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Oostende, 25 November 2024

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**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**

**(of UNESCO)**

**Twenty-eighth Session of the IOC Committee on International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE-28)**

**12-14 March 2025**

**Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS)**

By Ward Appeltans, Katherine Tattersall, Dan Lear

# Summary

During the intersessional period (May 2023 to November 2024) OBIS published 23.75 million new marine species occurrence records from 598 new datasets, adding 13,240 previously unreported marine species to OBIS. OBIS now holds 132 million records from 5,375 datasets on 194,000 marine species (18 Nov 2024).

The IODE Steering Group for OBIS (SG-OBIS) held its twelfth session in Gunsan, Republic of Korea, from 25-29 March 2024. This session brought together 23 participants representing 16 OBIS nodes and the secretariat. A key outcome of SG-OBIS-12 was the agreement on a new priority strategy and management structure to align with the Rules of Procedure for IODE Programme Components. The new strategy focuses on two thematic areas: Data Mobilization and Data Application. To implement the strategy, two OBIS coordination groups were established:

* OBIS Data Coordination Group (DCG): This group is tasked with reviewing data standards, specifications and implementation models and ensuring the long-term archiving of data. Key performance indicators focus on the review and implementation of biodiversity Essential Ocean Variables (EOVs) specifications, engagement with external data-related groups, and integration with the IOC data architecture.
* OBIS Products Coordination Group (PCG): This group focuses on enhancing access to FAIR OBIS Products. Activities include developing an OBIS Products Catalogue and a JupyterHub for testing.

Additionally, an OBIS Nodes Coordination Group (NCG) was formed to facilitate communication and coordination among OBIS Nodes regarding ongoing activities, priorities, and challenges.

To support the new coordination and community engagement activities, a part-time OBIS staff member (consultant) has been employed, funded by increased regular program funding from UNESCO to IODE. Another significant decision was to convene an OBIS All-Hands meeting, biennially. This meeting will serve as a platform to bring together the broader OBIS Community of Practice.

The SG-OBIS-12 also developed a communication plan and allocated a budget for creating and disseminating branding materials.

To align with the new IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use, the SG-OBIS-12 revised and adopted new guidelines for data sharing and use within OBIS.

An ad-hoc online meeting of the IODE Steering Group for OBIS (SG-OBIS-12+) occurred on 30 May 2024. The primary objective was to address the status of the work plan and budget and to elect a new SG-OBIS Co-Chair, following Martha Vides' completion of her two terms. Dan Lear (MBA/OBIS-UK) was appointed as the new incoming SG-OBIS Co-Chair. The SG-OBIS also decided that it would be a co-organizer of the Living Data 2025 conference, together with TDWG, GEO BON and GBIF.

The joint marine strategy and action plan with GBIF was formally announced on 28 May 2024, with webinars taking place on 13 June 2024, to inform the community. A joint OBIS-GBIF Implementation Committee has been established which meets monthly.

The 6th session of the OBIS Executive Committee (EC-OBIS-6) took place in Oostende from 14–16 October 2024, focusing on planning the activities of the three new coordination groups and drafting the 2025 OBIS work plan and budget, alongside a long-term vision for OBIS’s future. Discussions also covered developing a new website and outreach materials to enhance OBIS’s visibility and attract resources. The EC-OBIS-6 also planned OBIS’s participation in the upcoming meetings: IODC-3, IODE-28 and decided to have the next SG-OBIS meeting (SG-OBIS-13) and OBIS coordination group meetings in Bogota, Colombia, 18-20 October 2025, back-to-back with the Living Data 2025 Conference, which will take place on 21-24 October 2025 (this will replace the All-Hands meeting in 2025).

In December 2022, COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity called upon OBIS to support the monitoring framework of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which aims to halt biodiversity loss, reduce risks and restore natural ecosystems. Specifically, OBIS is mentioned in complementary indicators for countries to report on Goal D and 21 (access to data and information). COP16 did not conclude on this agenda item, but the suggestion is made to include OBIS also in target 20. OBIS will need to provide robust indicators and guidance for state parties to use OBIS in their national reports. This work will be brought to the OBIS EC for endorsement as a work plan amendment.

