Geoservices REST API

This wiki page aims to collate community concerns related to the adoption of the "Geoservices REST API" document as a standard of the [Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC)](http://www.opengeospatial.org/). The page is being collaboratively edited, targeting completion by Wednesday 15 May 2013, after which it will be delivered by the board of the [OSGeo Foundation (OSGeo)](http://osgeo.org/) to the OGC and OGC voting members.

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| **Contents** [hide]* [1 Cover Letter from the OSGeo Board](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Cover_Letter_from_the_OSGeo_Board)
* [2 Open Letter to OGC and voting members](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Open_Letter_to_OGC_and_voting_members)
	+ [2.1 Signed](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Signed)
* [3 Summary](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Summary)
	+ [3.1 Criticism and Response](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Criticism_and_Response)
* [4 Positions on the vote](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Positions_on_the_vote)
* [5 Issues with the document](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Issues_with_the_document)
* [6 Further Concerns](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Further_Concerns)
	+ [6.1 Political Concerns](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Political_Concerns)
	+ [6.2 Commercial Concerns](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Commercial_Concerns)
	+ [6.3 Technical Concerns](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Technical_Concerns)
	+ [6.4 Methodological Concerns](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Methodological_Concerns)
* [7 Further Reading](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API#Further_Reading)
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Cover Letter from the OSGeo Board

*Please don't edit this "Cover Letter" statement, which has been approved by the OSGeo Board.*

The board of the [Open Source Geospatial Foundation](http://osgeo.org/) (OSGeo) is presenting this letter to the OGC. This letter highlights concerns about the "GeoServices REST API" from many people within the OSGeo community. As always, if there is anything the OSGeo board can do to help, then please let us know.

Signed: Jeff McKenna (OSGeo president), Peter Batty, Jáchym Čepický, Michael Gerlek, Anne Ghisla, Mark Lucas, Daniel Morissette, Cameron Shorter, Frank Warmerdam

Open Letter to OGC and voting members

*Please don't edit this "Open Letter" statement, comments and discussion should go in the "Further Concerns" section below.*

May 2013

We, the undersigned, have concerns that approving the "Geoservices REST API" as an OGC standard will have detrimental impacts on interoperability within the spatial industry.

We strongly urge that the proposed "Geoservices REST API", as it stands in May 2013, be rejected as an OGC standard.

People have listed different reasons for concern. These concerns are described below.

Signed

*Please add your name here if you agree with the above statement. Include name, work title (if appropriate), very brief title/involvement in OSGeo if appropriate. (Link to OSGeo profile if appropriate). You may sign as a group, such as the Project Steering Committee of XXX project if you wish, or as Your Name on behalf of YYY company.*

