

**Name or GOOS Component:**

GOOS Biology and Ecosystems Expert Panel

**Report submitted by:**

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**Date submitted:**

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## Considerations for the GOOS Reform proposal

Draft proposal: <https://oceanexpert.org/document/37899>

### Mission, scope and accountability mechanism

(slides 7 - 10 and 24 - 26)

**What are your concerns regarding the reform proposal on mission, scope and accountability mechanism?**

1. The proposed mechanism for GOOS to receive additional funding from Member States (page 9) lacks clarity. It is not specified whether funds would be paid directly to GOOS, to IOC, or to UNESCO. The proposal should explain how new funds would be used, for example, to coordinate efforts and improve data interoperability across countries and sectors; as indirect funding channelled from Member States or the private sector to support long-term observing initiatives endorsed by GOOS; or a combination of both.
2. The key result on page 25 for the objective "evolve a globally integrated ocean observing system", framed as an increase in the number of Member States contributing to and sharing data from GOOS networks is insufficient. Progress toward this objective should be measurable even if the number of contributing Member States remains unchanged. Additionally, the proposal does not explain how the level of coordination and collaboration between states would be assessed. Clarification is also needed on the scope of "GOOS networks": does this refer exclusively to OCG observing networks, or does it also encompass BioEco community observing initiatives and programmes? How are observing initiatives not led by MS, e.g., intergovernmental or private-sector initiatives, captured under this framework?
3. The key result "# of co-developed initiatives or products with stakeholders" presupposes existing stakeholder buy-in and does not account for the reality that meaningful stakeholder engagement and co-development require dedicated funding and paid support. This assumption should be made explicit and addressed in the

proposal.

4. The accountability for increasing GOOS funding and commitments appears to fall disproportionately on the Secretariat and National Focal Points. The role and accountability of the Donor Coordination Group in fundraising efforts is not clearly articulated. Furthermore, the significant responsibilities placed on NFPs under this proposal are unlikely to be fulfilled without strong, committed backing from their respective Member States.

### **If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?**

- 1) A clear alternative is difficult to propose without a better understanding of which mechanisms are available for increasing Member State contributions directly to GOOS.
- 2) A more meaningful "Key result" for this objective would be the volume of data shared by each Member State and/or the number of new observing programmes from Member States contributing to GOOS. Clarity is also needed on what formally constitutes a "GOOS network", given that most BioEco EOVS do not yet have officially endorsed networks. We support BioEco EOVS communities pursuing GOOS endorsement and working toward the attributes expected of OCG networks. However, this transition requires sustained investment, both financial and in-kind, to secure buy-in and mature these communities into recognised global networks.
- 3) The new Donor Coordination Group must give explicit attention to the funding needs associated with co-development activities. It is not sustainable to continue relying on the Panels' expert volunteer workforce to deliver co-developed initiatives and stakeholder engagement without financial support. The continued dependence on short-term, project-based funding for core Panel support, particularly for the BioEco Panel, will undermine any progress in this area.
- 4) Accountability for the percentage increase in GOOS funding and commitments should rest primarily with the Donor Coordination Group, not with the Secretariat and NFPs. Expectations placed on NFPs under this proposal need to be recalibrated: the level of engagement assumed is high, yet NFP participation in this domain has historically been uneven. Without clearer accountability structures and realistic expectations, this component is unlikely to deliver.

### **How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like? (including with respect to your component)**

2. Assigning unique identifiers to all datasets contributed to GOOS, whether through federated data systems or centralised platforms such as OBIS, would enable consistent measurement of data volume and the number of contributing programmes per Member State. We recommend revising the Key Result to reflect the increase in data sharing by Member States as the primary metric. Providing clear criteria for what constitutes a GOOS network would also help the BioEco community understand the steps and standards required to achieve that recognition.

3. When developing funding proposals, explicit provision should be made for co-development activities, including stakeholder engagement. Core funding from IOC and WMO should be sought to support all essential staff, including the science officers who support the Panels, rather than continuing to outsource these roles, as has been the case for the BioEco Panel and as the current proposal appears to perpetuate.

4. The Donor Coordination Group should be added to the accountability matrix for reporting on the percentage increase in GOOS funding and commitments. Progress on this metric should serve as a direct measure of the Group's effectiveness and the value it adds as a new component of the GOOS governance structure.

