

THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION: FIFTY YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN OCEAN SCIENCE, SERVICES AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

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Established in 1960 as a body with functional autonomy within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) serves as the focal point in the UN System for ocean observations, science, services and data exchange and it is recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the competent international organization for marine science. IOC provides a significant contribution to the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and is an active member of the United Nations coordination mechanism on ocean affairs, UN-Oceans.

After the International Indian Ocean Expedition (1959–65), among the most notable achievements of the IOC are the establishment of the International Oceanographic Data Exchange (IODE) programme (1960), the World Ocean Circulation Experiment (WOCE) (1988–1998), the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) (1990), the Global Sea Level Observing System (GLOSS) (1996), and regional tsunami warning systems (2005).

Today the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO is providing coordination and expertise on climate change and variability of the oceans, on consequences of ocean warming and ocean acidification, on monitoring marine biodiversity, on management and demarcation of Marine Protected Areas, Marine Spatial Planning, and other management tools, among other emerging issues.

With this mission, IOC is engaged in generating credible and timely scientific information as a necessary asset for nations to engage in the process of responding to the global challenges that affect the marine and coastal environments. Better science linked to improved risk management and adaptive management strategies will help scientists and policy makers cope with the range of expected impacts and the high levels of uncertainty related to mitigation and adaptation alternatives.