

IHO File No. S3/2546

CIRCULAR LETTER N° 51/2026
22 September 2026

APPROVAL OF THE IHO RESOLUTION – GEBCO SECRETARIAT

References:

- A. IHO CL 40/2026 dated 17 July 2026 – *CALL FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE NEW IHO RESOLUTION ON THE GEBCO SECRETARIAT*
- B. 4th IHO Assembly – Decision 21
- C. Convention of the International Hydrographic Organization as amended by the Protocol dated 14 April 2005 that entered into force on 08 November 2016 – Article IX Section f.

Dear Hydrographer,

- 1. The Circular Letter in Reference A called for the approval of the proposed IHO Resolution – *IHO Resolution on The GEBCO Secretariat* in application of Reference B.
- 2. The IHO Secretariat thanks the fifty-five (55) Member States who responded to Reference A: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Brazil, Bahamas (The), Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Iran, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Monaco, Myanmar, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Malaysia, Nigeria, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivian Republic of), Vanuatu.
- 3. Of the above-mentioned Member States fifty-four (54) supported the adoption of the proposed IHO Resolution with one voting against (United States of America). Six (6) Member States submitted comments in addition to their vote. All comments received are provided in Annex A to this Circular Letter with responses from the IHO Secretariat.
- 4. In addition to the comments received, one suggested clarification to article 6 was received from the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO). This clarification was made to article 6 which has been changed from:

The GEBCO Secretariat will operate within the existing GEBCO governance structure, reporting to the IHO Inter-Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC) and the IOC Executive Council via the GGC.

To:

*The GEBCO Secretariat will operate within the existing GEBCO governance structure, reporting to the IHO Inter-Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC) and the **Relevant** IOC **bodies** via the GGC.*

5. When the Circular Letter in reference was issued, there were one hundred and one (104) Member States of the IHO with two States suspended. In accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the IHO as amended (Reference C), the minimum number of affirmative votes required is thirty-six (36). As a result, the proposed IHO Resolution (Annex B) has been adopted and will be included into the IHO M-3 Publication accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luigi Sinapi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rear Admiral Luigi Sinapi
Secretary-General

Annexes

- A. IHO Member States' responses to IHO CL 40/2026 with comments from the IHO Secretariat
- B. IHO Resolution xx/2026

IHO MEMBER STATES' COMMENTS IN RESPONSE TO IHO CL 40/2025

CANADA (Vote = YES)

Canada supports the establishment of the GEBCO Secretariat; however, the language in this resolution could be more specific. Canada looks forward to member state consultation and involvement as the implantation of this resolution progresses.

Comment by the Secretariat:

The IHO Secretariat notes Canada's comments and is ready to facilitate any further Member State consultation that is required.

INDIA (Vote = YES)

India supports the adoption of the IHO resolution on the GEBCO Secretariat. India extends its best wishes to the GEBCO Secretariat being established for the benefit of the world maritime community.

Comment by the IHO Secretariat:

The IHO thanks India for their comments.

FRANCE (Vote = YES)

La France approuve formellement cette résolution mais s'interroge comme indiqué lors du dernier conseil n°9 de l'OHI, sur la priorité donnée au sujet GEBCO et sur l'affectation des ressources du secrétariat ou en contribution d'Etats membres. Il est observé par ailleurs que des propositions au conseil n° 10 envisagent également le recrutement de contractuels pour renforcer l'assistance aux directeurs sur des sujets spécifiques. Cela soulève les questions: i) de l'arbitrage entre les différents besoins de renforcement du secrétariat de l'OHI qui sont étudiés au fil de l'eau sans vraie analyse stratégique d'ensemble et ii) plus fondamentalement du positionnement de l'OHI qui n'a pas vocation - du point de vue de la France- à devenir un organe opérationnel mais à rester un organisme de standardisation.