### **Proposed structural changes nr. 1-5** (slides 11 - 19)

#### **What are your concerns regarding the reform proposal on the first five structural changes?**

- 1) Page 13 describes the GOOS Secretariat as comprising the Paris Office and a GOOS Project Office, but provides no explanation of what the Project Office encompasses. Clarification is needed on whether this includes consultants, Panel support functions, the OCG/ICG, and OceanOPS, or some subset thereof.
- 2) "Monitoring observing system design" is listed as a Panel responsibility under the proposed Terms of Reference. Fulfilling this role effectively will require close, sustained interaction and coordination with the new ICG. A single Vice-Chair for the BioEco Panel is unlikely to be sufficient for this purpose.
- 3) The proposal assumes the ICG will seamlessly take over coordination of all biological observing communities, an assumption that is not well-founded. GOOS recognition and buy-in from the broader biological observing community remains limited. OCG, and OceanOPS are neither widely known among biologists nor mandated to coordinate observing communities (data providers). Engagement with these communities currently rests with BioEco Panel experts and OBIS as the recognised data centre, and relies heavily on the outreach efforts of individual EOVS co-leads. Transferring this coordination function to the ICG will not be a minor undertaking; it will require deliberate planning, adequate financial resources, and sufficient workforce capacity.
- 4) The proposed GOOS SC Regional Experts (page 18) are to be selected by WMO and IOC, creating a risk that biodiversity and biological observing expertise will not be represented if IOC does not nominate appropriately qualified candidates. A mechanism to ensure this expertise is consistently present on the SC should be built into the selection process.
- 5) The suggestion on page 19 that staffing for Panel Scientific Officers, ICG Officers, and other technical roles can be "adopted by other organisations" is inadequate and repeats a structural failure already demonstrated in practice. The BioEco Panel Science Officer position was outsourced to external organisations from a Member

State from inception, and after funding was stopped, the Panel has operated over the last 6 years without a fully funded core position, relying instead on fragmented project funding that has delayed activities and eroded continuity. If Expert Panels are genuinely considered important components of the GOOS system, their core support positions must be secured through stable, sponsor-provided funding, not outsourced to external organisations. This approach also undermines the retention of institutional knowledge and the ability to attract and keep capable staff over the long term. Dedicated support for Panel Co-Chairs should also be considered.

### **If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?**

- 1) The composition and remit of the GOOS Project Office within the GOOS Secretariat should be clearly defined.
- 2) Careful thought is needed on how the three Panels will interact with the ICG once it is established. For the BioEco Panel in particular, a single Vice-Chair is unlikely to be sufficient in the early stages of this transition. A fully funded annual face-to-face meeting between the Panels and the ICG should be provided to facilitate meaningful exchange.
- 3) A careful, well-resourced transition plan is needed to move ocean observing coordination and data responsibilities from the BioEco Panel to the ICG. This plan should clearly articulate how the expertise and capability built within the Panel will be transferred, and should be supported by a dedicated paid position working across both components. The role of OBIS within the ICG should be formalised, including its relationship with OBIS nodes, which already coordinate data collection from biological observing communities and support data pipelines.
- 4) The selection criteria for SC members should include a requirement for balanced disciplinary representation, ensuring that all domains of ocean observing — including the biological and ecosystem domain, are consistently reflected in decision-making.
- 5) Core funding from GOOS sponsors must be committed to supporting all Expert Panels and the ICG. Achieving GOOS's mission requires a serious, long-term commitment to sustaining the full breadth of its coordinating functions including, all three Panels, and the new ICG. Stable, multi-year funding is essential to maintain continuity, preserve institutional knowledge, and provide coherent expert guidance on data requirements and observing system design. These are not peripheral functions, they are central to GOOS's value and should be funded accordingly. Additional support for Co-Chairs, workshops, and targeted engagement activities could be pursued through project-based or outsourced funding to complement the core investment.

### **How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like? (including with respect to your component)**

2 & 3. Develop a structured transition plan to transfer data coordination responsibilities from the BioEco Panel to the ICG. The plan should identify what expertise and functions need to

be transferred, over what timeframe, and with what resourcing. A dedicated paid position bridging the BioEco Panel and the ICG should be established to manage this transition and maintain continuity. The role of OBIS within the ICG should be formalised from the outset, recognising it as a core component for biological data coordination and community engagement.

4. IOC and WMO should include equal disciplinary representation as an explicit requirement in the selection criteria for SC scientific and technical experts, ensuring biological and ecosystem observing is consistently represented alongside physical and biogeochemical disciplines.

5. Sponsors must commit core funding to support all essential staff across the Expert Panels and the ICG. This is a structural requirement, not an optional enhancement; without it, the reform cannot deliver on its stated ambitions.

### **Proposed structural change: Infrastructure Coordination Group (ICG)** (slide 20)

#### **What are your concerns regarding the reform proposal on the ICG?**

The expansion of the OCG's remit into an ICG is a substantial undertaking. Moving from metadata management and network coordination to coordinating "all ocean observing data providers" (including GOOS Networks, the biology community, and regional and coastal observations) raises serious questions about feasibility. OceanOPS and WMO have no established experience in biological data management or in coordinating observing communities in this space. The biological ocean observing community is fragmented, unevenly engaged with GOOS, and operates very differently from its physical and biogeochemical counterparts. The data itself is considerably more complex to handle.

