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Preamble

"GCOS Goes Green" is based on the United Nations (UN) "Greening the Blue" initiative". GCOS' UN sponsors - WMO, UN Environment and UNESCO IOC – are part of this effort to reduce the UN System's environmental footprint and GCOS' strategy builds on it.

1. "Keeping Watch Over Our Climate" – Background

The GCOS programme is mandated to provide comprehensive information on the total climate system, including the detection of climate change and monitoring its impacts globally¹. The experts contributing to the GCOS programme are only too well placed to see the negative impacts on ongoing climate change, and as a result feel both a concern, and a responsibility, to reduce their own impacts on climate, and that of the GCOS programme. This concern is increasingly shared by societies around the world, and phenomena like the "Fridays for Future" movement, where students demand climate action, have an increasing influence on national and international policymaking. The growing disquiet, not only for the climate but also for a sustainable future in general, leads countries to mitigate their contribution to climate change and rethink their use of natural resources in general. The Sustainable Development Goals² (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) reflect at a global level this will for a sustainable future. Internally, the UN has seized this responsibility with the "Greening the Blue" initiative³, with the goal to find more sustainable ways of working for the UN family. GCOS' UN sponsors - WMO, UN Environment and UNESCO IOC - participate in this initiative and have pledged to

¹ Memorandum of Understanding between the World Meteorological Organization the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Council for Science, 1998,

https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=19904.

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

³ <https://www.greeningtheblue.org/>

measure and report their greenhouse gas emissions and environmental waste generation and to make serious efforts to reduce both.

Like its sponsors, GCOS integrates ecological principles in its current way of working. In order to remain credible as a climate programme, particularly in the context of the Paris Agreement, GCOS started a process to reduce its environmental impacts to a minimum. These efforts need to be measurable and traceable, but they also need to be accommodated alongside GCOS' other objectives, such as the need to ensure global outreach and presence. At the 26th session of the GCOS Steering Committee in Helsinki in 2018, the members of the committee decided to establish a task team to draft a "green strategy". With the strategy rolled out in this document, GCOS pledges its dedication to neutralize its carbon footprint and to minimize its ecological footprint, to "Go Green" for a sustainable future of our planet.

2. "Monitoring the Observing System" – Measuring GCOS' footprint

GCOS is all about observing and monitoring and we know that sound information is key for efficient action – "you cannot manage what you cannot measure". Therefore GCOS will monitor the reduction in its environmental and climate footprint to make progress traceable and to ensure efficiency.

The major source of emissions for GCOS as a global programme is travel. GCOS' air travels are arranged by WMO's travel unit and information on CO₂ emissions are included by default in any offer. In order to monitor the emissions, these measures are implemented:

- The GCOS Secretariat monitors all CO₂ emissions and costs of travel of GCOS.
- The GCOS Secretariat keeps track on travels that have been avoided in order to reduce the footprint.

The main work of GCOS relies on scientists working in an honorary capacity and only part time for GCOS, seconded by their organizations. Therefore, the overall monitoring of the ecological footprint for all work done by GCOS is not possible, as much of this is conducted outside the immediate confines of the GCOS office; however, individual monitoring can be encouraged within their organizations. Since the GCOS Secretariat is hosted by WMO, monitoring energy use and waste production of the secretariat is already undertaken by WMO as part of "Greening the Blue". Therefore the numbers can be derived from the overall WMO statistics:

- The GCOS Secretariat will request the average per capita use of energy as well as waste production from WMO on an annual basis.
- ➔ The statistics for air travel and the avoided CO₂ emissions for all GCOS related travels as well as energy and waste production of the GCOS Secretariat will be presented annually to the GCOS Steering Committee.

3. "GCOS' Determined Contributions" – Goals

Limiting global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels as foreseen in the Paris Agreement requires that "*global net human-caused emissions of CO₂ would need to*

fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching 'net zero' around 2050."⁴

This goal can only be reached by rapid and far-reaching efforts and transitions in almost all aspects of human life on our planet. As an international climate programme, GCOS wants to contribute to this effort and demonstrate that the global goal is realistic and feasible. In fact, GCOS and WMO are already carbon neutral, since all flights and other CO₂ emissions are compensated through the United Nations Carbon offset platform⁵.

GCOS affiliated experts should also embrace a responsibility beyond the compensation, not only to have a neutral emission balance but actively to reduce their gross emissions. This implies that the experts should further reduce their air travels, GCOS' main source of CO₂ emissions, as much as possible. Keeping in mind that GCOS as an international programme has other objectives to accommodate, including global outreach and presence, this is no simple and straight-forward task. Consequently, GCOS will need to undergo a transformative process which is guided by reduction goals. During this process, GCOS scrutinizes and challenges its current way of working and will establish working structures that help to reduce air travels and cost efficiently without losing track of other goals. Therefore, the GCOS reduction goals are implemented step-wise and over a multi-year period and allow the programme to develop and incorporate new ways of working. GCOS pledges:

- To reduce air miles and related emissions by 25% by 2025 compared to the average of 2015-2019 as a first step.
- To reduce air miles and related emissions by 50% by 2030 compared to the average of 2015-2019 as a second step.
- To further reduce air miles and related emissions continuously towards the minimal travel required to be operational.

