

33rd Session of the IOC-UNESCO Assembly UNESCO headquarters, Paris, France – 25 June - 3 July 2025

Participation in IOC-UNESCO Assembly.

Task 1.1.1.9

Maintain relationship with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, including Assembly.

High level summary

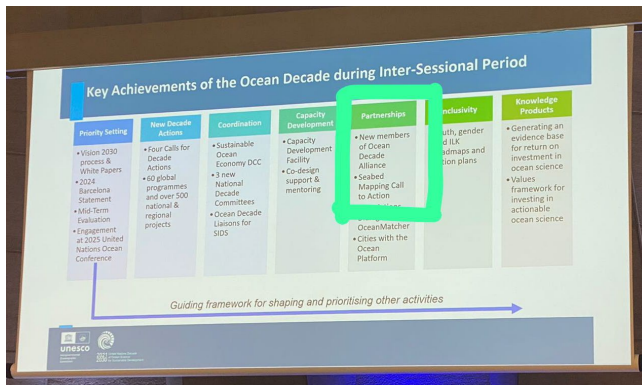
- The complementary OECD policy brief entitled “*Exploring and mapping the ocean depths for a more sustainable future*” to provide an evidence base to support policy development and financing as relates to seabed mapping was signposted by the IHO delegation.
- The IHO was recognized as a willing partner in the work of IODE, GOOS and IOC in general, especially as it relates to seabed mapping and data standardization to aid interoperability and onward utilization by end users.
- The IHO was mentioned as one of the new members of the Ocean Decade Alliance and a key partner in the launch of the Seabed Mapping Call to Action during UNOC3. This is a key component of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030.
- Modern relevance of GEBCO underscored in the language of the UNOC3 Political Declaration and seabed mapping recognized as a recurring theme.
- For the first time, the 2025 GEBCO grid contains bathy data from ARGO float groundings, as the result of an initiative initiated by the IHO in cooperation with ARGO in 2023.

Details:

The 33rd Session of the IOC-UNESCO Assembly was held in Paris from 25 June to 3 July 2025, at the UNESCO headquarters. The IHO Secretariat participated at the Assembly as an observer and was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Samuel Harper. The Chair of the GEBCO Guiding Committee (GGC) Evert Flier of Norway also attended the IOC Assembly.

On 25 June, after the opening remarks, the IOC-UNESCO Executive-Secretary provided the “*IOC Governance, programming and budgeting Report*”, highlighting the main achievement of the Commission following the recent UNOC3 and the importance of the oceanic economic dimension and the challenge of sustained financing for ocean observations experienced in the last two years after the previous IOC Assembly. Amongst the interventions from the Assembly participants, IHO Director signposted the complementary OECD policy brief entitled “*Exploring and mapping the ocean depths for a more sustainable future*”, which provides an evidence base to support policy development and financing as relates to seabed mapping. The modern relevance of GEBCO was underscored in the language of the UNOC3 Political Declaration, and seabed mapping was a recurring theme in the discourse of the conference. The indispensable role of Seabed Mapping in activities, such as the Digital Twin of the Ocean should not be underestimated and the IHO is thrilled to be one of the newest members of the Ocean Decade Alliance, and has committed to throw its full weight behind the implementation of the Seabed Mapping Initiative Call to Action. Finally, the role and the tireless and long-lasting support of the Principality of Monaco to marine science and in particular Seabed Mapping, for the achievement of one of the last great exploration challenges for humankind, was highlighted.

On 27 June, the proposed new IODE Data Architecture was presented. On this regard, the IHO Assistant Director took the opportunity to reaffirm that the IHO remains a willing partner in the work of IODE, GOOS and IOC in general, especially as relates to seabed mapping and data standardization to aid interoperability and onward utilization by end users. The wording in the UNOC3 Ocean Action Panel 2 concept note were recalled in the context of Ocean observations and data underpinning scientific knowledge, particularly in cases where “the use of internationally accepted technical standards and the associated regulatory frameworks enables scientific data to be made available to ocean users who would otherwise not have access to relevant science”. Specifically, delegates were reminded that the OAP2 Concept note recalls that “the *e-navigation* strategy of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) sets out the future regulatory environment for shipping, including the use of new technology, such as the *S-100 Universal Hydrographic Data Model*, which allows for interoperable thematic layers, such as marine protected areas, and real-time oceanographic data to be presented in navigations systems, reducing the impact on ecosystems and reducing pollution through more efficient route planning”. In addition, AD Harper drew attention to the fact that the *S-300 series within the S-100 ecosystem* remains attributed to IOC for the development of oceanographic product specifications, and that IODE could play a key role on the development of such S-3xx products.



Key Achievements of the Ocean Decade.

Later in proceedings, the report on United Nations Ocean Decade and the mid-term evaluation report were presented, highlighting the key achievements of the Decade during inter-sessional period, amongst which the outcomes of the UN Decade and UN Conferences, the 4 Calls for Decade Actions including 60 global programmes and over 500 national and regional projects, the Ocean Decade Liaisons for SIDS, the Capacity Development Facility, the enlargement of the Ocean Decade Alliance membership with the joining of the IHO and the launch of the Seabed Mapping Initiative, the Inclusivity topics, and the Values framework for investing actionable ocean science.

On 2 July, the GEBCO Guiding Committee Chair presented on 2025 GEBCO Report and Governance review, highlighting the recent achievements of GEBCO in terms of approval of a GEBCO Strategy 2024-2030 enabling and inspiring seabed mapping efforts through international collaboration, technological innovation, capacity development and education, presentation of the content of the GEBCO Governance review to streamline the internal process to GEBCO structure, and finally to announce that 27.3% of the world's ocean floor has now been mapped to modern standards and that the increase in data represents more than four million square kilometers of newly mapped seafloor – an area roughly equivalent to the entire Indian subcontinent, containing for the first time ever *bathymetric data from ARGO float groundings*, as the result of an initiative initiated by the IHO in cooperation with ARGO in 2023.

This milestone comes at a pivotal moment, as in June, at the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, the global ocean community recognized the ocean's central role in addressing some of the planet's greatest challenges, from climate resilience to food security.

Photo:



IHO delegation at the 33rd Session of the IOC-UNESCO Assembly

Next 34th Session of the IOC-UNESCO Assembly will take place in Paris, France in June 2027 (dates tbd).