1. [Cameron Shorter](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ACamerons), Geospatial Solutions Director at [LISAsoft](http://lisasoft.com/), core contributor & coordinator of [OSGeo-Live](http://live.osgeo.org/), OSGeo Board member
2. [Mark Lucas](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Mark_Lucas), Founding member and board of directors for OSGeo foundation, Principal Scientist for RadiantBlue Technologies Inc.
3. [Stephen Woodbridge](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AWoodbri), Director of [iMaptools.com](http://imaptools.com/), Contributor and/or PSC of [Mapserver](http://mapserver.org/), [pgRouting](http://pgrouting.org/), [PAGC](http://www.pagcgeo.org/), and [PostGIS](http://www.postgis.org/)
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5. Gerhard Triebnig, Managing Director at [EOX IT Services GmbH](http://eox.at/)
6. [Brent Wood](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3APcreso), Environmental Information Delivery Programme Leader, NIWA, New Zealand. OGC member, Aust/NZ OSGEO chapter member, NZOSS Council member
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12. [Daniel Morissette](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ADmorissette), President at [Mapgears](http://mapgears.com/), OSGeo Board member, core contributor and PSC member of [Mapserver](http://mapserver.org/) and [GDAL/OGR](http://gdal.org/). Former OGC TC member and involved in the implementation of several OGC WxS specs in MapServer.
13. [Bob Basques](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Blammo&action=edit&redlink=1), GIS Systems Developer at the City of Saint Paul, MN. [Public Works GIS (GISmo)](http://gis.ci.stpaul.mn.us/), Technical Director at [SharedGeo](http://www.sharedgeo.org/), OSGeo Charter Member, OSGeo TCMUG local chapter member, Co-founder and PSC member of [GeoMoose](http://www.geomoose.org/) project.
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15. Bevan Rudge, Director Lucion Limited, IT Advisor at Conservation Strategy Fund, Esri client
16. [María Arias de Reyna](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ADelawen), software engineer at [GeoCat](http://geocat.net/), Spain, member of OSGeo Spanish Local Chapter.
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29. [Sandro Santilli](http://strk.keybit.net/), OSGeo Charter Member, [PostGIS](http://postgis.net/) and [GEOS](http://trac.osgeo.org/geos) PSC member and core hacker.
30. [Javier Diaz](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Javiarch&action=edit&redlink=1), member of Geoinquietos Bs As [[1]](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Category%3AGeoinquietos_Buenos_Aires), member of the Organizing Committee FOSS4G Bs As 2013 [[2]](http://www.foss4g-ba.org/)
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32. [Francisco José Peñarrubia](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AFpenarru), CTO and co-founder at [SCOLAB](http://www.scolab.es/). Members of [gvSIG Association](http://www.gvsig.com/)
33. [Shanmugam Ganeshkumar](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AGanesh), Director of [GeoICON](http://www.geoicon.com/), member OSGeo Malaysia Chapter
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40. [Peter Baumann](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Pebau&action=edit&redlink=1), [Jacobs University](http://www.jacobs-university.de/lsis), OGC member, WCS.SWG chair, editor of 10+ specs (disclaimer: this is an expression of my personal opinion and not in any way endorsed by OGC)
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58. [Saber Razmjooei](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Sabb&action=edit&redlink=1), UK, [Lutra Consulting](http://www.lutraconsulting.co.uk/), Co-Founder
59. [Peter Wells](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Wellsp&action=edit&redlink=1), UK, [Lutra Consulting](http://www.lutraconsulting.co.uk/), Co-Founder
60. [Sidney Gijzen](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ASGijzen), The Netherlands, Researcher GIS @ [Alterra, Wageningen UR](http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Research-Institutes/alterra.htm)
61. [Miles Fidelman](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Mfidelman&action=edit&redlink=1), US, Principal, Protocol Technologies Group, LLC
62. [Puneet Kishor](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3APunkish), OSGeo Charter Member; [Geology, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison](http://www.geology.wisc.edu/); [Creative Commons](http://creativecommons.org/staff#puneetkishor)
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70. [Mike Saunt](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Mikesaunt&action=edit&redlink=1), UK, Owner at [Astun Technology Ltd](http://astuntechnology.com/), OSGeo sponsor
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80. [Simon Pigot](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ASimonp), contributor to and PSC member of [GeoNetwork opensource](http://geonetwork-opensource.org/) (speaking for myself, not an official view of my employer)
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100. [Vincent Picavet](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AVincentP), co-founder of [Oslandia](http://www.oslandia.com/), founding member and treasurer of OSGeo-FR
101. [Stefan A. Tzeggai](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AStefan_A._Tzeggai), creator of [AtlasStyler SLD editor](http://www.geopublishing.org/AtlasStyler), founder of [empirica systeme gmbh](http://www.empirica-systeme.de/)
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107. [Alexander Bruy](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Alexbruy&action=edit&redlink=1), [NextGIS](http://nextgis.org/), QGIS core developer
108. [Danilo Furtado](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ADfurtado), Portugal, OSGeo member, OSGeo-Portugal
109. [Andreas Schmitz](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Stranger&action=edit&redlink=1), Germany, deegree core developer and TMC member, CTO of [Occam Labs](http://www.occamlabs.de/)
110. [Oliver Tonnhofer](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AOlt), Germany, [MapProxy](http://mapproxy.org/) core developer, founder & CTO of [Omniscale](http://www.omniscale.com/)
111. [Thomas Baschetti](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AThomas_Baschetti), Germany, Freelancer, Mapbender PSC Member, [FOSSGIS](http://fossgis.de/) member
112. [Ian Mayo](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AIanMayo), GeoSpatial developer, UK
113. [Ivan Mincik](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Imincik&action=edit&redlink=1), CEO of [GISTA s.r.o.](http://www.gista.sk/), Slovakia
114. [Edmar Moretti](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Edmar.moretti&action=edit&redlink=1), Software developer, [i3GEO](http://www.i3geo.com/) core developer, Brazil
115. [Diego Moreira](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AMoreira), GIS Analyst, Contributor of [QGIS](http://qgis.org/), Brazil
116. [Luigi Pirelli](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Ginetto&action=edit&redlink=1), Freelance Analyst/Programmer, co-founder of Italian OSGEO Local Chapter [GFOSS.it](http://www.gfoss.it/), Italy
117. [Kyle Shannon](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Kyle&action=edit&redlink=1) Software Developer, contributor of [GDAL/OGR](http://gdal.org/), United States
118. [David Mateos](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3ADMateos), worker member at [Terrativa S. Coop.](http://www.terrativa.net/) and OSGeo Spanish Local Chapter Member, Spain
119. [Luis Franco](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=Luis_Franco&action=edit&redlink=1), researcher and GIS analyst at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain
120. [Gabriel Roldan](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AGroldan), Software Developer, Argentina, OSGeo Charter Member, OSGeo Spanish Local Chapter Member
121. [Dimitris Kotzinos](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3AKotzino), OSGEO Charter Member, OSGEO Greek Chapter founder, Assistant Professor TEI of Serres, Greece
122. [Stefan Steiniger](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/User%3APerriger), owner of [GEO Steiniger Ltda.](http://www.geosteiniger.cl/), contributor to [OpenJUMP GIS](http://openjump.org/) and [OpenTripPlanner](http://www.opentripplanner.org/) and author of several FOSS4G overview articles, Canada/Chile
123. [Nobusuke Iwasaki](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Iwasaki&action=edit&redlink=1), Senior Researcher, National Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences, Tsukuba, Japan, OSGeo Japan Chapter Board Member
124. [Ross Johnson](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Johnson&action=edit&redlink=1), Land Information Officer, City of Ryde Council and NSW Committee member of Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI)
125. [Kumaran Narayanaswamy](http://wiki.osgeo.org/index.php?title=User:Kumaran&action=edit&redlink=1), CEO & Managing Director of kCube Consultancy Services Pvt Ltd India.[[4]](http://www.kcubeconsulting.com/), Member of India OSGeo Chapter.
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Summary

