

32nd Meeting of the Joint IAG-IHO Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea (ABLOS) and 12th ABLOS Conference Doha, Qatar 6 to 9 October 2025

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2025

Task 2.1.2.8 Attendance of ABLOS Board Meeting and Conference

High level summary:

- The 12th ABLOS Conference (7–8 October 2025, Doha) was the first held outside Monaco, hosted by Qatar under the theme “Is UNCLOS Fit for Purpose in Modern Times? Achievements, Challenges and Future Pathways.”
- Over 280 participants and 29 speakers attended the Conference, featuring keynotes from UN DOALOS, ITLOS, IHO, and IAG leaders.
- ABLOS key priorities discussed included the BBNJ Treaty, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and data sharing.
- It was agreed to maintain BBNJ, MPAs, and data sharing as standing agenda items and to focus the 2026 Seminar on data sharing.
- Progress was reported on the 7th edition of TALOS, including improved animations, web accessibility, and integration of S-121 as the UN-endorsed tool for coordinate deposits.
- ABLOS explored contributing to IHO Capacity Building through e-learning materials based on TALOS (C-51) and by linking DOALOS resources to its website.
- The Conference was deemed a major success, promoting global dialogue on modern maritime governance and setting a precedent for future ABLOS Conferences.

Details:

The Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea (ABLOS) is a joint board of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the International Association of Geodesy (IAG) with the main objective of providing information and advice on technical aspects of the Law of the Sea.

32nd Board Meeting

The 32nd ABLOS Board Meeting was attended by the eight ABLOS members. IHO-appointed observers from Australia, Brazil, Chile and Qatar were also present. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Fiona Bloor (IHO-UKHO). The IHO Secretariat was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Leonel Manteigas, ABLOS Secretary.

Ms. Fiona Bloss, ABLOS Chair, opened the meeting welcoming all participants and highlighted the presence of IHO Director Sinapi and the IAG President, who is also an ABLOS Member. She extended sincere appreciation to the Qatari authorities for their warm hospitality in hosting both the meeting and the Conference.

In his opening remarks, Director Luigi Sinapi thanked Qatar for its generous hospitality and emphasized the significance of this being the first time the ABLOS Conference was held outside Monaco. He outlined the topics that ABLOS should consider as main priorities, including: the BBNJ Treaty (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction); Marine Protected Areas; and, the facilitation of ocean observations data sharing strengthening. He also highlighted the importance of aligning ABLOS's work

with the emerging S-100 framework, particularly regarding products such as S-121 (Limits and Boundaries), S-122 (Maritime Protected Areas), and S-130 (Demarcation of Seas and Oceans).

Dr. Richard S. Gross, IAG President and ABLOS member, expressed his pleasure in participating in both the meeting and the conference, wishing all participants a productive and successful event.

The new members, Dr. Richard S. Gross (IAG President) and Prof. Dr. Harald Schuh attended their first ABLOS meeting. As the position of Vice-Chair remained vacant, Dr. Gross volunteered to assume the role and was elected unanimously.

The Board discussed ABLOS's potential contribution to the IHO Capacity Building/Development Programme, recognizing that existing conferences and seminars already support knowledge sharing on Law of the Sea issues. They considered developing e-learning materials based on the forthcoming Version 7 of the TALOS Manual (C-51). DOALOS reported that it provides scholarships and presentations that enhance capacity building, leading ABLOS to agree to include links to DOALOS capacity-building content on its website. A follow-up evaluation will determine additional DOALOS materials appropriate for inclusion in the IHO e-Learning Center. To align efforts with regional needs, some ABLOS members will join the next intersessional meeting of the Capacity Building Sub-Committee to engage with and gather feedback from regional capacity-building coordinators.

Regarding the future of ABLOS the Board discussed ABLOS's potential role in supporting the BBNJ Agreement, Marine Protected Areas, and the sharing of data, especially data collected remotely or by industry, where sharing is often restricted by sovereign states."

It was agreed to collaborate with DOALOS to assess needs and explore the development of informative materials related to BBNJs raising awareness of how ABLOS and DOALOS can assist States that require support.

The Board acknowledged the growing demand for data sharing across multiple sources and uses, despite persistent restrictions by some states. ABLOS will continue to explore how it can promote awareness and facilitate developments in this field, including organizing workshops and seminars. A proposed approach is to categorize data types and sources to streamline requests for support and tailor event content accordingly.