The OBIS budget request for the next intersessional period (2025) includes three scenarios (base, medium, and preferred). The major difference between the scenarios is the inclusion of funds for in-person workshops, consultant support, and data training workshops.

In conclusion, OBIS has made significant progress in mobilising and sharing marine biodiversity data. The implementation of the new strategic framework, with its focus on data and product coordination and node engagement, is expected to support international frameworks such as the GBF, and further enhance the impact and sustainability of OBIS in the coming years. However, addressing potential risks, such as securing sufficient funding and filling key staff positions, is crucial to ensure continued success. Several new Horizon Europe projects involving the OBIS Secretariat were initiated in 2023-2024, enabling staff growth and retention. The secretariat now has 8 staff members of which 3 are project appointments and 4 are consultants. A second UNESCO regular programme (P3 level) post for OBIS has been created. The vacancy for the OBIS technical and scientific coordinator was posted on 25 January 2024, however the recruitment process for this position is still ongoing (Nov 2024).

The OBIS Programme Component Report is included as **Annex I**.

**Annex I:** **OBIS Programme Component Report**

|  |
| --- |
| 1. **TITLE OF IODE PROGRAMME COMPONENT/PROGRAMME ACTIVITY/PROJECT AND ACRONYM**
 |
| Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS) |
| 1. **ESTABLISHED *(provide reference to IODE Committee session and Decision)***
 |
| IOC Resolution XXV-4 (2009): OBIS accepted within IODE programmeIODE Decision XXI.2 (2011): Establishment of an IODE Steering Group for OBIS |
| 1. **REPORT SUBMITTED BY *(Name/Date)***
 |
| Ward Appeltans (manager), Katherine Tattersall (Co-Chair), Dan Lear (Co-Chair)22 November 2024 |
| 1. **GENERAL OVERVIEW/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
 |
| **OBIS Steering Group**The IODE Steering Group for OBIS (SG-OBIS) held its twelfth session in Gunsan, Republic of Korea, from 25-29 March 2024. This session brought together 23 participants representing 16 OBIS nodes and the secretariat. A key outcome of SG-OBIS-12 was the agreement on a new priority strategy and management structure to align with the Rules of Procedure for IODE Programme Components. The new strategy focuses on two thematic areas: Data Mobilization and Data Application. To implement this, two OBIS coordination groups were established: a Data Coordination Group and a Products Coordination Group, respectively. Additionally, an OBIS Nodes Coordination Group was formed to facilitate discussions among OBIS nodes regarding ongoing activities, priorities, and challenges. To support the new coordination and community engagement activities, a part-time OBIS staff member (consultant) has been employed, funded by increased regular program funding from UNESCO to IODE. Another significant decision was to convene an OBIS All-Hands meeting, biennially. This meeting will serve as a platform to bring together the broader OBIS Community of Practice. The SG-OBIS also developed a communication plan and allocated a budget for creating and disseminating branding materials. To align with the new IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use, the SG-OBIS-12 revised and adopted new guidelines for data sharing and use within OBIS. An ad-hoc online meeting of the IODE Steering Group for OBIS (SG-OBIS) occurred on 30 May 2024. The primary objective was to address the status of the work plan and budget and to elect a new SG-OBIS Co-Chair, following Martha Vides' completion of her two terms. Dan Lear (MBA/OBIS-UK) was appointed as the new incoming SG-OBIS Co-Chair. The SG-OBIS also decided that it would be a co-organizer of the Living Data 2025 conference, together with TDWG, GEO BON and GBIF.**OBIS Executive Committee**The 6th session of the OBIS Executive Committee (EC-OBIS-6) took place in Oostende from 14–16 October 2024, focusing on planning the activities within the three new coordination groups and drafting the 2025 OBIS work plan and budget alongside a long-term vision for OBIS’s future. Discussions also covered developing a new website and outreach materials to enhance OBIS’s visibility and attract resources. The EC-OBIS-6 also planned OBIS’s participation in the upcoming meetings: IODC-3, IODE-28 and decided to have the next SG-OBIS meeting (SG-OBIS-13) and OBIS coordination group meetings in Bogota, Colombia, 18-20 October 2025, back-to-back with the Living Data 2025 Conference, which will take place on 21-24 October 2025 (this will replace the All-Hands meeting in 2025). **Data**During the intersessional period from May 2023 to November 2024, OBIS published 23.75 million new records from 598 new datasets, adding 13,240 previously unreported marine species to OBIS.**OBIS Secretariat staffing**A second UNESCO regular programme (level P3) post for OBIS, an OBIS technical and scientific coordinator, has been created. The vacancy was posted on 25 January 2024 however the recruitment process for this position is still ongoing (Nov 2024). Several new Horizon Europe projects involving the OBIS Secretariat were initiated, enabling staff growth and retention. The secretariat now has 8 staff members of which 3 are project appointments and 4 are consultants. **Partnerships**The joint marine strategy and action plan with GBIF was formally announced on 28 May 2024, with webinars taking place on 13 June 2024, to inform the community. A joint OBIS-GBIF Implementation Committee has been established which meets monthly. |
| 1. **DESCRIBE THE STATUS OF WORKPLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND THE RESULTS ACHIEVED**
 |
| **OBIS 2024 work plan**1. The development of a draft communication and outreach plan. US$0. **Completed**, but will be reviewed in 2025
2. The establishment of a new OBIS data policy and guidelines aligned with and implementing the recently adopted IOC data policy. US$0. **Completed**
3. A comprehensive review of the OBIS management structure to align it with the new IODE Rules and Procedures. US$0. **Completed.** Existing ToRs updated and developed new ToRs for the various new coordination groups.
4. Appoint a part-time consultant community engagement officer to assist in the establishment of the coordination groups and to provide administrative support. US$30,000. **Completed**
5. Technical and scientific workshops for the coordination groups: US$20,000. **Completed**. Replaced with EC-OBIS meeting
6. The biannual OBIS conference. US$40,000. **In progress.** Scheduled for 2025
7. Development of OBIS communication and outreach materials and distribution of these materials. US$5,000. **In progress**
8. Maintenance and further development of the OBIS technology stack: US$15,000. **In progress**

