



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

Thirty-third Session of the Assembly
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Item 4.5.3 of the Provisional Agenda

**REPORT OF THE INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP ON OCEAN OBSERVATIONS
IN AREAS UNDER NATIONAL JURISDICTION (2025)**

Summary

By Decision A-32/4.8.2, the IOC Assembly decided to establish an ad hoc intersessional Working Group on Ocean Observations in Areas under National Jurisdiction according to the terms of reference provided in the Annex to the same decision and requested the Working Group to report to the IOC Assembly at its 33rd session.

This document provides the report from the Working Group including recommendations for action.

Financial and administrative implications: paragraph 14.

The proposed decision(s) is referenced A-33/Dec.4.5.3 in the Action Paper (document [IOC/A-33/2 Prov.](#))

Introduction

1. In compliance with Assembly [decision A-32/4.8.2](#) (2023), an ad hoc intersessional Working Group on Ocean Observations in Areas under National Jurisdiction (referred to as the Working Group) was established with representatives from 27 Member States under the co-chairship of Dr Suzan M. El-Gharabawy (Egypt) and Mr Ariel Hernán Troisi (Argentina). The Working Group has met on a monthly basis since November 2023.
2. The Working Group provided an interim report ([IOC/EC-57/4.2.Doc\(1\)](#)) on its work to the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in June 2024. The Executive Council through IOC [Decision EC-57/4.2](#) encouraged the Working Group to continue its work, and encouraged Member States to contribute to the work of the group.
3. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Working Group presents to this Assembly the results of the Working Group including recommendations for actions.

Background

4. Prior to 2023 and discussion of this matter at the 32nd session of the Assembly:
 - (i) The IOC Executive Council at its 55th session in 2022 had considered document [IOC/EC-55/3.4.Doc\(1\)](#), which highlighted issues and solutions for enhancing sustained ocean observations in areas under national jurisdiction, and the role of IOC, WMO and DOALOS in this regard. The document was based primarily on the summary report of the *Experts Workshop on Ocean Observations in Areas under National Jurisdiction* ([OONJ, 2021, GOOS-246](#)).
 - (ii) [Decision IOC/EC-55/3.4](#) invited the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) to provide detailed information on the issues raised and requested Member States to provide information on their experiences regarding sustained ocean observations in areas under their national jurisdiction including on the issues identified by GOOS. Separate surveys were then conducted throughout 2022–2023, to seek feedback from GOOS observation networks and from Member States. The results of these surveys were presented to the Assembly at its 32nd session (2023) in document [IOC-32/4.8.2.Doc\(1\)](#).

Summary of discussions from the Working Group

5. The Working Group reviewed a range of material, including the summary report of the *Experts Workshop on Ocean Observations in Areas under National Jurisdiction* ([OONJ, 2021, GOOS-246](#)) as well as additional information collected in 2022–2023 via the survey undertaken with networks ([IOC/INF-1431](#)) and Member States in response to IOC Circular Letter [2938](#). In addition, the Working Group also invited representatives from a number of networks (Argo, Go-SHIP) as well as OceanOPS to its meetings to comment on issues within the Working Group's mandate.
6. One of the main requirements of the working group was to identify and document specific examples of problems encountered in the implementation of continuous ocean observations and to assess their impact on GOOS, as well as on research, services and products that depend on GOOS data.
7. In order to focus on its work, the Working Group did not seek to define what is meant by 'sustained ocean observations', but based its work on the principle that GOOS long-term observations are those conducted through deployment of instruments over long periods of time, as well as repeated surveys. This contrasts with other types observations, such as short-term seagoing expeditions.

8. The Working Group extracted and grouped the issues raised by the networks and Member States from the survey results into several categories. It became clear that the main issue raised in the surveys was the lack of clarity, awareness or understanding of the application process for **Marine Scientific Research (MSR)**, which often differs from one country to another. This impression was confirmed throughout the discussions between the Working Group and the GOOS observing networks, which identified challenges such as the deployment of observation equipment and the repetition of activities. The key points identified by the Working Group on the MSR application process are as follows:

- (i) Administrative complexity, such as unclear points of contact or delayed responses, particularly when more than one coastal State are involved;
- (ii) Additional costs or additional information requirements during the application process;
- (iii) Missed deployment opportunities due to the six-month requirement in Article 248 of UNCLOS;
- (iv) Difficulties in using Form A (Annex I to the 2010 DOALOS Guide on MSR¹).

9. In light of the above, the Working Group sought to understand what the material impacts of these challenges for GOOS. The Working Group members had differing views on what constitutes a material impact. Qualitatively, these impacts include missed deployments, reduced data collection, decreased data flow to GOOS, and missed opportunities due to simplification or cancellation of a cruise. However, after consultation with the networks, no data or evidence was provided to quantitatively determine the perceived data deficit or material impact on GOOS services or products.

10. A report from the Ship-of-Opportunity Programme (SOOP) presented evidence of material impacts for GOOS caused by the existing MSR process. The data provided by SOCONET/SOOP-CO₂ (pCO₂) provides the CO₂ fluxes between air and ocean and trends in surface water acidification. These data are essential for annual assessments such as those provided by the Global Carbon Project and play an important role in IPCC reports. In addition, these data are important for validating data obtained using biogeochemical sensors on Argo floats (BGC Argo). These challenges have a significant negative impact on GOOS. Current legal requirements make MSR applications extremely complex, if not even impossible, for SOOP, even though these data are needed for scientific purposes and for IPCC reports, among others.

11. The Working Group recognised that many of the issues raised concerned the need to comply with Part XIII of UNCLOS, and therefore sought to identify best practices among Member States in order to promote good working practices within GOOS networks. Examples included:

- (i) USA State Department compilation of States' MSR application processes <https://www.state.gov/guidance-on-supporting-documentation/>
- (ii) France have developed a solution designed to help countries obtain French equipment with their own vessels, enable them to control what is measured and provide FAIR data to the global community, as is the case for Morocco;
- (iii) Mauritius has acquired floats from NOAA, the data are automatically uploaded nationally, and the country can choose to deliver the data to the global community;
- (iv) Bilateral arrangements between certain countries coordinating on GOOS;

12. Although this list is not exhaustive, details of best practices should be communicated to GOOS for dissemination to the community, as appropriate.

¹ [*Marine Scientific Research: A revised guide to the implementation of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*](#), United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations, New York 2010

13. Furthermore, given the Working Group's mandate to identify potential actions that fall within the IOC mandate, several recommendations were considered:

- (i) IOC/GOOS could raise awareness of the MSR process, for example through relevant communications, including appropriate links to information;
- (ii) request GOOS to consult its networks and relevant stakeholders to determine whether and, if so, where the 2010 DOALOS Guide on MSR could be revised, and report back to the 34th IOC Assembly;
- (iii) IOC Member States should promote collaboration between neighbouring coastal States to facilitate bilateral and regional facilitation of MSR clearance;
- (iv) Invite IOC's Regional Subsidiary Bodies and GOOS Regional Alliances to act as intermediaries between national authorities and research networks and facilitate awareness of the MSR clearance process by offering consistent technical advice and guidance, as well as coordinating efforts to streamline procedures among countries with similar regional characteristics;
- (v) recognising the value of the IOC mandate for the Argo programme, the Working Group identified that IOC could consider a similar mandate for other relevant GOOS networks, in particular SOOP;

Financial and administrative implications

14. The financial and administrative immediate implications of the activities fall within the parameters of the regular budget of IOC (42 C/5) and the activities under Function B of the IOC Medium-Term Strategy: "Observing System / Data Management".