

IHO File No. S1/5051 & S3/8151/MSDIWG

**CIRCULAR LETTER N° 09**  
**05 February 2026**

**UN-GGIM & IHO JOINT WORKING GROUP ON MARINE GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION (MGI)**

**References:**

- A) IHO Council decision C9/026
- B) IRCC decisions IRCC17/053, 054, and 055
- C) 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGGIM Agenda item #13 and subsequent decision 15/111
- D) UN-GGIM and IHO Joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information Terms of Reference

Dear Hydrographer,

1. The IHO Marine Spatial Data Information Working Group and the UN-GGIM Marine Geospatial Information Working Group agreed to merge their initiatives under a single entity to be designated the UN-GGIM and IHO Joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information.
2. The merger and Terms of Reference were approved by the IRCC 17 as referenced in decisions IRCC17/053, 054, and 055 followed by the 15<sup>th</sup> session of UN-GGIM Committee of Experts (decision 15/111) and the IHO Council- 9 (decision C9/026).
3. Accordingly, the IHO MSDIWG was decommissioned during IHO Council 9, and [its membership](#) in the Portal will be merged into a single consolidated membership list under UN-GGIM. IHO Member States are invited to join the new joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information (MGI), if they have not already done so, and/or to update their membership status as necessary. **Member States wishing to join are kindly requested to inform the IHO Secretariat (Yong BAEK, [yong.baek@iho.int](mailto:yong.baek@iho.int)) by email.**
4. As stated in the new Joint Working Group Terms of Reference, the Working Group shall have two Co-Chairs—one nominated by the IHO and the other through the UN-GGIM process—who should ideally serve staggered three-year terms, renewable once, subject to practical considerations and mutual agreement. In keeping with outgoing MSDIWG's Terms of Reference, Ms Caitlin Boatright (USA) will hold the IHO co-Chair position until the end of the first Joint Working Group meeting following Assembly 4 at which time, Ms Boatright may extend her tenure as Chair through the normal IHO election process or a new IHO Chair may be elected.
5. Member States wishing to serve in the **IHO Co-Chair position** are kindly requested to send expressions of interest to the IHO Secretariat (Yong BAEK, [yong.baek@iho.int](mailto:yong.baek@iho.int)) by **May 1, 2026** by email.

6. The first in-person UN-GGIM and IHO Joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information meeting will be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand during the week of May 4, 2026. Further details will be announced by the Joint WG in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Nyberg', written in a cursive style.

Dr John NYBERG  
Director

Annex : UN-GGIM and IHO Joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information **Terms of Reference**

**UN-GGIM & IHO JOINT WORKING GROUP ON MARINE GEOSPATIAL  
INFORMATION (MGI)  
Terms of Reference**

**1. Mandate**

1.1. The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), at its Fourteenth Session in August 2024 (decision 14/111), welcomed the proposal to consolidate its Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information with the International Hydrographic Organization Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure Working Group (IHO-MSDIWG). The Committee requested both groups to initiate this process by updating their working modalities and procedures in coordination with each other.

1.2. The UN-GGIM and IHO Joint Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information (hereinafter "the Working Group") is established under the mandate of UN-GGIM, a subsidiary expert body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and under the authority of the Inter-Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC) of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) to strengthen global coordination, technical development, and strategic alignment in the domain of marine geospatial information.

1.3. The Working Group aligns its activities with the marine geospatial information policy directions of both UN-GGIM and the IHO, ensuring consistency with the marine geospatial information policy directions and strategic goals of both the UN-GGIM and the IHO. Its work programme should be structured and managed to reflect and support the shared objectives and priorities of these organizations.

1.4. The Working Group shall also promote the recognition of the strategic role of national hydrographic offices in providing fundamental marine geospatial data essential for safe navigation, marine spatial planning, disaster risk mitigation, maritime boundary delimitation, and sustainable ocean resource management, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the recommendations of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO).

