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**CIRCULAR LETTER 47/2017**  
**08 August 2017**

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UN-GGIM WORKING GROUP  
ON MARINE GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION**

**References:**

- A. IHO CL38/2016 dated 16 August - *Sixth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)*;
- B. IHO CL38/2017 dated 18 June - *Proposal to establish a UN-GGIM working group on marine geospatial information.*

Dear Hydrographer,

1. As announced in Reference A, the seventh Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) took place at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA from 31 July to 4 August. The principal purpose of the UN-GGIM is to play a leading role in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information management and to promote the use of geospatial information in addressing key global challenges, particularly taking into account the role of geospatial data in monitoring and achieving the Sustainable Development goals agreed under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN-GGIM reports to the UN General Assembly via the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
2. Over 300 participants representing nearly 90 UN Member States and more than 20 international observer organizations, including the IHO Secretariat, participated in the Session. Secretary-General Robert Ward represented the IHO assisted by the Secretary of the IHO Marine Spatial Data Infrastructures Working Group (MSDIWG), Mr John Pepper. Unfortunately, as in previous sessions of the UN-GGIM, national hydrographic services were not well represented among the national delegations, nor was it obvious that many delegations had been briefed by their national hydrographic services.
3. The seventh Session, which began on 3 August was preceded by 30 associated side meetings held over the preceding two days when regional UN-GGIM meetings and discussions in support of several UN-GGIM working groups took place. The IHO Secretariat, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the UN-GGIM and with the contribution of Mr John Nyberg, the Head of the Charting Division of the Office of Coast Survey of NOAA, mounted a poster display and organized a well-attended panel discussion on marine geospatial information as one of the side events.

**Agenda Items and Decisions of Relevance to the IHO**

4. Several items on the agenda of UN-GGIM7 were of direct and increasing relevance to IHO Member States, particularly in relation to the contribution of hydrographic data and services to national and regional spatial data infrastructures.
5. **Use of Standards.** Progress in the development and maintenance of relevant IHO standards was presented to the Committee as part of a combined report of the IHO, the Technical Committee TC211 (Geographic Information / Geomatics) of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC). The UN-GGIM expressed its thanks for the continuing work of the IHO, the ISO/TC211 and the OGC with respect to standards, harmonization

and implementation, and the usefulness of the two UN-GGIM reference documents on standards produced by the three organizations in the past. The Committee agreed with the recommendation that the UN-GGIM standards reference documents should undergo periodic review in order to ensure that they provided the most current guidance and references on applicable standards for spatial data infrastructures (SDI). The Committee agreed to seek the views of its Member States on how they were using the reference documents on standards as a means of highlighting the fundamental importance of the adoption and use of geospatial standards to enhance data inter-operability and access in their countries. This would be a precursor to the next review cycle.

6. The IHO has a long established cooperative involvement with the ISO/TC211 - primarily through the representation of the IHO in the meetings of the committee by the Secretariat, and has developed more recently an active participation in the relevant activities of the OGC, and most notably, the very recently established OGC Marine Domain Working Group.

7. **Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes.** The Committee reviewed the progress being made by its working group (WG) on global fundamental geospatial data themes. The themes are intended to be considered as the minimum list of geospatial data themes that all States should be addressing as part of their SDI. As a result, the Committee of Experts adopted a list of 13 themes, which includes *elevation and depth* as one of the themes. The Committee directed the WG to develop more detailed definitions for each theme. The IHO Secretariat has already contributed to preliminary work on developing a description for the theme of “elevation and depth”.

8. **Marine Geospatial Information.** As reported in Reference B, marine geospatial information was included in the Committee’s agenda for the first time this year. Under this agenda item the Committee agreed to establish a UN-GGIM Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information (MGIWG). The MGIWG will provide input to the Committee to support its Member States in developing national policy, strategic priorities, decision-making and the monitoring of global developments in relation to their spatial data infrastructures and marine geospatial information management.

9. **Marine Geospatial Information WG.** In addition to encouraging the Member States to involve the relevant national subject matter experts in their delegations, the terms of reference for the WG specifically and uniquely allocate an Observer position to the IHO.

10. It should be noted that while the IHO has been recognised as having a fundamental role in marine geospatial information, the terms of reference of the WG indicate a scope well beyond hydrography. The WG is expected to ... *play a leading role at the policy level by raising political awareness and highlighting the importance of reliable, timely and fit-for-purpose marine geospatial information to support the administration, management and governance of the marine environment.* It is anticipated that the WG will consider the full range of maritime geospatial information, including met-ocean data.

11. The terms of reference of the UN-GGIM: MGIWG are presented at Annex A.

### **The Role of IHO Member States in the UN-GGIM**

12. In addition to the topics described above, the UN-GGIM has the following items on its active work programme:

- global geodetic reference frame,
- legal and policy frameworks including issues related to authoritative data,
- geospatial information for sustainable development,
- geospatial information and service for disasters, and
- strengthening collaboration with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN).

These are all topics with direct relevance to most national hydrographic services.

13. The IHO MSDIWG has an obvious and direct relevance to the work and developments now taking place in the structure and the agenda of the UN-GGIM. It reinforces the role of the MSDIWG and the priority that is placed on MSDI in the IHO Work Programme.

