



IHO File No. S3/2405

**CIRCULAR LETTER 39/2017**  
**13 June 2017**

## OUTCOMES FROM UN OCEAN CONFERENCE

Dear Hydrographer,

1. The Secretary-General represented the IHO at the United Nations (UN) Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development* (The Ocean Conference) that took place in the General Assembly Hall at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA from 5 to 9 June 2017.

2. The overarching theme of the UN Ocean Conference was - *Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14*. The Conference was convened to review the actions required to achieve the targets set under SDG14 and to rally support from governments, international organisations, academia, industry and the general public to ensure that the goal is achieved. This included encouraging all interested parties to declare Voluntary Commitments towards meeting the targets. As discussed at the first session of the IHO Assembly, the Secretariat registered two Voluntary Commitments on behalf of the IHO. Both are based on the existing IHO Work Programme:

- *Provide fundamental mapping of the seas and oceans*
- *IHO Hydrography Capacity Building Programme for Coastal States*

3. By the end of the Conference well over a thousand Voluntary Commitments had been registered from governments, international organizations and industry.

4. SDG14 comprises ten principal targets covering a wide range of issues affecting the sustainable development of the seas and oceans. These can be found at:  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14>.

5. Of particular relevance to Hydrographers is SDG14 target 14a:

*Target 14a - Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries.*

Target 14a to increase scientific knowledge of the seas and oceans clearly involves a better understanding of the depth and shape of the seafloor, since bathymetry underpins almost every other human activity and scientific study in the maritime domain. In this respect the work of the IHO and its aim to ensure that all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are adequately surveyed and charted, together with its support of the IHO-IOC GEBCO programme of ocean bathymetric mapping is key to improving the achievement of many, if not most of the targets under SDG14.

6. The Secretary-General was able to make a statement on behalf of the IHO during the Conference. He pointed out that all the targets agreed under SDG14 depend upon a better knowledge of the depth and shape of the seafloor, not only in the deeper ocean but also in the world's coastal waters where 50% remains unsurveyed.

7. The Secretary-General highlighted the IHO's continuing desire to improve the currently unsatisfactory situation regarding mankind's knowledge of the depth and shape of the seas and oceans and the need to support government hydrographic surveying programmes. He explained that in addition to national surveying programmes, the IHO is now re-invigorating the concept of crowd-sourcing also known as passage sounding - where all vessels use their standard navigation equipment to help measure and map the depth of the sea. At the same time, he reported that the IHO is investigating the use of other innovative technologies, including the use of autonomous roaming vehicles, and the determination of the depth in shallow water using satellite imagery, where conditions allow. The Secretary-General specifically mentioned the IHO-IOC GEBCO programme as a way to better support the aims of SDG14 – and in particular target 14a.

8. He concluded by saying that Governments need to support their national hydrographic services, industry and academia must ensure that the depth data that they already hold is made available for the common good, and that the entire seafaring community should support the IHO in its global, crowd-sourced bathymetry programme.

9. Almost all the 193 Member States of the UN attended and many were represented by their Head of State or Government. The heads of intergovernmental and international organizations, together with representatives from business, academia and science, and ocean and marine life advocates were present in the Conference, making a total of about 6,000 participants. The Secretaries-General or equivalent of all the principal intergovernmental organizations with which the IHO collaborates were present, including the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA). The Secretary-General was only able to identify three Member States whose hydrographic services were directly represented; these being Mexico, UK and the USA.

10. During the Conference, Mr Yohei Sasakawa, on behalf of the Nippon Foundation, announced a ten-year programme with GEBCO aiming at comprehensively mapping all of the seafloor by 2030. This is reported in a separate Circular Letter.

11. The Conference ended with the overwhelming adoption of a 14-point *Call for Action* by the UN Member States. A copy of the Call for Action is available at: <https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction>.

12. There are several topics in the Call for Action that relate directly to the role and work programme of the IHO, including the following:

... *strengthen cooperation, policy coherence and coordination amongst institutions at all levels* (paragraph 13b);

... *strengthen and promote effective and transparent multi-stakeholder partnerships* (paragraph 13c);

... *develop comprehensive strategies to raise awareness of the natural and cultural significance of the ocean, as well as of its state and role* (paragraph 13d);

... *dedicate greater resources to marine scientific research* (paragraph 13f); and

... *support the use of effective and appropriate area-based management tools, including (...) marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management, based on best available science* (paragraph 13j).

13. The Governments of Kenya and Portugal will take on the co-hosting responsibilities for the next Conference in 2020, which will assess the progress made towards meeting the SDG14 targets.

14. In addition to their contribution to the relevant tasks identified in the IHO Work Programme, IHO Member States are invited to ensure that the role of Hydrographic Offices in contributing to the implementation of SDG14 is understood and acknowledged at the national level.

15. The IHO Secretariat will continue to monitor the overall contribution of the Organization to the implementation of SDG14 and liaise as appropriate with the relevant IHO organs and partner organizations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ward', with a period at the end.

Robert WARD  
Secretary-General