OBIS is already well-positioned in this space: it specialises in ocean biodiversity data and is deeply connected to biological observing communities through its global network of OBIS Nodes. The ICG concept has merit, greater integration across the observing system is a legitimate goal, but its remit must be carefully scoped to build on what already exists rather than attempting to replicate or displace it.

The transition of biological observing community coordination from the BioEco Panel to the ICG, if this is indeed within the ICG's intended scope, will take time and must be approached with adequate resources and a clear plan. How the ICG will engage effectively with the biological community, given that GOOS remains poorly known and recognised in that space, and how it will do so without the Panel's expertise, remain open and important questions.

Finally, a GOOS Biodiversity Strategy has been developed, and the design of the ICG will have significant implications for how its implementation plan takes shape and where accountability for specific actions within that Strategy will sit. This interdependency needs to be explicitly acknowledged and addressed in the reform process.

#### **If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?**

Before proceeding, the proposed scope of the ICG should be carefully reviewed. The ambition to coordinate all ocean observing data providers, including the biological community, is substantial, and the time and resources required should be honestly assessed against what is realistically deliverable.

A more effective path would be to build on existing capability rather than construct new coordination structures from scratch. The BioEco Panel, OBIS, and established external partners already hold the expertise, relationships, and community recognition that the ICG will need. Leveraging these assets is the most efficient route to meaningful coordination across biological observing communities and to improving data flows, metadata standards, and interoperability. Over time, this approach would also accelerate recognition of GOOS and the ICG within the biological community. Credibility in this space is earned through trusted relationships, demonstrated expertise and benefit.

Specifically, OBIS leadership should be formally embedded within the ICG, with the ICG building explicitly on the OBIS Node network for regional and thematic coordination, and maintaining close collaboration with the BioEco Panel for scientific and technical input. Linking OBIS Nodes with National Focal Points would further strengthen information flows at the national level, creating a more coherent connection between global coordination and in-country implementation.

If the full scope proves too ambitious, a more targeted revision of the ICG's remit is an alternative; meaningful integration can still be achieved without the ICG assuming all coordination responsibilities. The BioEco Panel is already working alongside OceanOPS and the OCG to improve metadata flows for biological observing and to develop criteria for assessing the maturity of biological observing programmes. OceanOPS and the OCG can continue to advance this work within their current remit, in close collaboration with OBIS and the Panel, without requiring a large expansion of scope.

Either path will require dedicated resourcing. The question is not whether to invest, but where and how. However, the first option will require more substantive resources.

**How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like?** (including with respect to your component)

**Revise ICG scope with full understanding of its implications.**

If the full proposed scope is retained:

- Develop a structured transition plan in close collaboration with the BioEco Panel, which currently holds the relationships and expertise needed to coordinate biological observing communities.
- Include at least one OBIS representative formally within the ICG, and establish a dedicated paid position, separate from the Vice-Chair role, to work across the BioEco Panel and the ICG, connecting these two components during and beyond the



transition period. This position may be temporary, but it is additional to the core staffing required to stand up and sustain the new system.

- Some biological observing communities are already well-coordinated and represent an accessible entry point for early ICG engagement. These communities should be prioritised for initial outreach, with care taken to respect the identities and branding they have established independently.

If the ICG scope is revised to extend the current OCG and OceanOPS remit to include biology:

- Develop an explicit plan to encompass biological observing within the current remit of the OCG and OceanOPS, with OBIS as an essential and formally recognised partner throughout.
- Scope out the technology and data system improvements required to support biological data within this expanded framework, as these needs are distinct from those of physical and biogeochemical observing.
- Establish a dedicated paid position to work across the BioEco Panel, OBIS, and the OCG/OceanOPS, ensuring coherent coordination across all components.
- Community coordination with biological observing groups should remain within the BioEco Panel's remit, drawing on its established expertise and networks.

## **Proposed structural change: NFP role and interaction model** (slide 21)

### **What are your concerns regarding the reform proposal on NFP role and interaction?**

The responsibilities assigned to NFPs under the proposed reform are substantial, to the point where the role may require a full-time position in many Member States. This is not a straightforward expectation to meet. The proposal appears to assume broad Member State agreement with this expanded role. Levels of engagement with GOOS activities also vary considerably across Member States, and the proposal does not adequately address how this unevenness will be managed or improved.

### **If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?**

Member States should be actively involved in defining the activities NFPs are expected to undertake, and explicit assurances of MS support, including funding, should be sought before the ToRs are finalised. Expanding NFP responsibilities without that foundation risks creating obligations that cannot be met. If Member State support cannot be secured, the NFP role should be recalibrated to reflect what is genuinely feasible, rather than setting expectations that will go unmet and undermine confidence in the reform overall.

