

## **The 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy**

Submitted by Geoffroy Lamarche

### **SUMMARY**

Following GGC38 in November 2021, a Strategy Drafting Working Group was appointed by GGC to devise a GEBCO Strategy. The final document “2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy” is the fruit of multiple discussions. Both Vision and Mission were revised. The strategy is organized around five pillars critical to achieving its Vision and Mission: Data, Technologies and Standards, Capacity, Community, and Governance. The strategy now need endorsement from its parents’ organizations.

Action to be taken: See section 4

Related documents: The 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy

## **1 Introduction**

GEBCO is an internationally recognised and well-respected program run under the auspices of the International Hydrographic Organisation (IOC) and Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

While both parent organisations have their respective strategies, the absence of a published strategy for GEBCO was noted at the 38<sup>th</sup> GEBCO Guiding Committee (GGC) meeting (GGC38) in November 2021 in Monaco. GEBCO’s original vision “to be the most authoritative, publicly available bathymetry data sets for the world’s oceans” has remained the same since the inception of GEBCO in 1903.

## **2 The need for a Strategy**

GGC38 felt a need to investigate the opportunity to revise this vision and with it the mission and therefore write a first strategy.

The benefits GEBCO would get from a published strategy are many and include:

1. Clarifying its core business and providing transparency on its goals, objectives, and intended actions to stakeholders
2. Fostering trust among the community so as to help members plan for the future.
3. Strengthening relationships and alignment with parent organizations, enhancing collaboration and support.

4. A public strategy will better engage a wider audience, including policymakers, researchers, and the general public, fostering collaboration and support for GEBCO's mission.
5. Unifying its mission to enhance collaboration and leadership thus ensuring alignment of efforts within sub-committees, projects and work programmes
6. Providing a roadmap for future growth and development and holding itself accountable for achieving its stated objectives, enabling better tracking and evaluation of progress over time.
7. Periodic reviews and updates of the strategy will ensure GEBCO remains agile and responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities in ocean mapping and research.

Following discussion at GGC38, it was unanimously decided that a strategy should be developed, including considering the need to update both its vision and mission.

### **3 The Strategy Drafting Working Group**

A strategy drafting working group was appointed, consisting of the following members:

- Dr Geoffroy Lamarche (Chair)
- Mr David Millar (Deputy-Chair)
- Ms Kim Picard
- Mr George Spoelstra

The role of the drafting group was to

1. Draft the Terms of Reference (TOR)
2. Draft the Rule of Procedures (ROP)
3. Develop a first complete draft of the strategy for discussion at GGC39
4. Finalize the strategy for presentation at UNESCO-IOC and IHO as the parent organizations.

### **4 Principles and delivery strategies**

In developing the strategy, the drafting working group used the following principles:

- Support the IOC and IHO in engaging with national government and coordinating efforts
- Engage at the UN and other multilateral organisations
- Leverage the parent organisations, subcommittees, subordinate projects and other relevant initiatives
- Nurture and develop partnerships with stakeholders to enhance visibility and efficiency
- Ensure the entire ocean space is considered
- Ensure open, diverse, equitable and inclusive cultures

## **5 Development of the 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy**

Both TOR and ROP were developed and accepted within the first 6 months following GGC38.

A first complete draft was presented at GGC39 in November 2022 in Southampton for discussion.

The GEBCO Strategy 2023-2030 has been developed by the GEBCO Strategy Drafting Working Group with discussions essentially undertaken via email. The drafting working group met several times online (video) to discuss progress and specific issues raised.

One-on-one meetings were also held at various times when possible or needed.

Other members of the GGC were invited to discuss advanced drafts at online workshop on 21 February 2023 and 7 Sep 2023.

A second complete draft was presented at GGC40 in November 2023 in Monaco for discussion.

The present final strategy was completed in December 2023.

All meetings were minuted and the various versions of the GEBCO Strategy 2023-2030 are archived.

The 2023-2030 GEBCO strategy is organized around five pillars critical to achieving its Vision and Mission:

1. Delivering open and fit for purpose seabed data
2. Supporting, promoting and using innovative solutions to continuously improve the GEBCO data value chain
3. Establishing global infrastructure to develop capacity
4. Engaging communities and partners to best deliver GEBCO's mission
5. Gaining support for our mission through robust processes that influence decision-making

This framework was discussed at GGC39 and subsequently the efforts of the Working Group were focused on the final wording of the strategy. Several in-depth discussions were held, particularly regarding the articulation of the vision and mission.

