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INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

**IOC Contribution to World Ocean Assessment
and other ocean assessment processes (IPBES, TWAP), 2015**

Summary. This document provides a summary of IOC's activity related to the development of marine related assessment aimed at improving the science-policy interface. These comprises: (i) the scientific and technical support provided to the World Ocean Assessment (WOA); (ii) the implementation of the Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP); and (iii) the contribution of IOC to the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socio-Economic Aspects – World Ocean Assessment (WOA)

Oceans and seas cover over 7/10ths of our planet. Until now, there has been no system to provide an integrated, world-wide view of what is happening to the oceans and seas and our uses of them. Following the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, the United Nations set up a regular process to review the environmental, economic and social aspects world's oceans and seas – the three pillars of sustainable development. This is the “Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects”. The outputs will be a series of World Ocean Assessments, building on the many assessments already carried out by States and international organizations. The aim is to provide a sound, scientific basis for decisions at the global level on the world's oceans and seas, and a framework for national and regional assessments and management decisions.

The task of the first cycle of the Regular Process (2010 to 2014) was to produce the first [World Ocean Assessment](#). To this end, the UN General Assembly has created an Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole to oversee and guide the Regular Process, and a Group of Experts to carry out the assessments within the framework of the Regular Process. In addition, a much larger pool of experts has been created to assist the Group of Experts in conducting the assessments and to provide effective peer-review to ensure the high quality of the outputs. Since the Working Group meets once a year, a Bureau consisting of 15 Member States, representing the regional groups of the United Nations was established for the intersessional periods of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

Following the adoption in 2012 of the Terms of Reference and Methods of Work for the Group of Experts as well as the Outline of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment (World Ocean Assessment, WOA-I), the Group of Experts supported by the Pool of Experts have engaged in the drafting of the WOA chapters with the aim to deliver a final report to the UN General Assembly (UNGA 70, 15–28 September 2015).

Resolution A/RES/68/70 of 9 December 2013 on Oceans and the Law of the Sea invited IOC and other agencies to provide technical and scientific support to the Regular Process.

IOC played an instrumental role in the development of the Regular Process, first during the inception phase (2006–2009) in leading with UNEP, the Assessment of Assessments, and then by providing support to the Group of Experts and the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea (DOALOS), acting as the Secretariat of the Regular Process. IOC's support to WOA is also consistent with the IOC Medium-Term Strategy (2014–2021) and particularly ‘function D’ for supporting assessment and information to improve the science-policy interface.

IOC has continued to engage in the World Ocean Assessment in the following manner:

In the area of Communication: With initial letters of support and funds in cooperation with UNEP/GRID-Arendal, a communication portal and a dedicated website has been developed for use by the Group of Experts and contributors to the report. Between 2012 and 2014, financial support has been provided by the IOC to an amount of USD 30,000 thanks to contributions from France and Belgium (Government of Flanders).

In the area of Assessments: IOC is leading a number of marine assessment products and databases that are available to the Group of Experts and will be integrated into the World Ocean Assessment. In particular, the contribution of the GEF Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP) implemented by UNEP and IOC, to prepare an indicator-based assessment of the world's Large Marine Ecosystems and Open Ocean areas. This project which will deliver in 2015 its results in the form of technical reports and a web-based portal, has been implemented in close coordination with the WOA Group of Experts with a view to make this information available to writers and contributors (see below for additional information).

In the area of Capacity building: UNEP and IOC have continued to support Member States in the organization/facilitation of workshops. Technical and financial support has been provided to Member States for the organization of workshops, held in accordance with the Guidelines for Workshops adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 66/231 of 24 December 2011. These workshops were hosted by the governments of Chile, China, Belgium, the United States of America, Mozambique, Australia, Côte d'Ivoire and most recently India. Following the needs identified during these workshops some Regional Scientific and Technical Capacity Building Training Seminar were held in Bangkok, Thailand, 17–19 September 2012 and Maputo, Mozambique, 17 to 19 April, 2013 for the COBSEA/NOWPAP/WESTPAC regions as well as the Nairobi Conventions respectively.

IOC committed to assist the Group of Experts of the Regular Process (GOERP) in finalizing production of the report of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment with the technical editing of the publication among others. IOC is providing support to DOALOS to hire an editor for the whole WOA report. Between 2012 and 2014, IOC also participated in four meetings of the Group of Experts as observer.

