GSSB summary of the meeting held on 23 April 2020

Approved by the GSSB on 20 May 2020
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Participants

Present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Klafter</td>
<td>Business enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corli le Roux</td>
<td>Mediating institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustavo Sinner</td>
<td>Mediating institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Princing</td>
<td>Business enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Kuszewski</td>
<td>Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent Swift</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirsten Margrethe Hovi</td>
<td>Business enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loredana Carta</td>
<td>Labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michel Washer</td>
<td>Business enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Colley</td>
<td>Labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rama Krishnan Venkateswaran</td>
<td>Investment institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robyn Leeson</td>
<td>Vice-Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tung-Li (Tony) Mo</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent Kong</td>
<td>Business enterprise</td>
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Apologies:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evan Harvey</td>
<td>Investment institution</td>
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In attendance:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bastian Buck</td>
<td>Chief of Standards, Standards Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian Balaban</td>
<td>Team Assistant, Standards Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Miller</td>
<td>Senior Coordinator, Governance Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Espinach</td>
<td>Senior Manager, Standards Division</td>
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<td>Margarita Lysenkova</td>
<td>Manager, Sector Program, Standards Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia D’Adhemar</td>
<td>Senior Manager Sector Program, Standards Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah-Jayne Dominic</td>
<td>Senior Manager, Standards Division</td>
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List of abbreviations

- GSSB: Global Sustainability Standards Board
- IIRC: International Integrated Reporting Council
- SD: Standards Division
Decisions and action items

Decisions

GSSB Decision 2020.07 The GSSB resolved to approve Item 01 – Draft summary of the GSSB meeting held on 26 March 2020.

GSSB Decision 2020.08 The GSSB resolved to approve Item 02 – Proposed Project Working Group Composition for the Agriculture and Fishing Sector Standard.

Action items

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<td><strong>Session 2</strong></td>
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<td>• SD to begin the process of formulating a revised oil and gas Standard, which will be submitted for further public comment.</td>
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<td><strong>Session 3</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Session 4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• SD to submit the exposure draft of GRI 101: Using GRI Standards (GRI 101), followed with with targeted questions, for public comment.</td>
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Session 1: Welcome

GSSB Chair Judy Kuszewski (henceforth the Chair) welcomed the GSSB and presented an overview of the meeting agenda.

The GSSB was presented with Item 01 – Draft summary of the GSSB meeting held on 26 March 2020 for discussion and approval.

GSSB Decision 2020.07 The GSSB resolved to approve Item 01 – Draft summary of the GSSB meeting held on 26 March 2020.

The Chair announced an addition to the agenda regarding the convening of an ad hoc sub-committee of the GSSB, to study the GRI Standards in relation to the European Commission’s desire to re-
open the EU non-financial reporting directive and to develop European non-financial reporting
standards.

The Chair invited GSSB Members to offer recommendations regarding this sub-committee, and to
express their interest in taking part.

Session 2: Scope of the oil, gas, and coal
Sector Standard

The GSSB was presented with Item 05 – draft GRI Sector Standard: oil, gas and coal (continued from
26 March 2020).

The SD resumed discussion of the oil, gas and coal Standard unfinished at the last GSSB meeting.
Subsequent to an earlier approval of the sector project proposal, three stakeholder submissions had
raised concerns about coal being included in a single sector standard alongside oil and gas.

Feedback from the project working group (PWG) for the oil, gas and coal Sector
Standard

The SD presented the findings of the PWG on the scope of the Sector Standard.

Similarities across sectors: Technical work to date suggests that the topics identified in the draft
Sector Standard, together with reporting expectations, are applicable across the oil, gas, and coal
sectors, and that climate change is the most relevant impact for all sectors.

Differences between sectors: There are some differences in the way that topics need to
be described within the Standard, including the likely transition pathways of these sectors towards a
lower-carbon economy; the differences in nature of the activities undertaken by organizations in the
two sectors, and so of the source of an impact.

Views collected during additional external engagement largely reflect the comments of the PWG.

The PWG does not have a unanimous view on this issue, but the majority of the members believe
that inclusion of the two sectors (oil and gas, and coal) in a single Standard will be a major
impediment to the uptake, primarily for the oil and gas sector, and advocate that the two sectors
not be included in a single Standard.

Context to changes of scope of a Sector Standard for oil, gas, and coal

The SD pointed out that the Sector Program Description allows for scope and name changes prior
to final approval of a Sector Standard, either before or after public comment.