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The OGC candidate standard titled "GeoServices REST API" is currently being considered to be approved as an Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standard. The vote to accept the document as a standard is unusually contentious. This controversy is the reason for this Wiki page.

The candidate standard was previously released for public comment and can be found [on the request for public comment page](http://www.opengeospatial.org/standards/requests/89) (though public comment has been closed for now).

The candidate standard attempts to standardize a suite of web services such as a service which provides map images, a service which provides geospatial feature data, and a service which performs geospatial processing. The candidate standard focuses on interactions via a defined hierarchy of URLs and using predominantly a particular set of JSON schemas for the exchange of geospatial data.

Criticism and Response

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The adoption of this particular document as an OGC Standard is contentious for a wide variety of reasons including:

* the process through which the document was developed which is thought to lack sufficient flexibility to respond to input from various stakeholders,
* the focus of the document on 'REST' and 'API' which is seen as not matching the ideas others have for these concepts,
* the names of the standard and of the services which are seen as potentially confusing,
* the functionality of the new services which are considered to duplicate that of existing services already standardized by the OGC such as WMS, WFS, WCS, and WPS,
* the addition of a new set of services based on new URL patterns and new JSON exchange formats which is seen as duplicating the efforts of other working groups bringing similar ideas to the updates of existing OGC services,
* the re-introduction in the new services of previously resolved interoperability issues which is seen as failing to build on the existing knowledge and experience,
* the use of the particular JSON schemas which are seen as having little industry acceptance and are incompatible with other widely used schemas, and
* the lack of implementation diversity which is thought to give the vendor of the one complete implementation an unusual commercial advantage on top of the vendor's already dominant position in the domain.

These issues have potential impacts on the use of 'Open Standards' by governments and companies, on the interoperability of software interacting with standards compliant OGC services, on the costs to developers and users of standards compliant software, on the understanding of 'Open Standards' by the public at large, and, possibly, on the reputation of the OGC as a champion of interoperability.

In particular there are concerns by some that adoption of the standard will likely result in a combination of the following:

1. The cost to application developers, systems integrators, testers and sponsors to support all relevant OGC standards will be substantially increased.
2. Consequently, organisations and/or applications may choose to only support one standard, or only support one standard fully.
3. Sponsors (such as governments) who require compliance with OGC standards will discover that applications don't communicate together, due to applications supporting different OGC standards that essentially do the same thing.
4. This will result in a diminished importance of OGC, as the "OGC standards" stamp of approval will not equate interoperability.
5. After a while, in order to solve interoperability issues, a respected international organisation or program will likely take the initiative to mandate one standard as the preferred standard for all agencies to follow. To date, the OGC has provided this leadership.
6. One standard taking prominence over the other will likely lead to the other being neglected or deprecated, resulting in many OGC compliant systems becoming legacy systems in the process. This should be considered an undesirable outcome for a standards organisation.

