

**GENERAL BATHYMETRIC CHART OF THE OCEAN (GEBCO) PROJECT –  
TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR  
THE JOINT IHO-IOC GEBCO GUIDING COMMITTEE**

**(Adopted by the IOC on 4 July 2019 and the IHO on 5 June 2019)**

**PREAMBLE**

GEBCO was proposed in 1899 and became a reality in April 1903 when HSH Prince Albert I of Monaco offered to organize and finance the production of a new chart series designated: “The General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans” (GEBCO), under the Prince’s Scientific Cabinet. In 1922 the responsibility for GEBCO was passed to the Director of the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and in 1929 was transferred to the International Hydrographic Bureau (today the IHO). Since 1973, GEBCO has been a joint Project of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

The goals of the IHO-IOC GEBCO Project are to:

1. Develop and constantly improve the portrayal of global ocean depths;
2. Act as the designated international authority for undersea feature names;
3. Advance the development and application of sea floor mapping technology;
4. Encourage and facilitate ocean mapping cooperation leading to the exchange and preservation of bathymetric data and associated metadata;
5. Foster collaboration among individuals and organizations with established and developing expertise so as to assist local and regional mapping efforts to attain a global standard of quality;
6. Identify oceanic areas that are insufficiently mapped and recommend to appropriate ocean-going organizations and institutions that such areas are surveyed;
7. Promote education and training in ocean mapping through high level courses in Ocean Bathymetry acknowledged by the IHO and IOC;
8. Bring together the ocean mapping community and users of bathymetry thereby leading to products that are more widely used.

GEBCO is an IHO and IOC Project that is open to all those interested in mapping the ocean floor. It relies largely on the voluntary efforts of an international collaborating community of scientists and hydrographers with the support of the IHO and the IOC.

GEBCO is led by the Joint IHO-IOC GEBCO Guiding Committee.

**Terms of Reference**

The GEBCO Guiding Committee shall:

- 1.1 Guide the IHO-IOC GEBCO Project, under the general governance of IHO and IOC while recognising and following IHO and IOC policies.
- 1.2 Prepare and disseminate maps, grids, data files and other appropriate depictions of the ocean floor.
- 1.3 Identify the needs of the various user communities of the bathymetry of the world’s oceans; study the ways and means whereby these needs can be met.
- 1.4 Identify the necessary resources, both human and financial, for its undertakings and make appropriate recommendations to its parent organizations.
- 1.5 Stimulate the flow of data relevant to the GEBCO Project by actively identifying sources of new data and encouraging and promoting the release of data to appropriate data banks, with the objective of ensuring that maximum available data are provided to the IHO Data Centre for Digital Bathymetry (DCDB).

- 1.6 Supervise the development, maintenance and routine updating of GEBCO products. Activities are to include but are not restricted to:
- (1) Study and set out procedures for new compilations of bathymetry.
  - (2) Develop standards and methodologies for the production of bathymetric maps and grids and recommend their adoption to the IHO and IOC and to the seafloor mapping community.
  - (3) Supervise the development, production and updating of a worldwide grid of digital bathymetric data.
  - (4) Supervise the preparation and maintenance, in association with national and international bodies, of an authoritative IHO/IOC GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names.
  - (5) Study and implement the best distribution mechanism for the effective use of GEBCO products by all users.
- 1.7 Investigate and develop appropriate logistical and financial arrangements necessary for the furtherance of the GEBCO Project, recognising and taking into account the relevant IHO and IOC policies, and seeking the assistance of the Secretariats of the IHO and IOC as appropriate.
- 1.8 Integrate into its products the geographical names of undersea features that appear in the IHO-IOC GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names.
- 1.9 As required, establish subordinate bodies (sub-committees and working groups) to fulfil the Committee Work Programme and approve the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of those bodies, reviewing annually the continuing need for each subordinate body. The GEBCO Guiding Committee will report annually and intersessionally if necessary, to the IHO and IOC for endorsement on the status of subordinate bodies and encompass their comments before establishing, reviewing, modifying, and/or terminating subordinate bodies; actions which must be included as GGC agenda items to allow sufficient prior consideration by the IHO and IOC secretariats and member states.
- 1.10 Direct and monitor the work of its subordinate bodies.
- 1.11 Engage with regional mapping projects to encourage their compatibility with, and eventual inclusion in, GEBCO products.
- 1.12 Build capacity by encouraging and enabling the training and scientific education of new generations of ocean mapping operational experts worldwide.
- 1.13 Pursue, in dialogue with the IHO and IOC, policies that facilitate the suitability of GEBCO products not only for scientific users but also, where appropriate, for educational and socio-economic purposes in the broadest sense.
- 1.14 Take all practical opportunities to advocate the scientific and societal benefits of mapping the seafloor.
- 1.15 Report annually to the IHO and to the IOC, through their respective governing bodies and should also propose activities to be considered in the IHO's and IOC's work programmes, identifying and requesting, where necessary, the required funding support.
- 1.16 Prepare an annual GEBCO Work Plan and budget and propose it to each meeting of the IHO and IOC, through their respective governing bodies. The Guiding Committee should consider and submit to the IHO and IOC governing bodies proposals for new work items under the GEBCO Work Plan, taking into account the financial, administrative and wider stakeholder consequences.
- 1.17 Monitor the execution of the GEBCO Work Plan and receive reports from its Subordinate Bodies, including an evaluation of performance and progress achieved against agreed objectives.