The SD explained that it has accounted for the potential need to separate the draft Sector Standard,
and ascertained that this is technically possible, but that it will have an impact on the schedule.

The SD identified two viable options for changing the scope of the Sector Standard:

Option 1: Keeping oil, gas and coal as a single Standard, and proposing the question of separation
as part of the public comment.

The SD suggested that although this option enables the current schedule, it:
means a potential loss of support for the pilot project, which is of more concern
because this is the first project for this program;
may lead to the need for a second public comment, if feedback results in the need to
separate at a later date.

**Option 2: A separation of coal content prior to public comment.**
The SD explained that this option:
responds to stakeholder concerns and PWG opinion;
means that oil and gas will move to public comment, and that a new engagement
process for coal needs to be defined;
will not require a change to topics or appropriate disclosures listed;
involves a limited schedule delay;
does have potential implications for equivalency of Standards across the program as
a whole, but that this can be managed.
The SD emphasized that Option 2 addresses a packaging issue, about how it is taken to the
market, and that the content already agreed by the PWG will not change.

**SD proposal for the oil, gas and coal sector standards**
The SD proposed moving forward with Option 2 – that coal content be removed from the Sector
Standard, and that a sector standard for oil and gas be exposed for comment and a supplementary
process defined for coal – and recommended this option to the GSSB for comment.

**GSSB comment and discussion**
The Chair asked the SD for clarification on whether the presumption is that there will be a stand-
alone sector for coal.
The SD confirmed that preliminary opinion was that coal would form a stand-alone
sector, but that other options will be considered, including a combination with mining. The SD
added that one concern about a combination with mining is the dilution of commentary and content
around climate change.
A GSSB member pointed out coal might have as many dissimilarities with mining as a sector as it
does with oil and gas, and raised the possibility of a third alternative: that oil and gas, coal, and metal
and mining all be combined in an extractive industries sector standard or series of sector standards.
The SD has considered this option, but as representation on the PWG does not go
beyond oil, gas and coal, this would mean bringing in new expertise to broaden the scope. The SD
will look into this as the process develops, but it does not present an immediate solution if the
process is to move forward with the content that has been developed so far. Feedback from
stakeholders and the PWG has strongly been that acceptance of what is being developed is not
safeguarded if oil, gas and coal are co-located in one standard, and that broadening the scope to
cover extractive industries would lead to significant delay.

**GSSB validation of the SD’s proposal**
The Chair expressed support for the SD’s recommendation, for the sake of efficiency and for the
success of the program, and noted the support expressed by a number of GSSB members.
The GSSB agreed with the SD’s proposal that coal content be removed from the Sector Standard, and that a sector standard for oil and gas be exposed for comment and a supplementary process defined for coal.

**Actions**

- SD to begin the process of formulating a revised oil and gas Standard, which will be submitted for further public comment, and to prepare a more detailed scenario surrounding draft content for the coal sector.

### Session 3: Agriculture and Fishing Project Working Group update

The GSSB was presented with [Item 02 – Proposed Project Working Group Composition for the Agriculture and Fishing Sector Standard](#).

The GSSB was presented with [Item 03 – Overview of Project Working Group Applicants – Agriculture and Fishing Sector Standard](#).

The SD gave an overview of the applications process for the PWG for agriculture and fishing:

- A wide outreach resulted in 189 full applications (and an additional 13 that were incomplete). Seven did not give consent for personal details to be shared with the GSSB.
- Forty interviews were conducted, and 18 nominees are being put forward.
- Proposed members represent 14 countries across six regions, and most of the proposed candidates have more than 15 years of experience.
- The sectors include a number of commodities, so the proposed group is larger than usual.
- Expertise covers agriculture and fishing and food quality, with knowledge of crops, livestock and fishing. There is representation from environmental science and agronomy, as well as business, banking and investor relations.

The list of nominees for the PWG proposed by the SD consists of:

- **Business** – 7 candidates
- **Mediating institutions** – 5 candidates
- **Investment** – 2 candidates
- **Civil society** – [4] candidates
- **[Labor** – 2 candidates]

The SD brought to the GSSB’s attention that it has not been possible to finalize the candidates from the labor constituency, but that it has reserved two positions for labor candidates and will continue proactively to seek the involvement of that constituency to fill the positions.

The SD explained that one civil society candidate has unexpectedly changed organizations and withdrawn their nomination. The organization has proposed another candidate, who the SD thinks will be a reasonable replacement. The SD will confirm this via an interview, inform the GSSB.
accordingly, and may seek an electronic vote on the replacement. However, the SD is confident the
three existing civil society nominations adequately represent the constituency and cover the range of
necessary expertise.