**OBIS 2025 work plan**  |
| **Outcomes** *(add more outcomes if needed)* |
| **Outcome N° 1. Operational Data Coordination Group (DCG)** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. At least 5 online meetings scheduled through October 2025
2. SG-OBIS adopted data work plan for 2026-2027
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. Meeting minutes shared through a public portal via the OBIS website
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 2 Review, support, alignment and adoption of data standards, specifications and publication mechanisms including long-term archiving of data** |
| **Performance indicators** (list 2-5 indicators)1. By end 2025, review and provide implementation guidelines to OBIS Nodes for at least 90% of existing biodiversity EOV specifications, which will support the publication of EOV data by OBIS nodes
2. Conduct a survey by mid 2025, targeting 100% of OBIS nodes, to assess their engagement in at least 5 key external data-related groups, to include GOOS, GBIF, and TDWG and present findings with recommendations to the OBIS EC
3. Ensure that by the end of 2025, we present a Register of Engagement covering 100% of OBIS Nodes to the OBIS EC and report to Nodes CG
4. By end of 2025, achieve functional integration of OBIS data with the IOC data architecture, ensuring 100% alignment with interoperability standards, and report progress to SG-OBIS and SG-ODIS
5. Complete a review of the eDNA data extension for DwC and the eDNA FAIR checklist by end 2025, providing a final report with actionable recommendations for enhancing data interoperability and accessibility to the Joint GBIF/OBIS DNA derived data guidelines working group.
6. By end 2025, survey 100% of OBIS nodes' ability to provide long-term data archiving. Design and present model for tiered, CoreTrustSeal aligned, long-term data archiving to the NCG

  | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. Biodiversity EOV Publication Guidelines for OBIS Nodes
2. OBIS Node Engagement Survey Report & Recommendations
3. Register of OBIS Node Engagement
4. OBIS metadata published to ODIS following the latest specifications in the ODIS architecture guide <https://book.odis.org/>
5. Update to the OBIS-GBIF DNA derived data guidelines (Publishing DNA-derived data through biodiversity data platforms, <https://doi.org/10.35035/doc-vf1a-nr22>)
6. Long-term Data Archiving Model Proposal
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 3. Operational Products Coordination Group (PCG)** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. At least 5 online meetings scheduled through October 2025
2. SG-OBIS adopted product work plan for 2026-2027
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. Meeting minutes shared through a public portal via the OBIS website
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 4. Enhanced access to FAIR OBIS Products** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. Detailed plan drafted for development of catalogue.
2. Developmental “OBIS Products Catalogue” stood up for testing
3. Developmental “JupyterHub” stood up for testing
4. Production “OBIS Products Catalogue” published
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. OBIS Products Catalogue
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 5. Operational Node Coordination Group (NCG)** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. Nodes Coordination Group meetings: the NCG should organise at least 5 coordination meetings between November 2024 and October 2025.
2. Meeting attendance: Percentage of Nodes attending each meeting between November 2024 and October 2025.
3. Participant engagement: Number of questions asked by meeting participants between November 2024 and October 2025.
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. Build an NCG Wiki and make it accessible to Nodes
2. Progress reporting and engagement representation at EC meetings and SG meetings
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 6. Improve Inter-Node Communication** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. Flash Talks attendance: number of views per Flash Talk between November 2024 and October 2025.
2. Wiki users: number of Wiki monthly users between November 2024 and October 2025.
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. Create and distribute a Flash Talk template to be used by the Nodes by November 2025.
2. Create an interactive issue-reporting platform where Nodes can pose questions, suggest ideas, and report issues to be addressed either during NCG meetings or in the Wiki.
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 7. Improved OBIS branding, funding and partnerships**  |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. Number of web visitors
2. Amount of extra-budgetary funding raised
3. Number of new partnerships, or renewed, agreements signed
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. New OBIS website published
2. OBIS branding material, promotional merchandise slide deck and infographics
3. New partnership agreements signed
 | in progress |
| **Outcome N° 8. OBIS meetings** |
| **Performance indicators** *(list 2-5 indicators)*1. Participation in SG-OBIS-meetings (ad-hoc and in-person)
2. Participation in IOC and IODE governance meetings
3. Participation in OBIS All-Hands meeting
 | **Status** *(completed, in progress, cancelled)*in progress |
| **Deliverables**1. SG-OBIS report
2. Reports to IODE governance (Committee and management group)
3. Report of OBIS All-Hands meeting (conference proceedings)
 | in progress |
| **List of partners and key stakeholders.** *(Indicate how partners and stakeholders contribute to the action)*The GOOS BioEco Panel, GBIF, and TDWG all are active in the setting and development of data-related standards and specifications. Liaison and alignment will strengthen the position of OBIS, and reciprocal contributions to the DCG, where appropriate will further streamline the flow in the wider data ecosystem.The GOOS BioEco Panel, MBON, US-IOOS, CIOOS, and OTN and many others are also all important user communities whose feedback should be included in the development of the products catalogue. Members of these efforts and organisations may also be invited to sit on the PCG to guide priorities.The membership of the NCG is mandatory for OBIS Node Managers (or delegates/reps) and incorporates representation from the OBIS Secretariat and PCG and DCG. |