DOALOS noted that under the BBNJ "clearing-house mechanism", one objective is to respond to the needs on the BBNJ being one of the MPA's. ABLOS may be called upon to support requests connected to this mechanism, which provides a conceptual framework for managing and coordinating MPA-related challenges, particularly in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Given the importance of these topics, ABLOS decided to maintain BBNJ, MPAs, and Data Sharing as standing agenda items on the future ABLOS meetings.

Mr. John Ells, Chair of the Editorial Board, reported progress on the 7th edition of the TALOS Manual (C-51). The team has advanced in converting PowerPoint-based animations into embedded GIFs and video files for inclusion in PDFs and web pages, improving both protection and accessibility. The meeting discussed the publication's future format, highlighting the importance of providing both dynamic online access and traditional PDF downloads. While many organizations favor an interactive web-based version, printable PDFs remain necessary for users with limited internet connectivity. Automatic PDF conversion will support accessibility and flexibility. The new format will also enable individual chapter updates, allowing for more timely integration of technical and legal developments. Finally, it was agreed to include in TALOS a reference to S-121, that was endorsed by UN DOALOS for the deposit of national coordinates being part of national declarations of marine boundaries.

12th ABLOS Conference

The 12th Conference of the Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea (ABLOS), was held in Doha, Qatar, on 7–8 October 2025. The event was hosted by the Qatari Standing Committee of the Convention on the Law of the Sea under the overarching theme "*Is UNCLOS Fit for Purpose in Modern Times? Achievements, Challenges and Future Pathways.*" This was the first ABLOS Conference held outside

Monaco, underscoring efforts to broaden global participation and engage a more diverse range of experts and regions. The Conference brought together over 280 participants from around the globe, including experts, academics, legal professionals, government representatives, and international organizations. The main objective was to examine how the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) addresses current and emerging ocean-related challenges. A total of 29 speakers contributed to the program through thematic sessions, panel discussions, and interactive debates.

The 12th ABLOS Conference opened with welcome remarks from H.E. Dr. Ahmed Al-Hammadi (Chairperson, Qatari Standing Committee of the Convention on the Law of the Sea), Luigi Sinapi (IHO Director), and Dr. Richard Gross (IAG President). The keynote address was delivered by Ms. Alice Hicuburundi, Senior Legal Officer at UN DOALOS. The closing session featured a closing keynote by Judge Tomas Heidar (ITLOS President) and closing addresses by Director Luigi Sinapi and H.E. Dr. Ahmed Al-Hammadi. In a parallel event, Judge Tomas Heidar, President of ITLOS, also delivered a lecture in hybrid format entitled *“The Role of ITLOS in the Peaceful Settlement of Maritime Disputes,”* emphasizing the Tribunal’s continuing contribution to maintaining legal certainty and stability in the interpretation of UNCLOS. More than 100 participants from various countries joined the on-line session.

All related materials, including the Program, Abstracts, Biographies, and Presentations of the Speakers, are publicly available on the ABLOS website: <https://www.ablos.org/conferences/>

Participants unanimously considered the 12th ABLOS Conference a resounding success, both in terms of content and participation. The event fostered constructive dialogue on the evolving interpretation and implementation of UNCLOS, reaffirming its continuing relevance while identifying key areas where adaptation and modernization are required to meet 21st-century maritime challenges.

The Conference also strengthened cooperation among international organizations, academic institutions, and national authorities, setting a positive precedent for future ABLOS Conferences beyond Monaco.

More information is available in the article “UNCLOS and Evolving Ocean Activities Reviewed at ABLOS Conference” published by Hydro International: <https://www.hydro-international.com/content/news/unclos-and-evolving-ocean-activities-reviewed-at-ablos-conference>

Photos:



ABLOS 32th Board meeting



ABLOS 12th Conference – organizers and speakers



Director Sinapi on the welcome address



Conference room

Upcoming meetings:

The next meeting of the ABLOS along with a one-day Seminar, will be hosted by the Portuguese Hydrographic Office in Lisbon, Portugal, from 15 - 17 September 2026.

The 34th ABLOS Board Meeting and the 13th ABLOS Conference, scheduled for 2027, are planned to be held in Asia, with the host country yet to be determined.