GSSB Discussion

A GSSB member confirmed that the Global Council of Unions is actively seeking candidates from the
labor constituency, but that work has been delayed by the corona virus outbreak. Both the
International Union of Food and Allied Workers’ Associations and the International Transport
Workers’ Federation have good potential candidates working in food, agriculture and fishing, and it
is hoped that this issue be resolved in the short term.

The member also noted the positive indications for global recognition of the GRI as shown by
interest in participating in the PWG by such organizations as the WWF, other international
environmental NGOs, and government entities.

The GSSB raised some questions around regional representation. Latin America has two civil society
candidates, but none from the business constituency. Although there were a large number of
applications from Africa, only one was recommended for inclusion in the PWG.

SD response: The SD paid close attention to geographic diversity, and had put forward more
candidates from those regions in the short list. Language was sometimes a barrier to African
candidates, who had expected French to be an alternative working language. The SD will specifically
reach out to these two regions during the public exposure. The SD also pointed out that countries
indicated are those given on the application form. Candidates may work in a different region, or have
global responsibility within a sector, so their given location does not necessarily align with their
geographic responsibilities. The SD suggested that for future PWG composition proposals both
individual location and geographic responsibility be mentioned.

GSSB decision on proposed PWG composition

The Chair asked the GSSB if there were any reasons for withholding approval of the proposed
composition of the PWG for the agriculture and fishing sector Standard, and hearing none moved to
approve the proposal.

GSSB Decision 2020.08 The GSSB resolved to approve Item 02 – Proposed Project Working
Group Composition for the Agriculture and Fishing Sector Standard.

Actions

- SD to continue to seek the involvement of the labor constituency to fill two positions on the
  PWG for agriculture and fishing Sector Standard.

- SD to interview replacement civil society constituency candidate for the PWG for the
  agriculture and fishing Sector Standard, inform the GSSB accordingly, and if necessary seek
  an electronic vote on the replacement.

- SD to mention both an applicant’s individual location and their geographic responsibility in
  future PWG composition proposals.

Session 4: Universal Standards:
management statement
The GSSB was presented with Item 04 – Universal Standards: management statement.

The SD presented a brief summary of Item 04, and explained that it has been investigating the inclusion of a management responsibility statement into the Universal Standards. This reflects a desire for improved quality of sustainability reporting.

The SD identified two elements for strengthening accountability within a responsibility statement:

- Who should assume responsibility within the responsibility statement.
- What the statement should include.

The SD presented the two statements, as given in Item 04, that it proposed including in Section 3 of GRI 101: Using the GRI Standards. The first was for reporting 'in accordance with', and the second for reporting 'with reference to' the GRI Standards. The SD pointed out that as reporting 'with reference to' the GRI Standards will in future require a content index, there is a responsibility to affirm that information has been prepared with reference to the GRI Standards cited.

The SD pointed out that thinking has evolved regarding both the wording, and who should make the statements. The SD drew attention to the change in both statements from 'claim' to 'statement of use', and to the term 'senior decision-maker', as presented in Item 04:

“

The organization shall include the following statement in its GRI content index:

[Title of senior decision-maker of the organization] acknowledges responsibility for the following statement of use:

The Chair invited comment from the GSSB on the statement and the extent of responsibility, as well as on who is being required to make the statement.

GSSB comments

A GSSB member sought clarification as to whether taking responsibility involved an obligation to ensure that due diligence processes had been undertaken.

The SD responded that the statement is intended to confirm that an organization has reported the disclosures and followed the requirements in the Standards that apply to them, and to identify that there is a responsibility within the organization of somebody appropriately senior. It is not intended to extend to the veracity of the information. As such, it is not fundamentally different from the statement of use that organizations make at present.

A GSSB member made the point that what or who the senior decision maker is needed definition, and that both the title and name of the person is needed to make the statement relevant.

SD amended proposal

The SD expanded on the statement as presented in Item 04. Various terms relating to senior positions or governing bodies are used in GRI 102: General Disclosures 2016. The SD proposed that only two terms be used in the revised GRI 102:

- highest governance body [revised]
  formalized group of persons charged with the highest authority in an organization
- senior executive [revised]
  high-ranking member of the management of an organization, such as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or an individual reporting directly to the CEO or the highest governance body.

The SD then proposed the following for the management responsibility statement:
[Title of the most senior executive or the highest governance body of the organization] acknowledges responsibility for the following statement of use:

the information reported by [name of organization] for the [reporting period] has been prepared in accordance with the GRI Standards.