**2. Objectives**

The objectives of the Working Group are to:

2.1. Provide strategic leadership and raise political awareness about the critical importance of reliable, timely, and fit-for-purpose of marine geospatial information for the sustainable administration, governance, management, and use of the marine environment.

2.2. Provide technical and policy advice on the role of integrated marine geospatial information in supporting international agreements, including those related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), sustainable use of marine biodiversity, environmental protection, and joint use of sea space.

2.3. Promote and support the adoption and implementation of internationally agreed geospatial frameworks, schemas, and standards to strengthen the integration, enhance interoperability, and improve the usability of marine, coastal, and terrestrial geospatial information.

2.4. Promote the integration of marine and land-based geospatial information and infrastructure to support coordinated approaches to cross-sectoral challenges, in line with the 2030 Agenda and relevant international frameworks, including UNCLOS.

2.5. Coordinate and support activities across UN-GGIM and IHO on Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI), and Marine SDI (MSDI).

2.6. Promote and strengthen international and regional cooperation for the effective governance and maintenance of marine geospatial information management, systems, standards, and infrastructure.

2.7. Contribute and advance the development of global norms, principles (including FAIR principles), guidelines and standards to increase the availability, accessibility, quality and interoperability of authoritative marine geospatial information.

2.8. Promote the integration of national hydrographic data into Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI) frameworks at global and regional levels to ensure interoperability between terrestrial and marine geospatial information and support evidence-based decision-making.

### **3. Functions**

The Working Group shall undertake the following functions, organised under thematic domains:

#### **3.1. Policy leadership and strategic alignment**

- Promote and monitor the inclusion of marine geospatial considerations in global and regional policy processes, including UN-IGIF, UN-IGIF-Hydro, and SDGs.
- Advise Member States on the integration of marine geospatial priorities into national, regional and international geospatial strategies.
- Facilitate alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the UN Decade of Ocean Science.
- Provide guidance on the integration of marine geospatial information in alignment with international agreements such as UNCLOS and the BBNJ Agreement.
- Advocate for policies that enhance the availability, accessibility, and usability of marine geospatial information.

#### **3.2. Technical development and data governance**

- Support and strengthen the development, adoption, and maintenance of integrated marine geospatial information management, infrastructure, systems, and geospatial data standards, including the S-100 Universal Hydrographic Data Model and the IHO S-100 Roadmap.
- Promote relevant geospatial standards to enhance interoperability across land, inland, coastal, and marine geospatial information management systems through harmonised MSDI frameworks.
- Develop and maintain technical guidance on datum challenges, metadata standards, and reference models for marine data.
- Promote integration of hydrographic data from oceans, seas, coastal zones, tributaries and inland waters into cohesive geospatial frameworks.

### 3.3. International coordination and stakeholder engagement

- Provide a platform for coordination between Member States, the UN system, IHO, international organizations and other global and regional stakeholders.
- Foster collaboration in marine environment mapping with marine policy bodies, scientific initiatives, and regional SDI communities.
- Promote geographic and thematic balance in participation and leadership.
- Improve the usability and integration of marine geospatial information.
- Support Member States in operationalizing the IGIF-Hydro. 3.4. Data accessibility, capacity development and knowledge exchange
- Advocate for open data policies while addressing legitimate data sensitivity and security concerns.
- Identify and support capacity development needs, including the creation and delivery of training materials for integrated marine geospatial information management and marine SDI familiarisation syllabus.
- Promote sharing of good practices, case studies, and technical resources among stakeholders by establishing and maintaining a knowledge repository of frameworks, guidelines, technical solutions, and examples of cross-border planning.

## 4. **Membership and governance**

4.1. Membership shall comprise expert representatives nominated by IHO and/or UN Member States from the national mapping, hydrographic, geospatial, and relevant data services. Additional subject matter experts from the UN System, international organizations, NGOs and other organizations may be invited to contribute.

4.2. The Working Group shall have two Co-Chairs—one nominated by the IHO and the other through the UN-GGIM process—who should ideally serve staggered three-year terms, renewable once, subject to practical considerations and mutual agreement.