The GGC was provided with regular updates and in-depth discussions were held a two annual meeting.

The final wording of GEBCO's vision is as follows:

*To bring knowledge about our planet's seabed to everyone*

And GEBCO's mission is presented below:

*To produce free, open, and complete seabed data and information for the world's oceans. This is achieved by enabling and inspiring seabed mapping efforts through international collaboration, technological innovation, capacity development, and education.*

## 6 Challenges

Multiple comments were provided by the member of the GGC on the 21 Feb 2023 version (v.2).

### 6.1 Bathymetry vs seabed data

One key challenge resided in concerns from the extended GGC membership about transitioning from the use of the word 'bathymetry' to that of 'seabed data' or 'seabed datasets.' The following table synthesizes the discussions and rationale for the decision made by the GEBCO Strategy Drafting Working Group to elect for the use of the terms 'seabed data' in the strategy.

The main point of discussion revolved around the use of the words “seabed data” and “seabed dataset” as opposed to “bathymetry. The pros and cons of using one terms rather than the other were discussed in depth. Overall the drafting group remains confident that the use of seabed data was better representing the dynamic of GEBCO into the future. All arguments against the use of seabed data are recorded in a separate document and demonstrate that the challenge of moving from bathymetry to seabed data will be significant, but it was felt that this was a challenge that GEBCO was ready and should take.

The table below recapitulate the pros and cons of using seabed data instead of bathymetry

Pro (in favor of using Seabed data)	Cons (infavor of using bathymetry)
The term “seabed data” includes bathymetry	Seabed data is too wide
Strategy needs to look beyond 2030; Critical to be ready to move fwd	It makes strategy unclear
Strategy is aspirational – providing seabed data is an aspiration	Bathymetry is GEBCO’s focus and should remain so; It’s what we’ve done and will continue to do
Bathymetry is too technical; seabed is much clearer	plan is to go to 2030 - so bathy as with SB2030 should be there and bathy only
Seabed more readable; more flexible	seabed“ -- as distinct to “bathymetry” -- is a <b>fundamental</b> shift/extension of GEBCO as it currently is. Are we recognizing that fundamental change?
As soon as we use bathymetry we lose people, if this is for everyone then seabed data	Seabed 2030 is about bathymetry and shows this is a huge commitment already
General bathymetry is already there, it's not precise enough	Perfectly (better) aligned with past and future
SCUFN is based on features not only on bathymetry; we need a more unified view	We would need to define the working definition of “seabed data”
big impact of BBNJ at the moment - if we do not take these onboard who will	all our standard will need change
if not us who would?	We may not get ratification from IHO and IOC; briefing note to the IRCC then IHO council; Should be included in the IHO strategic plan
We're not doing chart anymore; GEBCO has already moved substantially from charts	Far too ambitious - Be careful what we wish for! This is a huge change in data types, data volumes, data base structures, and human, organizational and financial capacity. Do we actually mean to do

	that? In reality? In practical terms? Over what time frame?
We may not be resourced for seabed data but we aspire to do it	We're struggling to collect, compile and distribute bathymetry, what are the implications of adding other data sets ?
Accounts for development of technology	Do not underestimate the implications of one simple word change
Use accessible language but clarify the limitation can't limit bathymetry to everything else	This has come up many times over last 40 yrs and the conclusion has always been that GeoHab or others were doing it; or more significantly that it would be all too hard for GEBCO to take on.
need to start the move toward dataset; provide an umbrella for seabed dataset	does the term 'seabed' itself have a well-accepted definition? Where does the seabed end?
It adds from SB2030 and goes beyond	GEBCO would need at new name, e.g., General Seabed Characterization of the Ocean (GESCO).
GEBCO has bathymetry - should be put more in the fore but keep seabed	

## 6.2 Support to Seabed 2030

Another significant comment from the wider GEBCO's community was the need to better acknowledge the NF Seabed 2030 programme. This was noted and agreed by the drafting group and acted upon. It was also observed that the strategy will take GEBCO beyond year 2030. It is therefore critical that GEBCO is ready in 2030 to move forward and beyond the NF Seabed 2030 project.

## 7 Actions

The GGC is requested to:

- a. **Note** the contents of this report;
- b. Endorse the 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy
- c. Inform GEBCO's parent organisation of the endorsement of the 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy
- d. When endorsed, make the 2023-2030 GEBCO Strategy public on the GEBCO's web page.
- e. Consider a media release and advertising through social networks noting the importance of the document for GEBCO.
- f. **Take** any other action deemed appropriate.