14. Furthermore, given that the UN-GGIM is the highest level intergovernmental body now setting the global strategic guidance for geospatial information management, and it has firmly acknowledged that this includes the maritime domain, it is now more important than ever that the representatives of IHO Member States establish strong links with their land-based counterparts so as to provide balanced and well-informed representation in the UN-GGIM in such a way that they can influence and play a constructive role in the future considerations of the UN-GGIM. The alternative is that the IHO and its Member State representatives may be by-passed in the considerations and the decision-making of the UN-GGIM.

#### **Next Steps**

15. The UN-GGIM Secretariat will identify the co-Chairs and seek participation to the UN-GGIM: MGIWG during the forthcoming intersessional period. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the MGIWG will take place immediately prior to the next session of the UN-GGIM in New York in August 2018.

#### **Next Session of UN-GGIM**

16. The eighth Session of UN-GGIM will take place at the UN Headquarters in New York during the first week of August 2018.

Yours sincerely,

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

Robert WARD  
Secretary-General

#### **Annex:**

A. Terms of Reference for the UN-GGIM Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information

## **Terms of Reference for the UN-GGIM Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information**

### **1. Mandate**

- 1.1 The establishment of the UN-GGIM Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information [were adopted] by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management at its Seventh Session in August 2017.

### **2. Objectives**

The objectives of the Working Group are to:

- 2.1 Play a leading role at the policy level by raising political awareness and highlighting the importance of reliable, timely and fit-for-purpose marine geospatial information to support the administration, management and governance of the marine environment;
- 2.2 Encourage the use of internationally agreed-upon geospatial information frameworks, schemas, systems and established standards to improve the growing inter-dependent relationships between people and the marine environments; and
- 2.3 Support the Committee of Experts in the development of norms, principles, guides and standards to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable geospatial information including any regional capacity development initiatives.

### **3. Functions**

The functions of the Working Group will be to:

- 3.1 Provide a forum for dialogue and coordination between Member States, United Nations System, International Hydrographic Organization, and other international organisations and experts with a view to:
  - i) Encourage enhanced global cooperation in mapping the seas and oceans;
  - ii) Explore opportunities for the use and usability of marine geospatial data;
  - iii) Encourage maintenance and enhancement of the marine spatial data infrastructure;
  - iv) Encourage the integration of land and marine geospatial information including considering the issues related thereto;
  - v) Encourage the integration of inland tributary hydrographic data with marine geospatial information;
  - vi) Improve the availability and accessibility of marine geospatial information including encouraging free and open data access policies and reducing data security concerns;
  - vii) Motivate Member States to improve international engagement on marine geospatial information matters;
  - viii) Facilitate improved inter-governmental coordination of marine geospatial data activities, standards and infrastructure development; and
  - ix) Provide recognition that contributions by Member States to the marine spatial data infrastructures are valuable and benefits all.
- 3.2 A key undertaking is to contribute towards significantly increasing the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable marine geospatial information to support national development priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- 3.3 Propose work plans, informed by broad global consultation, to address the main area of focus identified by Member States while ensuring that there are no overlaps or duplication of initiatives.

#### **4. Membership, Composition and Term of Office**

- 4.1 The Working Group will comprise expert representatives nominated by Member States from their geospatial and statistical communities who are knowledgeable and experienced in the work of the Group. The Working Group will also invite an expert representative nominated by the International Hydrographic Organization. To ensure broad expertise and effectiveness, subject matter experts from the United Nations System, international organisation and the wider hydrographic surveying communities could be drawn into the Group.
- 4.2 The Working Group will select two members as co-Chairs and any other position as deemed necessary to support the work of the Group. The co-Chairs will serve for two (2) years and should the work continue beyond two (2) years, the Working Group may retain existing co-Chairs or elect new co-Chairs for another two (2) years. In normal circumstances, co-Chairs should not serve more than two consecutive two (2) year terms.
- 4.3 Should the need arise; the Working Group may establish sub-groups or task teams to work on particular aspects of its work programme. All sub-groups or task teams must have defined deliverables, delivery milestones and are established with a fixed duration. All sub-groups or task teams must bring its task to a satisfactory conclusion at each session of the Committee of Experts.
- 4.4 The Working Group will liaise, as required, with international organisations and invite their nominated experts as observers that have an interest in marine geospatial information.

#### **5. Reporting Procedure**

- 5.1 The Working Group will report to the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management at its annual session and this will include the preparation of written reports and background documents from time to time.

#### **6. Frequency of Meetings**

- 6.1 The Working Group will operate virtually and meet when the opportunity arises in concurrence with related UN-GGIM events.

#### **7. Governance**

- 7.1 The UN-GGIM Bureau may review and evaluate the work of the Working Group from time to time, may proposed to UN-GGIM revision of the terms of reference based on the work the Working Group has completed and any new items that UN-GGIM would like the Working Group to consider.

#### **8. Secretariat**

- 8.1 The United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs will serve as the permanent Secretariat of the Working Group. It will provide the day-to-day management and coordination when necessary, and undertake internal and external communication on behalf of the Working Group.
- 8.2 The co-Chairs will coordinate, monitor and report on the activities of any sub-group or task teams to the Secretariat and the UN-GGIM Bureau.

- 8.3 In co-operation with the co-Chairs, the Secretariat will coordinate and assist with the organisation and preparation of the agenda for the meetings of the Working Group, issue notices and any other support activities deemed necessary.