### **How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like? (including**

with respect to your component)

Conduct a structured survey or dedicated consultation with Member States to review the proposed NFP Terms of Reference, gather feedback, and establish realistic expectations before the reform is adopted.

Where Member States confirm their support, ensure this includes concrete provision, whether funding, institutional backing, or both, for NFP activities such as attending national committees and engaging with GOOS components.

Design a streamlined, low-burden reporting system that works for both NFPs and the Secretariat. Coordinating reports from 81 NFPs simultaneously represents a significant administrative challenge; a staggered or tiered approach to reporting cycles should be considered from the outset.

## **Proposed structural change: GOOS Regional Alliances** (slides 22-23)

### **How do you see the future role of GRAs in GOOS?**

GRAs are an important component of the GOOS architecture, but one that would benefit from clearer direction and a more defined remit. Under the proposed reform, NFPs would coordinate national observing networks while GRAs, if retained, would focus on end-user engagement. This division is difficult to reconcile with the current reality: several GRAs (including EuroGOOS, IOOS, CIOOS, and IMOS) are already actively coordinating national observing networks and have deep expertise in ocean observing, not in end-user engagement. Redirecting them toward a function that the proposal simultaneously assigns to NFPs lacks coherence and risks undermining some of the most capable regional coordination structures GOOS has.

A further consideration is that ocean processes are inherently transboundary. Regional approaches are often better suited, and better funded, for coordinating observing networks than national ones. This reality should weigh heavily in any decision about whether and how to retain GRAs in the reformed structure.

**How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like?** (including with respect to your component)

**Option 1 is preferred.** The existing expertise and regional reach of GRAs should be



harnessed and built upon. Rather than reassigning GRAs to end-user engagement, the reform should empower them to fulfil a genuinely regional coordination role, working closely with NFPs at the national level and with the Panels at the scientific and technical level. This would strengthen the coherence of the overall system and make better use of what GRAs already do well.

**Option 2 carries significant risks.** There are existing examples of regional bodies operating at arm's length from GOOS. For example, the Southern Ocean Observing System has developed its own set of EOVs, many of which diverge from those of GOOS, reflecting a pattern of limited communication and weak integration with the global framework. Allowing GRAs greater autonomy to operate independently would risk repeating and amplifying this problem, fragmenting global ocean observing coordination and undermining data interoperability and exchange at precisely the scale where consistency matters most.

## Governance

(slides 27 - 33)

### What are your concerns regarding the proposed governance?

Page 32 see specific comments on ICG and the role OBIS and the Panel have.

### If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?

See alternative under ICG

### How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like? (including with respect to your component)

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## Draft Implementation Plan

(slides 34 - 36)

### What are your concerns regarding the proposed implementation plan?

- 1) The BioEco Panel Science Officer position is currently 50% funded through a project, with that contribution set to drop to 20% in 2027. The Donor Coordination Group is not scheduled to launch until the end of 2026, and the current proposal suggests that this position, along with ICG support, could be outsourced to whichever Member State

volunteers to take it on. This is not a sustainable arrangement. The position is at immediate risk, and with it, the functioning of the BioEco Panel itself.

- 2) The joint Panels meeting referenced for Q3 2026 requires urgent clarification. The BioEco Panel already has plans for a face-to-face meeting in that period. If a cross-Panel meeting is to take place in the same window, planning needs to begin now, dates should be set and funding confirmed without delay.

**If you don't agree with the proposal - what is the alternative? Why?**

- 1) Core funding for the BioEco Panel Science Officer position must be secured from 2027 and maintained as part of the GOOS core staffing structure once the reform is established. This is a non-negotiable requirement for Panel continuity, without it, the BioEco Panel will not be able to function.
- 2) The calendar for upcoming cross-Panel meetings should be clarified and circulated as a matter of priority, with dates, logistics, and funding confirmed in sufficient time to align with existing Panel planning cycles.

**How do we make it work? What does the implementation look like? (including with respect to your component)**

Outlined above.

**Any additional considerations for the GOOS SC on GOOS reform?**

GOOS must give serious consideration to the continuity of its components and the retention of institutional knowledge across the organisation. The BioEco Panel has not received adequate support from GOOS from the start, and the current proposal continues to underestimate both the Panel's contribution and the resources it requires, most visibly in the suggestion that core support positions be outsourced to external organisations. This is not a viable model for a function that sits at the heart of GOOS's mission. If GOOS is to fulfil that mission, which explicitly encompasses healthy ocean ecosystems, and wants to implement its Biodiversity Strategy, it must commit to properly resourcing all three Panels and the ICG through stable core funding, and must not outsource any positions that are essential to their operation. Continuity, institutional memory, and long-term effectiveness cannot be built on a foundation of fragmented, externally dependent support.