| **Explain how the Programme Component/Programme Activity/Project is contributing to other IODE or IOC programmes and activities.**The Data Coordination Group supports the effective flow of standards-aligned data from the point of collation at the OBIS nodes, and facilitates the ‘Publish once, harvest many times’ paradigm. Improved flow of data from OBIS nodes increases the available evidence base which forms the foundation of derived data products, tools and services within OBIS and for our collaborators and network more widely, including the GOOS BioEco Portal. Additionally, our alignment with the activities of other groups engaged in the wider biodiversity data space significantly improves the interoperability and overall FAIRness of OBIS data, supporting cross-domain work and removing data silos and barriers to use and interpretation of data.OBIS “Products” include data and information products, from any type of analysis (e.g. description, data visualisation, etc.) that synthesise and generate new information from data hosted on OBIS and by other sources. Currently, these products are not well coordinated and fall short of being FAIR. The Products Coordination Group will increase the impact and value of these products by creating a catalogue, and coordinating products within that catalogue, to increase the findability and accessibility of OBIS Products. Increased FAIRness should increase the efficiency of other IODE and IOC programmes and activities using OBIS products by reducing the time needed to find and reshape, or repurpose, these products in support of IODE/IOC efforts. |
| **Provide details on the long-term sustainability.** *(including confirmed extra budgetary resources)*The Data Coordination Group depends on in-kind contributions of OBIS nodes and partners, guided and supported by members of the secretariat. The long-term sustainability of this group depends on positive feedback, where the in-kind contributions are seen as a productive and useful contribution by OBIS nodes and partners. The DCG does not currently have established Co-Chairs with the Co-Chairs of SG-OBIS currently acting in this capacity. The support of the wider OBIS community in taking on the DCG Co-Chair will be essential to the long term success of the group.The OBIS Products Coordination Group depends on in-kind contributions of OBIS nodes and partners, guided and supported by members of the secretariat. Specifically, the secretariat position of OBIS technical coordinator remains unfilled, but is crucial for supporting the development of the products catalogue and relevant OBIS products. The long-term sustainability of this group depends on positive feedback, where the in-kind contributions are seen as a productive and useful contribution by OBIS nodes and partners. This initial year will depend more critically on OBIS funding for website and catalogue development to develop a solid foundation for subsequent work.The programme of the NCG is sustainable indefinitely based on: (i) Availability of Secretariat support (Comms Officer), (ii) Availability of Co-Chairs and (iii) Engagement of Nodes. |
| **Risks.** *(Describe the potential risk of not achieving the expected results)*The lack of an effective DCG will reduce the availability and flow of data from the OBIS nodes. In turn this will negatively impact the availability of biodiversity data available to underpin assessments and associated tools, products and services developed elsewhere in OBIS and beyond. It will also reduce the reputation and perceived effectiveness of the wider OBIS network.If the OBIS Products Coordination Group is not able to produce an OBIS Products Catalogue, at best, the IODE/IOC collaborators and OBIS stakeholders will not comprehend the full utility, or production, of OBIS. At worst, OBIS may be perceived as an inefficient endeavour that is not able to cultivate and coordinate sophisticated information products. Lastly, there is some risk of restricted funds limiting development of the website and catalogue from their full potentials. Properly assessing and managing this risk depends on initial framing of the development work so that costs can be accurately estimated.Loss of Comms Officer support could severely limit the effectiveness of the OBIS NCG and loss of Co-Chair involvement and support could similarly severely limit the effectiveness of the OBIS NCG. |