In December 2014, the Secretariat of the Regular Process (Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea) informed the Commission that the draft of the first global integrated marine assessment of the Regular Process was completed and ready to be reviewed by Member States and relevant intergovernmental organizations. Through [IOC Circular letter 2564](#), IOC Member States were invited to take part in the review process that concluded on 15 March 2015. In parallel, the IOC secretariat also provided a technical review for the chapters particularly relevant to the IOC field of expertise.

The WOA report is now being finalized by Group of Experts and will be ready in September 2015 for consideration by the UN Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole. In the context of the WOA consideration by UN Member States, an evaluation of the 1st cycle of the Regular Process implementation may be conducted, reviewing the effectiveness of the arrangements and drawing lessons for improving the next cycle of the Regular Process.

In 2009, the Group of Experts leading the Assessment of Assessment (preliminary phase of the Regular Process) recommended that the Regular Process be serviced by an inter-agency secretariat co-located in one single intergovernmental organization. However, when the General Assembly decided to set up the Regular Process and its arrangements, it was decided to establish the Secretariat within the Division on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) in New York. The impact of this decision has resulted in a limited engagement of relevant intergovernmental bodies and programmes such as FAO, UNEP, IMO and IOC in the operations of the Regular Process. The adequate provision of supporting resources is critical to facilitate the work of the Group of Experts as well as the inclusion of the state of the art scientific knowledge. The next cycle of the Regular Process may consider the use of indicators and reference points to compare status and trends over time. This would require a heavy investment in the development of an indicator-based methodology. This is an area where IOC, building on its experience with the Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP), is well placed to contribute to.

Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP)

IOC is leading the implementation of the marine components of the Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP) funded by GEF. The project will provide a number of core ecological, socio-economic and governance indicators for the marine environment (64 Large Marine Ecosystems and Open Ocean areas) using globally available datasets. From the IOC perspective, TWAP is the first integrated and global marine assessment that the Commission is leading, and the results produced have the potential to inform a number of ocean governance mechanisms; these include the GEF, other UN agencies with an ocean mandate, other global assessment processes such as WOA and Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), UNEP Regional Seas organizations, and LME commissions, as well as Member States.

In order to conduct this assessment, IOC established a consortium of institutional partners and experts for the current Open Ocean and LMEs assessments (these include for e.g. NOAA, IGBP, GESAMP, UNEP-WCMC, University of British Columbia, National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), amongst others). This consortium is crucial for the conduct of the assessments, as the members provide the necessary expertise, tools and data that underpin the assessments. The final TWAP deliverables will be released in September 2015, there will be two technical assessment reports (IOC Technical Series, 119, vol. 1: LME and Vol.2: Open Ocean; IOC/2015/TS/119) and a joint web portal displaying the indicators globally and providing access to the underpinning data. (see <http://www.geftwap.org>)

Contribution to the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

The 'Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' (IPBES) was established in April 2012, as an independent intergovernmental body open to all member countries of the United Nations. The members are committed to building IPBES as the leading intergovernmental body for assessing the state of the planet's biodiversity, its ecosystems and the essential services they provide to society.

IPBES provides a mechanism recognized by both the scientific and policy communities to synthesize, review, assess and critically evaluate relevant information and knowledge generated worldwide by governments, academia, scientific organizations, non-governmental organizations and indigenous communities. This involves a credible group of experts in conducting assessments of such information and knowledge in a transparent way. IPBES will also aim to address the needs of Multilateral Environmental Agreements that are related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and build on existing processes ensuring synergy and complementarities in each other's work.

UNESCO is one of the four UN agencies that co-host IPBES, and provides technical and scientific support to the IPBES task force on data and knowledge. This task force delivered a draft data and information management plan, and Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) is mentioned in Annex I of the plan as one of the key strategic partners of IPBES in the data and knowledge area.

IPBES recently hold its third plenary meeting in January 2015 (IPBES-3). IPBES will organize a set of regional and subregional assessments. The agreement to undertake a regional assessment on the open ocean has been postponed to IPBES-4 (January 2016), i.e. after the UN World Ocean Assessment. In the current open ocean proposal, OBIS is mentioned as one of the key datasets.

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