

Visit to Fijian authorities (Fiji HO, Fiji Navy, IUCN and SPC)
41st GEBCO Guiding Committee (GGC41)
Seabed2030 – 6th Pacific Ocean Mapping Meeting
Suva – Nadi, Fiji
31 October – 8 November 2024

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2024

Task 3.6.1

Organize, prepare and report annual meetings of the GEBCO Guiding Committee (GGC) and associated bodies including TSCOM, SCRUM, GEBCO Science Day and SCUFN

High level summary

- The High-Level Visit to the Fijian political, military, hydrographic and scientific authorities, provided a unique opportunity to consolidate the links between the IHO and the Fijian and South West Pacific institutions, particularly reinforced by the GEBCO and Seabed2030 meetings. Hydrography is an integral part of the National Security Strategy of Fiji and is playing a fundamental role in the national and regional sustainable blue-economy, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) development, conservation of the marine biodiversity, and establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA); aiming to protect 30% of the Fijian ocean areas by 2030, in accordance with the 30x30 Alliance goal.
- The 6th Pacific Ocean Mapping Meeting was a showcase of activity related to the Nippon Foundation GEBCO-Seabed2030 project, which acts as an accelerator to the GEBCO programme and aims to generate a complete map of the ocean floor by 2030. The accurate collection of bathymetric data in the Pacific region is pivotal to enhance ocean knowledge and sustainable development in large ocean states such as Fiji.
- Hydrographic visibility in the Southwest Pacific Region has recently taken on special significance and importance for the IHO, when the Republic of Kiribati officially became its 100th Member State; a significant milestone for the global hydrographic community, which demonstrates the relevance of our work in support of all ocean related activities. This is complemented by the work of the Seabed2030 Pacific Ocean Regional Centre, which has focused its efforts on data collection, advocacy, data sharing policy, capacity building and commitment towards local indigenous communities, as well as partnering with regional marine organizations and academia.
- A key component of GGC41, was the implementation of the new GEBCO strategy (2024-2030). A number of interactive sessions were held including a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the five Strategic Pillars. Additionally, the implementation of the Governance Review report was discussed, and it was agreed that this would be undertaken as one single work item together with the implementation of the strategy. A first draft of the GEBCO Implementation Plan will be presented by an *ad-hoc* Task Group to the next GGC intersessional meeting, planned in the first quarter of 2025.
- IHO and IOC-UNESCO confirmed the full support to the GEBCO programme, respectively through the creation of a “*Fund Generation Project Team*”, established under the Inter Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC) of IHO, to identify additional resources to fund the IHO Capacity Building and GEBCO, and the establishment of the “*Ocean Decade Corporate Data Group*” within the UN Decade initiative, that will soon issue Guidelines for ocean observations and bathymetric data collection in areas under national jurisdictions to share with GEBCO and Seabed2030.

- The commitment to address and emphasize the importance of seabed mapping and GEBCO in cooperation with other International Organizations and Governments at the next UN Decade and United Nations events in 2025 (One Ocean Science Congress, 4-6 June 2025, Nice – France, Blue Economy and Finance Forum, 7-8 June 2025, Monaco and UNOC25, 9-13 June, Nice – France), was presented and discussed under the leadership of the IHO and IOC-UNESCO Secretariats.

Details:

On 31st October in Suva, Fiji, following the invitation of the Fiji Hydrographic Office, a delegation composed of the IHO Director & Head of Delegation Luigi Sinapi, IHO Assistant Director Samuel Harper, Chair GEBCO Guiding Committee Evert Flier, Director Seabed2030 Jamie McMichael Phillips and Head of Seabed2030 Pacific Ocean Centre Kevin Mackay, paid a visit to the Fiji Hydrographic Office (HO), the Chief of Fiji Navy and the Permanent Secretary Home Affairs, the Oceania Regional Office of International Union of Conservation Nature (IUCN) and the Secretariat of Pacific Community (SPC).