**GSSB comments**

The GSSB raised some concerns about the addition of 'the most' to 'senior executive', as this could indicate a difference in expectation. Concerns were raised that, depending on what is being signed off on, this could be loading considerable responsibility onto a director or senior executive. A GSSB member raised the issue of litigation in regions like the US if a named person is seen as being required to take personal liability. Although this is already the case for financial reporting in many regions, this risked organizations being less likely to disclose information or less likely to use GRI. The GSSB suggested that legal consequences be further explored.

The SD responded that in some regions the requirement is already specified in legislation, also with regards to non-financial reporting. The SD is trying to capture who is making the statement on behalf of the company. As regards the specifications of 'most' and 'highest', the SD always tries to move the responsibility to the highest level possible, but some leeway is given as to who can make the statement: an executive or governance body.

A GSSB member made the further point that the statement requires somebody who might have no detailed knowledge of GRI to sign off that the report has been completed in accordance with the GRI Standard. The person who does that should be someone who knows what the GRI Standards are and has responsibility in reporting, not in governance.

**SD proposal**

The Chair noted some discomfort among some members of the GSSB with what was being proposed, and asked if there were any components of the proposal that the GSSB felt the SD could move forward with. The SD was asked if it could propose a way forward.

The SD responded that its aim is to improve quality and accountability in GRI Standards reports, and to have a global application. The SD is aware of the implications of this, and of the challenge in coming up with something that applies universally. Stakeholders interviewed in Europe and Asia express the belief that non-financial reporting is headed towards more transparent accountability.

The SD believes that a body or individual within an organization needs to take ownership of the responsibility statement, otherwise it loses its power. The SD is proposing to go forward with the management statement in the knowledge that it is challenging and that there will be reaction to it, but in the belief a draft needs to be exposed for public comment in order to receive and deal with this reaction.

The SD visually presented its proposal to make the changes in the exposure draft of GRI 101 and to include the following questions for public comment:

**Question 1:** Should the GRI Standards require the most senior executive or the highest governance body of the organization to include a statement acknowledging their responsibility for preparing the reported information in accordance with, or with reference to, the GRI Standards?

**Question 2:** Should the statement be extended to the quality and veracity of the reported information?

A member of the GSSB agreed with the direction being taken, but reiterated that a responsibility statement should not become an obstacle for the implementation or uptake of GRI Standards.

Various GSSB members expressed support for public consultation, with some suggesting that it
would be relevant to see what emerges from the IIRC process for integrated reporting, as this is also a point in IIRC deliberations.

The Chair asked the GSSB whether it was comfortable to take the new provisions in the Standard to public comment for feedback.

A GSSB member asked whether there was value in an interim step of gathering further feedback, particularly from the business constituency, before a more public consultation.

The SD responded that it has already had a number of such targeted consultations. The variety of response indicates that further consultation would not lead to any more specificity on who or what body should sign off on a responsibility statement. The common denominator was that this very much depended on the jurisdiction of where an organization is headquartered. Public consultation, however, offers the opportunity for a wider set of comments. The SD will actively promote feedback from the business constituency, regulators and the global community of GRI reporters.

A further consideration is that the GSSB needs to reflect on the exercise that organizations are being asked to conduct, in relation to similar expectations that exist for financial reporting. The dynamic is similar in the sense that non-financial organizations are increasingly working with adoption through regional legislators. However, the GRI has a comprehensive, global set of Standards and, as standard-setter, has to articulate who it wants to express an opinion about whether or not a report is in accordance.

The Chair noted a number of expressions of support for sending an exposure draft for public comment.

One GSSB member said that while being comfortable with sending a draft for public consultation, it should be made clearer what is being requested. It is important to get the wording of a sign-off right and to place it at the right level,

The Chair suggested that the SD and GSSB spend time making sure the question is formulated in a way that elicits the kind of feedback that is required, and that it is accompanied by specific, targeted questions. The Chair asked if the GSSB was happy in principle to go ahead with the preparation of the public comments process. No objections were recorded.

The Chair asked the SD whether this constituted a reasonable set of instructions to proceed to the next stage, and received an affirmative answer.

**Action**

- SD to submit the exposure draft of GR 101, followed with targeted questions, for public comment.

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**Session 5: Any other business and close of public meeting**

No other business was raised and the Chair closed the public sessions of the meeting at 3.34 p.m. CET (Central European Time).

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**Session 6: Private session**
This was a private session.