

59th Session of the IOC-UNESCO Executive Council

UNESCO headquarters, Paris, France – 30 June - 3 July 2025

Participation in IOC-UNESCO Executive Council.

Task 1.1.9.2 UNESCO-IOC - Executive Council

High level summary

- The Executive Secretary's Report stressed growing pressure on the Ocean and the need to strengthen GOOS, IODE and multilateral ocean cooperation.
- Key priorities included ocean observation, IOC data architecture, SIDS resilience, Tsunami Ready, Marine Spatial Planning and the Ocean Decade.
- The European Commission presented the OceanEye initiative to reinforce ocean observation infrastructure and support ocean health.
- The IHO intervention reaffirmed cooperation with IOC, GOOS and GEBCO, highlighting bathymetry, Seabed 2030 and Depth as an Essential Ocean Variable.

Details:

The 59th Session of the IOC-UNESCO Executive Council (EC) was held in Paris from 30 June to 3 July 2026, at the UNESCO headquarters. The IHO Secretariat participated at the EC as an observer and was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Samuel Harper.

On 30 June, following the opening remarks delivered on behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, which emphasized the central role of the Ocean, currently under increasing pressure, as well as the importance of the IOC as a multilateral platform and of GOOS as a global observing system for advancing ocean knowledge and providing tangible responses, the donation of €100 million by The Nippon Foundation to the IOC and the Ocean was recalled. The IOC-UNESCO Executive Secretary then presented the *"Report of the Executive Secretary on the work accomplished since the thirty-third Session of the Assembly (July 2025–May 2026)"*.



IOC-UNESCO Executive-Secretary presenting his Report

The Executive Secretary's Report emphasized the increasing pressure on the Ocean and the need to reinforce multilateral ocean cooperation in a context of growing environmental and institutional

unpredictability. Particular attention was given to GOOS and IODE as essential foundations for ocean observation, data exchange, maritime safety, environmental protection and evidence-based decision-making. The Report highlighted IOC's efforts to mobilize stronger political and financial support, including through key partners such as China, Norway, the European Union and The Nippon Foundation. It also underlined the relevance of the BBNJ Agreement, IOC support to SIDS, Tsunami Ready communities, Marine Spatial Planning, Sustainable Ocean Plans, and resilience to sea-level rise and ocean-related hazards. The Ocean Decade has reached its mid-point with a growing portfolio of global programmes, projects, National Decade Committees and coordination structures. At the same time, the Report noted significant challenges, including limited resources, vacant positions and delays affecting

GOOS, IODE and IOC data architecture, calling for a more dynamic, better resourced and fit-for-purpose IOC.



IHO Director congratulated the IOC Executive Secretary and Secretariat on the comprehensive report and on IOC's leadership in advancing global ocean observation, underlining the shared IOC-IHO commitment to climate resilience, marine biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and the sustainable blue economy. He welcomed the progress of GOOS and the focus on integrating observing networks, standards and

data management, highlighting the opportunity to further strengthen cooperation with GEBCO. In this context, bathymetry was recalled as a fundamental spatial framework for ocean science and operational applications, while the work undertaken through GEBCO and the Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project was recognized as a strong example of international partnership and open data sharing. The IHO also welcomed the ongoing collaboration with IOC and GOOS towards the recognition of Depth as an Essential Ocean Variable, reaffirming its commitment to continued cooperation in support of the Ocean Decade and beyond.

Following the Executive Secretaries Report, the EC received reports from a number of activities relevant to the IHO.

Update on the Implementation of BBNJ

The Executive Council received an update on the IOC Working Group on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), highlighting progress in positioning IOC as a key scientific and technical partner for implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. The presentation focused on IOC's proposed role in developing the BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism, drawing on its established strengths in ocean data, observations and capacity development, while also outlining contributions to capacity building, marine technology transfer and the future Scientific and Technical Body. Following the report there was intense discussion on whether the IOC should respond to an expected call for expressions of interest for providing the technical solution for the Clearing House Mechanism, ahead of seeking Assembly approval.

Update on the reform of GOOS Governance

The Executive Council received an update on the reform of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), beginning with a reminder of GOOS's central role in coordinating global ocean observations and the growing importance of sustained ocean data to support the Ocean Decade and other international commitments. The presentation noted that the current governance framework has become increasingly complex and outdated, creating challenges for efficiency, stakeholder alignment and long-term sustainability. Members heard that the reform process is now underway, with initial work focused on

defining a renewed mission and value proposition, streamlining governance arrangements, and introducing a stronger accountability framework. The proposed model retains IOC and WMO as co-sponsors, transitions UNEP and ISC to partner roles, and is designed to accommodate future partners, including mechanisms established under the BBNJ Agreement.



IHO Assistant Director Harper congratulated the IOC on the work undertaken to reform the governance of GOOS and restated the commitment of the IHO, through GEBCO, to submit a proposal for Depth being incorporated as an Essential Ocean Variable (EOV). Further, he reaffirmed IHO's willingness to work in partnership on data standardization and interoperability as the reform of GOOS continues. Finally, he explained that the newly formed GEBCO Secretariat will provide enhanced resources to facilitate these endeavors and others.

Update on GLOSS

The Executive Council reviewed the Global Sea Level Observing System (GLOSS) Implementation Plan 2026–2030, which sets out a modernised vision for the GLOSS to meet growing demands for climate monitoring, coastal hazard warning and operational oceanography. The presentation highlighted the transition to a more integrated global sea-level observing network, strengthened data management and unified data access, alongside revised governance arrangements to improve coordination, standards and capacity development. The plan also emphasises closer collaboration with GOOS, WMO and the IHO, recognising the importance of high-quality sea-level observations for hydrography, vertical reference frames, navigation and coastal resilience.

Introduction to the EU OceanEye Initiative

An introduction to the EU's OceanEye initiative was presented in a side event. This flagship ocean observation initiative is designed to strengthen and integrate ocean observing systems, improve access to ocean data, accelerate innovation, and reinforce international cooperation through support for the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS). By 2035, the initiative aims to position the EU as a global leader in ocean intelligence and ocean observation technologies. For the IHO, OceanEye is significant because it will expand the availability of high-quality marine data and strengthen partnerships that underpin hydrography, seabed mapping, and marine spatial information.

Photo:



IHO delegation at the 59th Session of the IOC-UNESCO Executive Council

Next 60th Session of the IOC-UNESCO Executive Council will take place in Paris, France in June 2028 (dates tbd).