notify Member States of the rescheduling of the SPM negotiation meeting. The Secretariat will also urge delegations to coordinate with their respective capitals regarding the official communication that is currently being disseminated, to ensure that adequate responses and nominations are received in a timely manner.
Looking ahead, the Secretariat anticipates participating in the CPR briefings in September and October, with the aim of preparing Member States for the SPM review and approval meeting.

In response, the IMAG inquired whether any issues of sensitivity or political complexity had been raised by Member States during the briefings, which might warrant further attention from the IMAG. Specifically, the IMAG was interested in identifying any matters that could potentially initiate policy debates during the SPM review and approval meeting, and which may need to be addressed in advance to ensure consensus-building and procedural coherence.
The Secretariat clarified that feedback received from Member States during the briefings reflected a combination of general support and constructive review. While delegates expressed strong appreciation for the regular updates provided by the Secretariat, specific concerns were raised regarding gender and regional representation within the GEO-7 process. The Secretariat emphasized that, of the 11 criteria guiding the composition and implementation of the process, representation and inclusivity remain a top priority, particularly in relation to gender balance and regional diversity, which continues to be closely monitored and addressed.
Moreover, the Secretariat reported that concerns had been raised during one session concerning alternative proteins and the reduction of animal protein consumption. This issue, though previously

addressed in GEO-6 and other assessments, prompted some Member States to re-emphasize their reservations. The Secretariat acknowledged that these discussions were not entirely unexpected. Another prominent issue raised by Member States involved the inclusion of diverse forms of knowledge, particularly Indigenous and Local Knowledge systems. While Member States expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's efforts in this regard, they also underscored the importance of ensuring these knowledge forms are visibly and meaningfully reflected in the final outputs. The importance of engaging youth and other underrepresented groups was similarly emphasized.

In preparation for the SPM review and approval meeting, the Secretariat informed the IMAG that it has been attending briefings and presentations from other assessments, such as the IPBES reports presented at the CPR. This was done to observe the nature of feedback provided by Member States and to identify trends or challenges that may arise in similar contexts, including those related to the use of artificial intelligence, grey literature, and validation of knowledge sources. These observations are being used to anticipate potential issues that could emerge during the SPM meeting.

Recognizing the importance of strategic preparation, the IMAG noted that having a comprehensive list of potential sensitive issues would be a valuable resource for all participants in the SPM review and approval meeting. Such a list would enable the IMAG, the coordination group, and other stakeholders to approach the meeting with a clear and coherent narrative. Consequently, the IMAG formally requested the Secretariat to compile and share a list of the most relevant and potentially contentious elements, to facilitate informed and constructive participation in the upcoming meeting. In response, the Secretariat confirmed that it has already initiated the development of such a list and committed to sharing it with the IMAG once it is finalized.

GEO supporting services:

In response to requests from Member States for the delivery of GEO supporting services beyond the production of the GEO-7 report, specifically in the areas of capacity building, knowledge generation, and support for policymakers, the Secretariat informed the IMAG that it is currently collaborating with 16 partner institutions in these areas.

As part of these efforts, the Secretariat is advancing the development of "Science-to-Policy" seminars. These seminars are being designed in partnership with a IGES in Japan, with the aim of translating the global and regional recommendations emerging from the GEO-7 report into actionable insights for national and subnational implementation. The Secretariat intends to disseminate the content of these seminars through UNEP's regional offices, collaborating centres, and UN Country Teams, ensuring that countries are adequately supported in adapting the GEO-7 recommendations to their specific national contexts.

The Secretariat provided an update on the ongoing collaboration with Sendas, based in Mexico, which has been instrumental in facilitating the dialogues on IK & LK. The Secretariat emphasized the importance of documenting the methodology, process, and lessons learned from the integration of IK & LK into the GEO-7 report. This reflection will not only serve the purposes of GEO-7 but will also provide valuable insight for UNEP's broader institutional efforts, particularly given the increasing international recognition of the importance of IK & LK in environmental assessment and decision making.

Additionally, the Secretariat noted that the Environmental Pulse Institute is contributing to the development of the GEO-7 glossary. The coding infrastructure for this glossary platform was shared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reflecting productive inter-agency collaboration. The glossary now allows GEO-7 authors to collaboratively review and agree upon definitions, fostering clarity and consistency in terminology used throughout the assessment.

The Secretariat also acknowledged the collaborating centre in Cairo, Egypt, which has been supporting the GEO-7 review process through the development and management of the READ platform. This platform has provided critical support in gathering and analysing statistical data related to reviewer input and engagement. Notably, the IPCC has expressed interest in adopting the READ platform for its own assessments, indicating the innovation and value it offers to the broader scientific community.

GRID-Arendal, another collaborating service, continues to provide comprehensive support across several dimensions of GEO-7 production. Turning to national level activities, the Secretariat reported significant progress in the development of Malawi's National State of Environment Report, which has now reached its SOD. Given the upcoming national elections, the finalization timeline of this report will be aligned with electoral and political considerations.

Furthermore, to maximize the impact of the SPM, the Secretariat intends to pilot-test selected key elements, such as visuals and core messages, with intended end-users. This user-feedback process is being developed in collaboration with the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, based at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. The Tyndall Centre has previously conducted a similar process with the IPCC, using a rigorous methodology to test and refine key graphics and messages based on user feedback.

Finally, the Secretariat expressed its appreciation for the support received from IMAG member organizations, which has contributed to the organization of the IK & LK dialogues. Furthermore, to the governments of the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Norway who have provided additional resources to strengthen these supporting services and to deepen engagement with the network of collaborating centres.

The IMAG concluded by thanking the Secretariat for the comprehensive update and expressed continued support for these activities.

List of Participants

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Apologies

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Dr. Fabian Wagner	Dean, Capacity Development and Academic Training, IIASA, Austria	Germany	Science and Technology
Ms. Djatougbe Aziaka	President and founder of welfare Togo; co-facilitator of UNEP NGO major group	Togo	Non-governmental organization