(France formally approves this resolution but, as indicated at the most recent 9th meeting of the IHO Council, questions the priority being given to the GEBCO issue and the allocation of Secretariat resources or contributions from Member States. It is also noted that proposals to the 10th meeting of the Council envisage the recruitment of contractors to strengthen support to the Directors on specific matters. This raises the following questions: i) how to prioritize between the various needs for strengthening the IHO Secretariat, which are currently being considered on an ad hoc basis without any genuine overarching strategic analysis; and ii) more fundamentally, the positioning of the IHO, which—in France's view—is not intended to become an operational body but should remain a standard-setting organization.)

Comment by the IHO Secretariat:

The IHO Secretariat notes France's comments regarding the prioritization of secretariat resource and the potential use of contracted support. Whilst Member States will have the opportunity discuss the latter during C-10, it is noted that the new resolution in question represents the implementation decision taken at A4.

SAUDI ARABIA (Vote = YES)

Saudi Arabia Hydrographic Office's approval is premised on the explicit understanding that the GEBCO Secretariat's operational costs.

Comment by the IHO Secretariat:

The IHO Secretariat notes Saudi Arabia's comments

SWEDEN (Vote = YES)

Sweden would like to thank the IHO Secretariat and the GEBCO Guiding Committee for preparing the draft resolution on the GEBCO Secretariat. Sweden votes "yes", with the caveat that the proposed amendments to the resolution set out below are taken into account. It is unclear from the draft resolution how the GEBCO Secretariat's work plan and budget are to be regulated. Sweden proposes that similar articles to those contained in the IHO's infrastructure resolution, approved by A-4, be included:

- The GEBCO Secretariat's three-year work plan and related three-year budget shall be maintained as a part of IHO's three-year work programme as approved by Assembly.
- The annual work plan and budget of the GEBCO Secretariat shall be decided upon by the Council.
- The annual work plan and the budget of the GEBCO Secretariat shall be approved by the Council after endorsement from IRCC and will be managed by the SRO assisted by the GEBCO Secretary.

Sweden also wishes to point out clearly that the IHO's normal decision-making process has not been followed, as the IHO Secretariat has deviated from Article VI(g)(vii) of the IHO Convention, by issuing CL 40/2026 to seek the votes of Member States, without first submitting the draft resolution to IRCC and Council. We recognise that there is an urgent need to implement this GEBCO Resolution, but Sweden request that this case be regarded as an isolated exception and that the procedure not be repeated.

Comment by the IHO Secretariat:

The IHO notes Sweden's comments. The IHO recognizes the importance of ensuring that the approval of the workplan and associated budget of the GEBCO Secretariat must be subject to a transparent and robust process that IHO Member States have visibility of. Given that the resolution already stipulates that this process be overseen by the GEBCO Guiding Committee and subsequently approved by IRCC and relevant IOC bodies, it is the view of the IHO secretariat that the concerns raised are duly covered. However, the IHO secretariat will undertake to bring these suggestions to the attention of the 10th Session of the IHO Council for further deliberation.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Vote = No)

The draft resolution does not address the Assembly's action regarding the operational and functional aspects (including staffing, administration and finance) implied by establishing the GEBCO Secretariat. Although the draft assigns an IHO Assistant Director (GEBCO Policy Officer) to act as the GEBCO secretariat, it does not provide context on the workload impacts for the remaining Assistant Directors. (document C10-05.3A) The resolution does not address the long-term viability of the GEBCO secretariat after the 3 year initial sponsorship from the government of Monaco expires. The US suggests consideration of the following paragraph to be included in the draft resolution to clarify the points above: "15. Establishment and operation of the GEBCO Secretariat shall not result in additional expenditures from the IHO regular budget beyond amounts specifically approved by Member States through the applicable IHO budget process. Expenditures of the GEBCO Secretariat shall otherwise be financed through the GEBCO and GEBCO Secretariat Funds and other approved external contributions, consistent with IHO Resolution 1/2014 (as amended). Any future proposal to finance additional GEBCO Secretariat costs from the IHO regular budget shall be subject to prior approval by Member States."