In response to these issues, the authors of the Geoservices REST API document have stated that:

* the process of the OGC has been followed completely,
* the specification actually is RESTful and does define an API,
* the name, due to the controversy, may be open for modification
* the OGC does not forbid duplication of service functionality, already has duplication between the W\*S and the S\*S (sensor) family of standards, should not block progress in the name of 'one true way', and harmonization between the services can be considered in the future,
* the JSON format exists and functions, and
* there are alternative implementations for some of these services.

The authors also stress that the existence of a large user base shows the service is useful, and that the standardization of the services at the OGC may encourage new implementations.

Positions on the vote

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The discussion raises a number of issues, many based upon complex technical concepts and implications. This makes it difficult for voting OGC members considering whether to support (or not) the "Geoservices REST API" as a standard. The following provides one analysis of the positions on the vote, aimed to simplify and summarize key points. However, it does not necessarily represent the opinions held by all signatories above.

**The pros for accepting the "Geoservices REST API" document as an OGC standard**

* The OGC should be in the business of developing good standards, not in choosing which standards should be implemented.
* The proposers of the document want to make a standard and have followed all the rules of the OGC. The work of any such group of members deserves serious, good faith consideration.
* The need for an integrated suite of services using simple data, which is addressed (partially) by the document, is real. The proposed document is pushing the OGC on this issue.
* The proposed document could be useful to a number of people.
* The proposed document is not significantly more broken than the existing standards of the OGC. As one author of standards [notes](http://lists.osgeo.org/pipermail/discuss/2013-May/011667.html):

*"I know how totally impossible it is to write a good standard, so the weaknesses in the existing document seem more acceptable."*

**The cons**

* The OGC actually is, whether it should be or not, in the position of recommending interoperable standards for geospatial services. The proposed document is not good enough, not widely enough implemented, and not publicly supported enough, to be considered at the same level as existing standards.
* Adopting a standard implies a desire to maintain the standard, but OGC's desire to support this approach has been questioned by some. In particular, the lack of collaboration and willingness to accept recommendations from the community on this version of the "Geoservices REST API" document bodes ill for the future.
* The overlap in functionality between the proposed services and the existing services, notably with the ongoing work to modularize the existing services, is almost 100 percent. However, compatibility is low.
* There is already a published document: <http://www.esri.com/library/whitepapers/pdfs/geoservices-rest-spec.pdf> so there is no need for the document to be adopted as an OGC Standard merely for interoperability with the ESRI implementation.
* The document, as a new, separate effort, repeats mistakes which were made and since solved by the other services.
* The document focuses on the past (notably with backwards compatibility and use of only GET/POST) not on the future.
* The document needs a comprehensive editorial review and substantial rewriting for clarity.

**A conclusion**

Both simple answers are bad.

A simple acceptance of the standard would introduce a new set of 'OGC approved' open services. The OGC approval might enable governments to buy a XXXX-new-name-here-XXXX solution instead of a W\*S or a S\*S solution. The path forwards towards harmonizing the services is unclear. Fixing this document in addition to fixing the W\*S services will be a pain.

Simply rejecting the solution would be bad for the OGC. It would place the OGC in the position of picking winners and losers in the standards business. It would mean that the OGC is stuck on the project of fixing the W\*S standards to meet some nebulous future functionality without having any path to get there. It would discourage innovation and progress.

Is there any third way?

Well, actually, there is a different way of thinking of the issue. Overall, there appears to be a shared desire for an integrated suite of geospatial services, originally focused on a simple data model, built on the exchange of well defined resources in simple formats including JSON, accessible and usable using the core HTTP verbs, and discoverable through following HTML links and patterns of URL paths. The hope is that such a suite can be designed based on the best expertise of the OGC, can be widely supported by the community, and can be implemented and tested by multiple groups. Neither the proposed document, nor the current services meet this vision. So the work, ultimately, is on improving all the services at the OGC, first to modularize them, then to enable simple implementations, and finally to link those implementations into a functional suite. Since this is the work that is already happening, perhaps the vote is an unfortunate distraction and the productive way forward is merely to redouble the efforts to create the next versions of the standards.