IHO-GEBCO-Seabed2030 delegation visits Fiji HO, Fiji CNO, IUCN and SPC – 31 October 2024, Suva, Fiji

During the meetings with the Fijian authorities, the following topics were discussed:

- The hydrographic and nautical cartographic capacities of the Fiji HO;
- The re-establishment of the National Hydrographic Committee, as a representation of different governmental and civil society stakeholders;
- The importance for Fiji and the South West Pacific Region to host the Seabed2030 Regional Pacific Centre and GEBCO meetings, to raise the awareness of seabed mapping at national and regional level;
- The commitment of the Fijian authorities in investing in Hydrography and supporting the initiatives of the IHO for the sustainable development of the national and regional blue growth;
- The international recognition of the importance to complete the first phase of the S-100 products implementation and the associated benefits and opportunities for the IHO Member States;
- The engagement of the IHO in the UN Decade and the next UN Ocean Conference planned in 2025 (UNOC25);
- The interest of IUCN in the full breadth of the IHO work, from standards to GEBCO, from data access to collaboration at events such as UNOC25, in order to strengthen the liaison between the two organizations;
- The commitment of Fiji Government towards the protection of 30% of the Fijian ocean areas by 2030, in line with the objectives of the 30x30 Alliance;

- The importance of investing in building capacities in favour of the SPC member states;
- The intention to update the IHO-SPC Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2011.

Organized by the Nippon Foundation GEBCO-Seabed2030 project in the Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi, Fiji, the 6th Pacific Regional Centre Meeting took place from 4 to 6 November and was attended by 90 participants from 27 countries (mainly Pacific Island Countries – PICs). The Meeting was structured in one-day workshop and two-day conference. The IHO Secretariat was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Samuel Harper, respectively keynote speaker and moderator of Session 3 dedicated to ocean mapping, ocean discovery and crowdsourced bathymetry.



Participants at the 6th Pacific Regional Centre Meeting, 4-6 November, Nadi, Fiji

The six keynote speakers (the Minister of Land and Resources of Fiji, the IHO Director, the Head of Ocean Affairs Division of Nippon Foundation, the Director Seabed 2030, the Chair of GGC, the Head of Marine Policy and Regional Coordination Section of IOC-UNESCO) highlighted the need for Pacific region to translate aims into concrete actions, investing on public-private partnerships and innovative models, generating virtuous clusters that cooperate with each other and share the mission of fighting against fragmentation, attracting investments for a more agile and operational approach to seabed mapping. Accessible ocean data, education and training and capacity building, supported by global initiatives like GEBCO, Seabed2030 and Crowdsourced Bathymetry, represent some of the desires and solutions available to PICs.

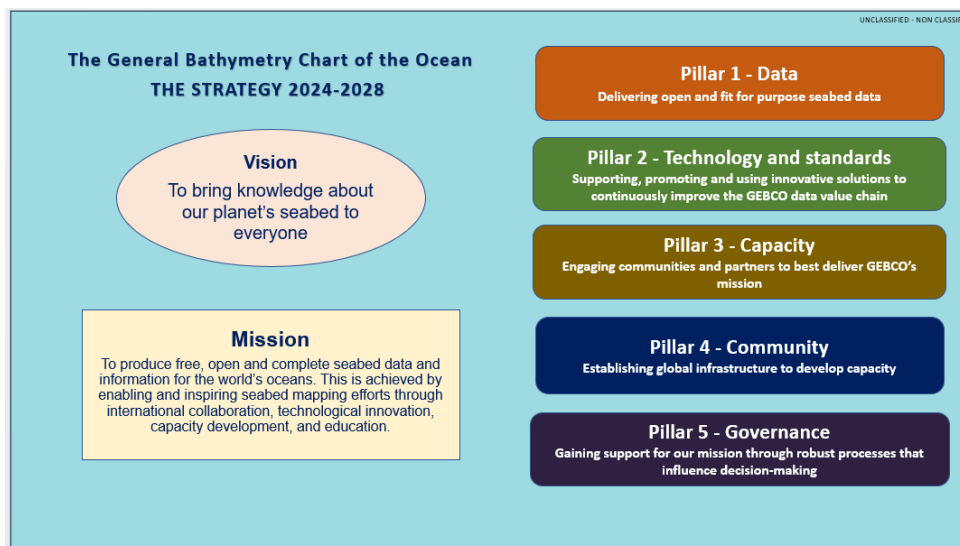
A broad range of topics were discussed, including Pacific maritime boundaries, the extended continental shelf, integrating ocean mapping for sustainable marine tourism and the specific needs of the Pacific Island Countries. Particular reference was made to the Republic of Kiribati becoming the 100th IHO Member State, and its internal hydrographic capacities development. The use of new technologies, such as satellite derived bathymetry and autonomous and uncrewed vehicles, together with successful exploration campaigns in the Pacific area to fill bathymetric data gaps were discussed. In terms of solutions, open data sharing and accessible marine digital products were identified as enablers to raise the awareness of seabed mapping and reduce the barriers between the states of the South West Pacific region.