| 1. **SUBMISSION OF WORKPLAN AND BUDGET FOR THE NEXT INTERSESSIONAL PERIOD**
 |
| **Workplan and budget for the next intersessional period.** *(show amount in USD)* |
|  | Budget request from IODE | Confirmed EB funds  |
|  | 2025-26:(base) | 2025-26:(medium) | 2025-26: (preferred) | 2025 | remarks |
| **Outcome N° 1. Operational Data Coordination Group (DCG)** |
| DCG online meetings | 0 | 0 | 72,000 | 72,000 | in-kind co chairs |
| **Outcome N° 2 Review, support, alignment and adoption of data standards, specifications and publication mechanisms including long-term archiving of data** |
| DCG in-person workshop | 0 | 0 | 30,000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| OBIS Secretariat staff support: IODE QMF and CoreTrustSeal Accreditation Consultant | 0 | 0 | 30,000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| Infrastructure costs: long term storage and associated operational costs | 10,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 |  |  |
| Data training workshop | 0 | 0 | 48000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| **Outcome N° 3. Operational Products Coordination Group (PCG)** |
| PCG online meetings | 0 | 0 | 72,000 | 72,000 | in-kind co chairs |
| **Outcome N° 4. Enhanced access to FAIR OBIS Products** |
| Infrastructure costs: (JupyterHub Instance for 5 active users at a time with 16GB RAM or for 100 active users with 64GB RAM) | 5,000 | 5,000 | 8,400 |  |  |
| PCG in-person workshop  | 0 | 0 | 30,000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| OBIS Secretariat staff support: UX Consultant  | 0 | 0 | 30,000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| **Outcome N° 5. Operational Node Coordination Group (NCG)** |
| NCG online meetings | 0 | 0 | 72,000 | 72,000 | in-kind co chairs |
| **Outcome N° 6. Improve Inter-Node Communication** |
| All-Hands meeting: Funding for member attendance at biannual All Hands meetings (including Living Data & SG-OBIS 2025) | 40,000 | 45,000 | 50,000 |  |  |
| Infrastructure costs: Communication platform subscriptions (e.g. Slack, Miro, other preferred tools?) Licence fee for <100 users. | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 |  |  |
| Regional face-to-face NCG meetings (room and catering) 2-3 per year | 0 | 0 | 50,000 |  | only in preferred scenario |
| **Outcome N° 7. Improved OBIS branding, funding and partnerships**  |
| Branding, Communication & outreach | 4,500 | 9,500 | 10,000 |  |  |
| Notion subscription | 1,500 | 1,500 | 1,500 |  |  |
| OBIS Secretariat staff support: OBIS Community Engagement Officer (consultant) | 40,000 | 50,000 | 150,000 |  |  |
| **Outcome N° 8. OBIS meetings** |  |  |  |  |  |
| OBIS secretariat travel (SG-OBIS) | 15,000 | 17,000 | 40,000 |  |  |
| OBIS secretariat travel (IOC Assembly, UNOC etc) | 2,000 | 10,000 | 15,000 |  |  |
| OBIS secretariat staff costs (Horizon Europe projects) |  |  |  | 412,000 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **TOTAL** | **120,000** | **150,000** | **720,900** | **628,000** |  |
| 1. **DRAFT TEXT FOR THE ANNOTATED AGENDA AND SUMMARY REPORT** *(to be used for reporting to IODE session)*
 |
| During the intersessional period (May 2023 to November 2024) OBIS published 23.75 million new marine species occurrence records from 598 new datasets, adding 13,240 previously unreported marine species to OBIS. OBIS now holds 132 million records from 5,375 datasets on 194,000 marine species (18 Nov 2024). The IODE Steering Group for OBIS (SG-OBIS) held its twelfth session in Gunsan, Republic of Korea, from 25-29 March 2024. This session brought together 23 participants representing 16 OBIS nodes and the secretariat. A key outcome of SG-OBIS-12 was the agreement on a new priority strategy and management structure to align with the Rules of Procedure for IODE Programme Components. The new strategy focuses on two thematic areas: Data Mobilization and Data Application. To implement the strategy, two OBIS coordination groups were established:* OBIS Data Coordination Group (DCG): This group is tasked with reviewing data standards, specifications and implementation models and ensuring the long-term archiving of data. Key performance indicators focus on the review and implementation of biodiversity Essential Ocean Variables (EOVs) specifications, engagement with external data-related groups, and integration with the IOC data architecture.
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