Issues with the document

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Beyond the controversy described above, there are issues with the Geoservices REST API document itself. Even if the standard deserves support, these issues could be considered blockers to the adoption of the current, May 2013, document.

The critique is incomplete because it quickly falls into a full editorial review of the text, something which takes a lot of time and effort and is beyond the scope and intent of this Open Letter.

The critique can be found at: <http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API_critique>.

Note that some of these critiques hold the document to OGC's current, standards writing guidelines. The OGC has been striving to develop better standards so new standards must meet higher requirements than past standards. The lack of clarity in the proposed document is not substantially worse than many published standards but ought to be resolved in new standards.

Further Concerns

--- DRAFT \_\_\_\_

*Please add concerns not addressed above as bullet points below. Where appropriate, link to external web pages (such as email achieves). Try to be concise, and try not to repeat concepts which have been covered above, (less words get read by more people). Points you have previously added, which are now covered above should be removed. Words that have been struck out will be removed by Tuesday 14 May.*

Political Concerns

Commercial Concerns

* ~~Supporting multiple overlapping standards greatly reduces usability while it increases complexity and cost of development and maintenance.~~
* ~~Many SME's have invested in supporting existing OGC standards in their products. They will be forced to choose the standards they support (and can explain), resulting in decreased interoperability, confusion and frustration for clients.~~
* ~~Confusing customers with new, overlapping OGC standards will lower the credibility of companies and of OGC, reducing business opportunities.~~

Technical Concerns

* The standardization of WKT for Spatial reference systems is unfortunately currently quite weak in OGC standards. Geoservices REST API is tied with ESRI's version of WKT, which is not properly specified in the Geoservices REST API documents, and is known to be incompatible with other OGC documents, which will lead to a larger confusion. See the following [comment](http://lists.opengeospatial.org/pipermail/requests/2012-July/000166.html) for more details on this issue.
* ~~The Geoservices REST API is not particularly RESTful - it's a thinly disguised service call, not an address space for RESTful objects that can be operated on.~~
* see [this discussion](http://wiki.osgeo.org/wiki/Geoservices_REST_API_critique#The_Technical_Approach) for detailed arguments why OGC WCS is superior to the "GeoServices REST API" Part 6. It concludes: *In summary, the ESRI "Geoservice REST API" Imaging part is at a technological level where WCS departed from some 5 years ago. Inconciseness of the specification at large will make it difficult for third parties to come up with interoperable implementations. The components making up the ESRI "Geoservice REST API" provide natural blocks assignable to the matching SWGs. As for Part 6 of the ESRI "Geoservice REST API", if to become a standard it needs to be discussed in the WCS.SWG for harmonization, clarification, and improvement.*

Methodological Concerns

1. Ten months after submitting, no public response (nor private to the authors of the comments) has been made to the various comments sent on the OGC Requests mailing list in [[July 2012](http://lists.opengeospatial.org/pipermail/requests/2012-July/date.html)] and [[August 2012](http://lists.opengeospatial.org/pipermail/requests/2012-August/date.html)] during the 30 day public comments period.
2. The Geoservices REST API cannot be amended (other than editorial changes in the specification document), because of a requirement of backward compatibility with ESRI implementation. Consequently, the standard is unlikely to improve, or its evolution will be only lead by ESRI.
3. OGC standards normally require interoperability experiments and a richer process to ratify a standard such as this one. No explanation has been forthcoming as to why a simplified process is appropriate in this case.

A response (from Adrian Custer):

1. The OGC is working to release those documents to the public as of 9 May 2013.
2. Work on the next version of the document can take any perspective acceptable to those working on the document. (The OGC has no method in place in case two groups want to evolve the document in two different directions.)
3. That is not true, the OGC does not require interoperability experiments or some "richer process" for the adoption of a standard; that may be desirable but is not required.

Further Reading

*Please add links to referenced documents, related news stories or blog posts here.*

* Call for comments on GeoServices REST API: <http://www.opengeospatial.org/standards/requests/89>
* Email archive of OSGeo discussions about GeoServices REST API: <http://lists.osgeo.org/pipermail/discuss/2013-May/thread.html>
* Adrian Custer's summary of technical issues (and original source of some content in this letter): <http://lists.osgeo.org/pipermail/discuss/2013-May/011667.html>
* "Is OGC Loosing its way?", letter to OGC Voters, from OGC Interoperability Movement Team Leaders, <http://lists.osgeo.org/pipermail/discuss/2013-May/011632.html>