The 41st Meeting of the GEBCO Guiding Committee took place in the Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi, Fiji, in the days 4, 7 and 8 November. 60 attendees from 14 IHO member states (Australia, Canada, Colombia, Fiji, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Republic of Korea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, United States of America) and representatives from the IOC-UNESCO and Industry participated in the meeting. The IHO Secretariat was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Samuel Harper, who is also the GEBCO Secretary.

The following main topics were discussed:

- The IHO and IOC-UNESCO updates;
- The GEBCO Strategy (2024-2030) and the implementation of the descendent Strategic plan;
- The GEBCO Governance Review report and related prioritized recommendations;
- The necessity to update the GEBCO ToRs and RoP;
-

- The turn-over in the GGC and Subcommittees membership, as well as the related positions of Chairs and Vice Chairs;
- The GEBCO work plans and funding for 2025 and beyond;
- The submission of “Depth” as EOVS (Essential Ocean Variable) to GOOS (Global Observation Ocean System) by the IHO Secretariat;
- The IHO and GEBCO participation at the 2025 global events in favour of the oceans (Ocean Conference, 4-6 June 2025, Nice – France, Blue Economy Forum, 7-8 June 2025, Monaco and UNOC25, 9-13 June, Nice-France);
- The Seabed2030 activities performed in 2024 and planned for 2025, with particular focus on the latest signed MoUs by Seabed2030;
- The latest updates on CSB and DCDB activities;
- The reports from the 6 GEBCO Subcommittees;
- The future of conducting symposia back-to-back to the GGC meetings, and
- The outcomes of the 6th Pacific Regional Centre Meeting.



The GEBCO Strategy (2024-2030)

The GGC attendees were divided in 5 groups to conduct a SWOT analysis of the 5 Strategic Pillars (Data, Technology and standards, Capacity, Community and Governance) of the GEBCO Strategy (2024-2030), with the aim to identify the top-3 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for each of the 5 Strategic Pillars. The results of the SWOT analysis, in addition to the recommendations descending from the GEBCO Governance, will be used to draft the GEBCO Strategy Implementation Plan.

In order to progress a number of focused areas of work, a series of Task Groups composed of GGC members were created. These small groups will tackle subjects such as:

- Liaison with the IHO Fund Generation PT,
- Liaison with the IOC Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management WG,
- Liaison with the Map the Gaps Symposium organizing committee,
- Develop proposals for future approach to the GEBCO seminars beyond 2025,
- Investigate submitting Depth as an EOVS,
- Develop the Strategy Implementation plan and to coordinate UNOC25,
- Discuss and prepare a Townhall at the One Ocean Science Congress in 2025.

The GEBCO Secretary reported that one IHO Project Officers has been assigned to support GEBCO, and this was greatly appreciated. IOC reported that the funds biannually assigned to GEBCO has been increased which was also well received.

The GEBCO Sub-Committees reported on their annual work plans and received specific guidance from the GGC on a range of activities for 2025. SCUFN was requested to develop a formal proposal for naming using alpha-numeric codes, together with implications of the change properly articulated whilst SCRUM was requested to identify priority areas for regional seabed mapping as well as supporting the organization of regional seabed mapping projects. TSCOM will explore how/whether GEBCO Grid should/could be incorporated as an S-XXX Product Specification, whilst SCOPE was declared dormant due to the lack of Chair and Vice Chair.

Finally, the GEBCO Budget for 2025 was discussed and approved. Mr Evert Flier, Norway was confirmed as the GGC Chair for the remainder of his 3 year term (2 years remaining due to a mismatch between the 3 year term as Chair and 5 year term as a member of the GGC), whilst the position of GGC Vice Chair will remain vacant until the next GGC intersessional meeting, due to the need to fill some vacancies in the IOC-UNESCO GGC membership. The Chair Teams of TSCOM and SCRUM were endorsed by the GGC for another 3-year term each.

Photo



41st GGC and Seabed2030 – 6th Pacific Ocean Mapping meetings – Nadi, Fiji

Upcoming meetings:

The 42nd GGC meeting is planned to be held in 2025 in Victoria, Canada (venue and dates TBC), whilst the 43rd GGC meeting will take place in 2026 in Colombia (venue and dates TBD).