## **Rules of Procedure**

### **1. Membership**

- 1.1 The Committee shall consist of five Members appointed by the IHO, and five Members appointed by the IOC. The Secretariats of the IHO and IOC, in close consultation with the Committee Chair, will

seek to strive that all appointed Members are, as far as possible, from different regions so as to achieve a balanced and diverse representation.

- 1.2 Appointed Members shall serve for a term of five years, renewable by a majority recommendation of the Committee for one additional five-year term and with the approval of the corresponding parent organization. The Chair shall inform the relevant parent organization of any foreseeable vacancy in a timely manner.
- 1.3 The Chairs of GEBCO Sub-Committees established under Article 9 of the Terms of Reference and the Director of the IHO Data Centre for Digital Bathymetry (DCDB), shall also be voting Members of the Committee. If a Member of the Committee mentioned under paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 above is also the Chair of a subordinate body, that Member shall have only one vote on the Committee.
- 1.4 Representatives of the Secretariats of the IHO and IOC shall be permanent Observers in the Committee. The Secretariats of the IHO and IOC will also be recognised as permanent Observers in all subordinate bodies established by the Committee.
- 1.5 The Committee may invite other suitably qualified individuals to take part in specific meetings as Expert Contributors.
- 1.6 Members of the Guiding Committee serve as experts<sup>1</sup> in their personal capacity rather than as representatives of their organization and/or country.
- 1.7 Members are expected to attend every meeting of the Committee. Members who are absent for two consecutive meetings will normally be considered to have resigned and new nominations shall be sought. No substitution shall be allowed at meetings.
- 1.8 Business may be conducted between meetings by appropriate communication systems.
- 1.9 All documents related to meetings and decisions of the Committee and Sub-Committees and other relevant documents will be posted on the GEBCO web site linked to the IHO and IOC web sites.

## **2. Office Bearers**

- 2.1 The Chair and Vice-Chair shall be elected by the Committee from the voting Members of the Committee and normally should be from different parent organizations. The Chair and Vice-Chair are each elected for a three-year term, but not exceeding their current membership of the Committee. They can be re-elected for one additional term by the Committee. The Chair shall conduct the business of the Committee. If the Chair is unable to carry out the duties of the office, the Vice-Chair shall assume the Chair with the same powers and duties.
- 2.2 The Committee shall appoint a Secretary for a five-year term which can be renewed by the Committee. If resources permit and at the Committee's request, a secretary may be provided by either the Secretariat of the IHO or the IOC. The function of the Secretary shall be defined by the Guiding Committee.

## **3. Meetings**

- 3.1 Representatives from Member States of IHO and IOC may participate as observers in Committee meetings.
- 3.2 Meetings shall be held at least every two years. The venue and date of the next meeting will normally be decided at the previous meeting, in order to facilitate participants' travel arrangements.
- 3.3 The quorum to hold a meeting shall be two more than half of the voting Members of the Committee.
- 3.4 An extraordinary meeting can be called by the Chair or any Committee Member, with the agreement of the simple majority of all voting members of the Committee.
- 3.5 The working language of the Committee shall be English.

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<sup>1</sup> So far as IOC is concerned, the Guiding Committee is classed as a Joint Group of Experts under the IOC guidelines for subsidiary bodies.

3.6 The Committee shall strive to make decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions shall be taken by simple majority vote of the Members entitled to vote. The Chair shall have the casting vote if there is a tie.

**4. Amendment and Revision**

4.1 These Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure shall be endorsed and approved by the IHO and IOC according to their current procedures. The Committee may propose to IHO and IOC changes to these Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure with the approval of two thirds of the Committee. Any changes shall enter in force after being endorsed and approved by both IHO and IOC.