4.3. The Working Group may establish sub-groups or task teams to focus on specific aspects of its work programme. These teams shall have clearly defined objectives, deliverables, and timeframes, reporting progress regularly to the Working Group's Co-Chairs and the Secretariat. Performance should ideally be reviewed at the plenary meeting, considering the scope, duration, and nature of each sub-group's mandate.

4.4. The Working Group may engage with topic-related international organizations and the Co-Chairs invite their nominated experts as observers to contribute insights and expertise in integrated marine geospatial information.

4.5. Each Member State is encouraged to nominate representatives from its national hydrographic authority to the Working Group to ensure a balanced representation of land and marine geospatial expertise.

## 5. **Secretariat and administrative support**

5.1. The United Nations Secretariat for the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management in the Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, shall serve as the permanent Secretariat, managing coordination, communication, and administrative support for the Working Group.

5.2. The Secretariat, working in coordination with the IHO secretariat, shall:

- Support the organisation and documentation of meetings, including agenda preparation, invitations, minutes, and follow-up correspondence;
- Facilitate internal and external communication on behalf of the Working Group;
- Maintain a repository of deliverables, reports, guidance materials, and technical documentation;
- Coordinate inputs for joint reporting to UN-GGIM and IHO-IRCC.

5.3. The Co-Chairs shall coordinate and monitor sub-groups or task teams and report on their activities to UN-GGIM and the IHO-IRCC.

5.4. In coordination with the Co-Chairs, the Secretariat shall assist with the organization of meetings, preparation of agendas, and dissemination of notices and relevant materials.

## **6. Meetings and work modality**

6.1. The Working Group shall primarily operate through virtual collaboration, utilising digital platforms to advance its work on a continuous basis.

6.2. Physical meetings should preferably be convened biennially, where feasible, in conjunction with IHO or UN-GGIM plenary sessions. Alternate-year in-person or virtual events may include management meetings, workshops, or high-level thematic seminars.

6.3. Sub-groups and task teams may convene virtual ad hoc meetings as required to meet specific milestones, in alignment with the Working Group's work plan.

## **7. Governance and decision-making**

7.1. The Working Group shall seek to make decisions by consensus. In cases where consensus cannot be achieved, decisions may be made through a formal voting process involving only UN and IHO Member States, with each Member State entitled to one vote. Decisions shall be determined by a simple majority of the votes cast.

7.2. Governance of the Working Group shall be reviewed periodically by the UN-GGIM Bureau and IHO-IRCC, which may propose updates to these Terms of Reference based on the evolution of global needs or strategic direction.

7.3. In case of persistent disagreement, lack of progress, or conflicting mandates, the matter, if it falls within the purview of the Working Group, shall be referred to the UN-GGIM Bureau and/or IHO-IRCC for resolution.

7.4. The Working Group shall strive to ensure continuity and institutional memory by staggering Co-Chair transitions and maintaining consistent engagement with both parent bodies.

## **8. Reporting procedure**

8.1. The Working Group shall prepare and submit an annual report to the Committee of Experts. This report shall include:

- A summary of key achievements, outputs and challenges;
- Progress against agreed objectives and work plan deliverables;
- Recommendations for strategic direction or new areas of work.

8.2. In parallel, a complementary report, prepared in accordance with the IHO reporting template, shall be submitted annually to the IHO-IRCC for review and guidance.

8.3. Reports shall be co-authored by the Co-Chairs and Secretariat, based on contributions from sub-groups and participating Member States, and aligned with the UN-GGIM and IHO reporting cycles.

8.4. The Working Group may also prepare and issue relevant background documents such as thematic briefs, technical notes, or policy guidance documents, as required, to inform relevant UN or IHO working groups, task teams, or relevant stakeholders.

8.5. All reporting shall be results-oriented, evidence-based, and aligned with the objectives of the UN-GGIM, IHO Strategic Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals, UN-IGIF and UN-IGIF-Hydro.