



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**Thirty-first Session of the Assembly**  
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Item 3.4.2 of the Provisional Agenda

**PROPOSAL TO RENEW THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN  
THE FLANDERS MARINE INSTITUTE (VLIZ) AND THE IOC REGARDING THE IOC  
PROJECT OFFICE FOR IODE**

Summary

The IOC Committee on International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE-XXV) at its 25th Session (18–22 February 2019, Tokyo) decided to review the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) Project Office activities, recalling that the MoU signed in 2017 is due to expire on 1 December 2021.

Purpose of the document: This document details the methodology followed by the reviewers as well as the results and recommendations formulated, in particular, the recommendation to renew the MoU between the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) and IOC.

Financial and administrative implications: There are no financial and administrative implications.

The proposed decision(s) is referenced Dec. A-31/3.4.2 in the Action Paper (document document [IOC-31/AP](#) Rev.)



## Introduction

1. In February 2019, the IOC Committee on International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange requested that the activities of the Project Office for IODE be reviewed in anticipation of the expiration of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Flanders Marine Institute (Belgium) and the UNESCO/IOC that established it in Ostend (Belgium). Such a review of the performance of the Project Office is foreseen in the Article IV of the MoU before the expiry thereof on 1 December 2021:

*A review of the performance of the UNESCO/IOC Project Office for IODE shall be organized once, and prior to the expiry of this Memorandum of Understanding. The evaluation shall be submitted for approval to the IODE Committee that oversees the Project Office activities. The IODE Committee may, as it deems necessary, recommend the renewal or extension of this agreement and will submit this Recommendation to the next available Session of the IOC Assembly or Executive Council.*

2. The MoU that established the IODE Project Office in Ostend, was first signed in 2005 and was renewed twice in 2012 and 2017.

3. The current Terms of Reference for the UNESCO/IOC Project Office for IODE are as follows:

- (i) To establish a creative environment facilitating the further development and maintenance of IODE projects, services and products with emphasis on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the data and product/service stream between the stage of sampling and the user;
- (ii) To assist in strengthening the capacity of Member States to manage oceanographic data and information (by organizing relevant training and the capacity building related activities) and to provide ocean data and information products and services required by users;
- (iii) To liaise and maintain links with relevant UNESCO/IOC programmes and other projects as relevant to the projects implemented by the UNESCO/IOC Project Office for IODE;
- (iv) To establish and maintain links with other relevant organizations, institutions and programmes in order to promote cooperation with the UNESCO/IOC Project Office for IODE.

## Objective of the review

4. The objective of the review is to evaluate the activities of the Project Office for IODE before considering a renewal of the MoU that establishes it in Ostend. Mr Adam Leadbetter (Marine Institute, Ireland) and Mr Loic Petit de la Villeon (IFREMER, France) were selected for this mission.

## Recommendations

5. Based on the results outlined above, the reviewers identified a number of areas which the IODE Project Office should consider in the future. These are detailed below:

- (i) In terms of conducting a performance review of the IOC Project Office for IODE, no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Project Office exist to provide a baseline for such a review. The reviewers recommended that the IODE Project develops and agrees on a clear set of KPIs with its key stakeholders (UNESCO/IOC and VLIZ).
- (ii) Similarly, it is recommended that the IOC Project Office for IODE improves its annual reporting to both VLIZ and the IODE community as a whole. These reports should include summary achievements from all IODE projects and highlight the impact of the activities of the Project Office and the overall IODE programme. Such reporting should

allow better communication of the results of the IODE programme to all stakeholders as interim updates between IODE sessions and UNESCO/IOC governing body sessions.

- (iii) The reviewers recommended that methods to better assess and report the impact of the training facilitated through the OceanTeacher Global Academy be investigated and adopted.
- (iv) The strong brand of the IODE Project Office should be more prominently displayed on the various portals operated by the IODE Project Office. Each of these portals should have a clear and distinctive purpose which is well described. The IODE brand could also be strengthened by clarifying IODE's relationships with the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (amongst others) on the IODE website, and perhaps through a full website refresh. This should also help to focus which projects are most clearly in IODE's domain, and which are most clearly in the domain of, for example, GOOS or WMO. Similarly, the IODE Project Office is encouraged to promote its brand and its activity including through Ocean Info Hub and Ocean Teacher Global Academy activities more prominently in communications for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The reviewers note the strong capacity of the IODE Project Office to conduct cross-cutting activities such as capacity building, training, marine information and data management projects, and in operating various web portals.
- (v) The reviewers noted that those interviewed universally praised the strong efficiency of the IODE Project Office secretariat under the strong leadership of Mr Peter Pissierssens. The reviewers identified the necessity for a succession planning to replace Mr Pissierssens who will retire and, if possible, to organize some overlap in tenure between Mr Pissierssens and his successor.
- (vi) Due to the administrative structures under which the IODE Project Office exists, it is difficult for the Project Office to become involved in European Union funded projects, including Horizon-funded projects and EASME contracts, such as the EMODnet lots. For example, it is noted that the European Union has made significant investments through Horizon funding in open data and open science, which IODE is well placed to contribute to. The reviewers recommended that structures which would allow more responsiveness of the Project Office to such projects be examined, for instance in the form of a subsidiary entity or an international association without lucrative purpose (AISBL). This may also require reaching out to sectors that are not traditionally involved in IODE Project Office activities, in particular private sector industry.
- (vii) Sustainability plans for the key and/or highest-priority IODE projects should also be developed in order to maximise the potential reach and impact of the projects. These sustainability plans should consider the continued and furthered use of blended teaching platforms for OceanTeacher Global Academy courses as was successfully trialled in 2020. It was also suggested to the reviewers that more autonomy for the Regional Training Centres should be considered as an element of the sustainability of Ocean Teacher Global Academy.
- (viii) The goal of more sustainable funding and improved ability to respond to project calls should be facilitated by the expansion of the IODE Project Office staff, in particular on the IT side. Currently, IT staffing is limited to one member but this puts limitation on the technical support and leadership that the Project Office can provide, especially when considering projects such as [Ocean Info Hub](#). The hiring and retention of extra full-time staff with skills in digital and information technologies would also help the IODE Project Office maintain its relevance in the rapidly and ever changing data management landscape, and to cement IODE's role in the 'FAIR-ification' of ocean data.

- (ix) The staffing level could be further mitigated in the short-term by encouraging secondments and internships to the IODE Project Office from a wider range of UNESCO/IOC Member States, particularly in the IODE Project Office's role with respect to UNESCO/IOC's Capacity Development Strategy.
- (x) The reviewers recommended the renewal of the MoU between IOC and the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ).

6. After considering the full report of the review ([Document IOC/IODE-XXVI/6.5](#) (Performance review of the IOC Project Office for IODE)) the IODE Committee, at its 26<sup>th</sup> Session (20–23 April 2021) adopted [Recommendation IODE-XXVI.6.5: The UNESCO/IOC Project Office For IODE In Ostend, Belgium](#).

#### **Financial and administrative implications**

7. There are no financial implications (costs) for IOC. Administrative implications include the establishment and signature of a new MoU between the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) and the IOC.

#### **Proposed decision**

8. In light of the foregoing, the IOC Assembly may wish to consider Dec. A-31/3.4.2 in the Action Paper (document document [IOC-31/AP](#) Rev.)