Beside reducing CO₂ emissions related to air travel, GCOS intends to reduce its ecological footprint in general by reducing energy consumption and waste production. Also here, GCOS ambitions are to be a role model and set high standards:

- To reduce energy consumption and waste production of the GCOS Secretariat in accordance with the "Greening the Blue" initiative goals.
- To encourage the members of all its bodies as well as its partners to reduce their individual ecological footprints and be ambassadors of sustainable working within their organizations.

4. "Walk the talk" – Reduction Measures

4.1. Meeting culture and structural efficiency

GCOS is dedicated to reach its ambitious targets and "walk the talk". However, there is not one determined way to reach the goals. Particularly the drastic envisaged reductions

⁴ IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 32 pp.

⁵ <https://offset.climateneutralnow.org/>

of air travel needs courageous but cautious changes in the current way in which GCOS's bodies, i.e., panels, working groups or task teams, work and communicate. A task team with its limited and focused charge, the GCOS scientific panels or the GCOS Steering Committee have very different ways of working and a "one-size-fits-all solution" to reduce air miles for these bodies is impossible. But in the same way, a 'one size fits all' approach to the conduct of the work of different GCOS elements is also not appropriate and this fact allows us to be flexible in conducting their operation. In order to identify most effective ways to reduce emissions and still fulfil its mandate thoroughly, GCOS will test and implement several measures as appropriate for its different bodies.

- The GCOS Secretariat will support the planning of future meetings based on air miles scenarios (e.g. joint meeting place A versus place B or joint meeting versus regional meetings linked through virtual sessions).
- Plan the need for joint and virtual meetings in view of the upcoming reporting cycle (GCOS Status Report Update in 2021, GCOS IP Update in 2022).
- Conduct the work of subsidiary bodies (working groups, task teams etc.) through flexible means which will allow reduction, or even elimination, of travel by use of videoconferences, interactive shared document writing, delegated work tasks etc.
- Use the savings on travel budget as an incentive (e.g. the panel saving travel money can bring ideas about an appropriate use of the corresponding budget).
- All GCOS bodies are challenged to come up with proposals during each meeting until the 50%-reduction goal for this panel, working group or task team is reached (compared to the average of 2015-2019). These plans will be presented on a regular basis by the GCOS Secretariat to the GCOS Steering Committee.

The GCOS Steering Committee collected ideas on how the GCOS' bodies could change their meeting culture and reduce their footprints, including the following suggestions:

- Proposal A: Hold joint meetings every 1.5 years with regular virtual meetings of subgroups at regular basis (e.g. quarterly) in between.
 - Proposal B: Hold joint meetings every second year with regular virtual meetings of subgroups at regular basis (e.g. quarterly) in between.
 - Proposal C: Hold joint meetings every third year with regular virtual meetings of subgroups at regular basis (e.g. quarterly) in between.
 - Proposal D: Hold joint meetings every third year. In the other years, hold regional meetings attended by a core team physically and the others joining in remotely for specific items.
 - Proposal E: Hold joint meetings every second year with local meetings in the member's country in every other. The local meetings can be linked with virtual sessions.
 - Proposal F: Change the meeting philosophy to hold shorter, more frequent and targeted meetings via video to address issues in a more timely and efficient manner, with more comprehensive face-to-face meetings every two years
- ➔ The implemented options will be evaluated by the GCOS Secretariat and results presented on a regular basis to the GCOS Steering Committee.

4.2. Green working culture

- All GCOS Secretariat staff attends the online tutorial of "Greening the Blue"⁶.
- The GCOS Secretariat implements and promotes several immediate measures:
 - Hold paperless meetings

⁶ <http://portals.unssc.org/mod/scorm/view.php?id=9>

- Ban plastic bottles and non-recyclable coffee/water cups
- Encourage vegetarian and regional catering during meetings
- Encourage hosts to avoid using disposable plates, cups and bottles during meetings
- All members of GCOS' bodies, particularly newly designated ones, will be made aware of GCOS' reduction goals and the GCOS Goes Green strategy. They will also be encouraged to attend the online tutorial of "Greening the Blue".

5. "Do good and talk about it" – Communication approach

GCOS wishes to become a role model for other WMO programmes and for organizations in and outside the UN system and in the scientific world. Therefore sharing its experience as a champion in sustainability is a crucial component of the GCOS Goes Green strategy. GCOS' approach to communicate its efforts and achievements includes:

- Address the topic and present a summary of the strategy in all meetings of its bodies.
- Present the strategy as well as highlighted efforts and achievements on a dedicated page on the GCOS website.
- Present and address the strategy in GCOS publications and reports.