Comment by the IHO Secretariat:

The IHO notes the United States' comments. The IHO Secretariat places the upmost importance on the prioritization of available human resources to the activities set out in the IHO Strategy and associated work plan. Further, the IHO recognizes the importance of ensuring that the approval of the workplan and associated budget of the GEBCO Secretariat must be subject to a transparent and robust process that IHO Member States have visibility of. Given that the resolution already stipulates that this process be overseen by the GEBCO Guiding Committee and subsequently approved by IRCC and relevant IOC bodies, it is the view of the IHO secretariat that the concerns raised are duly covered. However, will undertake to bring these concerns and suggestions to the attention of the 10th Session of the IHO Council for further deliberation.

TITLE	Reference	Last amendment (CL or IHC/A)	1 st Edition Reference
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GEBCO Secretariat	X/2026		
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1. It is resolved that IHO shall establish a GEBCO Secretariat, embedded within the IHO Secretariat.

Role

2. The GEBCO Secretariat provides the professional coordination, governance, programme management, policy engagement, and partnership development needed to deliver against the GEBCO Strategy and strengthen GEBCO's role as the global coordinating body for ocean mapping.

Scope

3. The GEBCO Secretariat shall provide specific technical and administrative services required to support the work of GEBCO, such as:
 - Administering the GEBCO Work Plan and Fund;
 - Overseeing delivery of strategy and governance review recommendations;
 - Shaping a conducive policy environment for seabed mapping;
 - Coordinating global mapping initiatives;
 - Identifying new partnerships and funding opportunities;
 - Provide key linkage with the related and complementary activities of the Parent Organizations; and
 - Coordinate strategic communication and outreach.
4. These support services shall encompass management of associated processes, information, technology, communication and support.
5. The exact scope of these support services shall be defined in the GEBCO Guiding Committee's three-year and annual work plans and may be extended to accommodate the needs of externally financed projects and initiatives.

Organisation and Governance

6. The GEBCO Secretariat will operate within the existing GEBCO governance structure, reporting to the IHO Inter-Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC) and the relevant IOC bodies via the

GGC.

7. The Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the GGC set out how the GEBCO Secretariat interacts with the GGC and other GEBCO Bodies and partnership activities.
8. The GGC, guided by the GEBCO Strategy will develop the 3 year and annual work plans, together with the associated budgets. These work plans will set out where the GEBCO Secretariat will lead on specific activities.
9. The day to day running of the GEBCO Secretariat will normally be undertaken by an IHO Assistant Director acting as the GEBCO Secretary and the nominal Head of the GEBCO Secretariat.
10. The staff of the GEBCO Secretariat shall be employed under the IHO Staff Regulations (M-7). The oversight of the GEBCO Secretariat falls under the responsibilities of the Secretary-General but shall normally be delegated to one of the IHO Directors who will act as the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).
11. In matters related to the role, scope and function of the GEBCO Secretariat, the Head of the GEBCO Secretariat will report to the GEBCO Guiding Committee. In matters related to the internal organisation of the GEBCO Secretariat, human resources and finances within its allocated budget, the Head of the GEBCO Secretariat will report to the SRO, who will consult with the IHO Secretary General and the IOC Executive Secretary as required.
12. The GEBCO Secretariat will benefit from a Sponsors Board comprised of the IHO Secretary General, The IOC Executive Secretary (or their nominated representative) the SRO and the Chair of the GEBCO Guiding Committee. The primary role of the Sponsors board will be to assess and guide the long-term financial viability of the GEBCO Secretariat, as well as to provide a consultative guidance and strategic advice and support to the Head of the GEBCO Secretariat.

Location

13. The GEBCO Secretariat shall be co-located within the IHO Secretariat, located in Monaco in accordance with the Host Agreement between the IHO and the Principality of Monaco (Annex to the IHO Convention M-1).

Budget

14. The budget of the GEBCO Secretariat is managed separately from the regular budget according to the principles laid down in the IHO Resolution 1/2014 as amended for the specific GEBCO and GEBCO Secretariat Funds.