IOC Circular Letter No 2670
(Available in English, French, Spanish and Russian)

8 May 2017

To : National Official Coordinating Bodies for liaison with IOC

cc. : Permanent Delegates / Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States
National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States
Chair and Vice-Chairs of IOC and Major Subsidiary Bodies

Subject : Follow up to decisions of the 49th session of the IOC Executive Council

Part 1 – Decision EC-XLIX/6.2.II (Governance)

By means of this circular letter the Secretariat would like to remind Member States that at its 38th session the General Conference of UNESCO established an open-ended working group on governance, procedures and methods of work of the governing bodies of UNESCO (38 C/Resolution 101) under the chairmanship of the President of the General Conference; Mr Stanley Mutumba Simataa.

The following UNESCO Member States were designated as Vice-Chairs: Angola, Bahrain, Germany (2017), Hungary, Norway (2016), Philippines, Venezuela. Two sub-groups have been established by the Working Group on governance as follows:

- Sub-Group 1 (2016): “Structure, composition and methods of work of the Governing Bodies (General Conference and Executive Board)”, co-chaired by Norway and Philippines
- Sub-Group 2 (2017): “Structure, composition and methods of work of UNESCO’s international and intergovernmental bodies”, co-chaired by Philippines and Hungary

It is further recalled that the General Conference invited all intergovernmental entities under review to inscribe, in 2016, if feasible, an item on their agenda concerning the follow-up to the recommendation of the External Auditor’s report contained in document 38 C/23. This item was included in the agenda of the IOC Executive Council at its 49th session in June 2016. The item was supported by document IOC/EC-XLIX/2 Annex 10 which explores general governance issues including additional ways of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of preparing and organizing the work of the IOC governing bodies. This document was examined by the sessional working group
on the ‘Future of IOC’, co-chaired by the IOC Chair Peter M. Haugan and Vice-Chair Ariel H. Troisi. The sessional working group benefitted from a presentation by the UNESCO Working Group co-chairs from Norway and the Philippines, who participated in the first meeting of the working group and clarified the context and scope of this exercise. The ensuing exchange of views was highly constructive and informative, concluding with a consensus on the value of continuing this dialogue with a view of ensuring that the IOC specific role and status within UNESCO is adequately addressed.

However, in further addressing this issue under item 6.2 of its agenda, the Council regretted that the working document IOC/EC-XLIX/2 Annex 10 on the UNESCO Governance audit and its draft decision were not discussed in plenary. In particular, there was some discussion on the approach and timeline for preparing a contribution to the work of the General Conference Working Group on this issue. A consensus was reached on extending the consultation on this issue to all Member States during the intersessional period and on reporting the results to the next session of the Executive Council preceding the Assembly in 2017. The Council agreed to include in decision EC-XLIX/6.2(II) an extended consultation process to respond to the UNESCO review and external audit and also agreed that further discussion of governance and working methods should be included in the agenda of the next Assembly.

During the intersessional period, the President of the UNESCO General Conference addressed a letter to the IOC Chair, requesting him to provide some input and a response to a questionnaire to be examined by the Sub-Group 2 on “Structure, composition and methods of work of UNESCO’s international and intergovernmental bodies”, co-chaired by Philippines and Hungary. That letter, as well as the response provided by the IOC Chair are attached herewith. This document was reviewed by the Sub-Group 2 at its meeting on 28 February 2017 and the informal summary of this meeting is also attached.

In pursuance to decision EC-XLIX/6.2(II), the item was included in the agenda of the forthcoming 50th session of the IOC Executive Council. In order to ensure a broad and inclusive consultative process, all Member States are hereby invited to participate in the open-ended working group that will examine this subject in Room IV of UNESCO on the afternoon of 20 June 2017 under the chairmanship of the IOC Vice-Chair Ariel H. Troisi. In case some Member States are unable to participate in this open-ended working group, all inputs, questions and concerns that may enrich the work of the group should be addressed to the care of the IOC Secretariat (k.yvinec@unesco.org). All inputs and contributions, as well as all the relevant documentation, will be stored on the dedicated website (http://www.ioc-unesco.org/governance).

The report of the Chair of the open-ended Working Group will be presented to the Assembly under item 3.2.3. This will facilitate the discussion of the issue in the plenary and guide the more in-depth examination of this item by the sessional Financial Committee under the chairmanship of Vice-Chair Ariel H. Troisi, with a view of reporting back to the plenary under item 11.1 and elaborating a proposal within the Draft Resolution on the Financial Matters of the Commission for adoption by the Assembly.

Subject to their availability, the UNESCO Working Group co-chairs from Philippines and Hungary will be invited to provide their guidance and insights into the process, either during the meeting of the open-ended working group on 20 June or during the Assembly.

The final proposal adopted by the Assembly will be transmitted to the UNESCO Working Group at its meeting on Friday 30 June 2017.

Part 2 – Decision EC-XLIX/5 (Future of IOC – Messages)

The Executive Council at its 49th session in June 2016 acknowledged the work by the Officers and the Secretariat with regard to the messages to specific audiences about the societal benefits of IOC’s mission, programmes and activities. They were presented in Appendix I to document IOC/EC-XLIX/2 Annex 9 Rev. The Member States encouraged the Chair, the Officers and the Executive
Secretary to finalize these messages taking into account the discussions at the 49th session of the Executive Council, to share them with Member States through a circular letter and to convey these messages widely and in a timely fashion to UNESCO and other United Nations organizations. The final versions of the messages were reviewed by the IOC Officers during their annual meeting in Paris, 16-18 January 2017. They were subsequently translated into the official languages of the Commission. The Secretariat takes the opportunity of this circular letter to share them with all IOC Member States.

signed

Vladimir Ryabinin
Executive Secretary

Enclosure: “IOC Messages”

All reference documents mentioned in the letter are available online at http://www.ioc-unesco.org/governance
Message for Member States representatives/delegates to UNESCO and UN at large

Various national economic assessments of the contributions of marine-related activities to national economies have typically shown that 5% of GDP, or in some cases even more, is directly due to marine activities. Societal benefits from national investments in ocean observations and marine science and international collaboration in these fields can contribute to development of national capacity for marine science, for safeguarding coast, for developing or supporting offshore industry, improved management of marine resources, coastal tourism, safe navigation, and national security.

As recognized in the UN Sustainable Development Goal No 14 the healthier and resilient the ocean, the more positive its contribution to the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development and vice versa. The Ocean is a jointly shared value. It covers nearly three-quarters of the planet’s surface and it forms an essential part of our environment, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the weather and climate. In addition, we rely on the oceans for food, to carry 80% of our trade, to absorb our wastes and to be part of our culture and enjoyment.

Since the ratification of the Law of the Sea in 1994, jurisdiction over large tracts of the coastal waters, stretching out to two hundred nautical miles and more, have been accorded to the coastal States. However, much of the ocean waters remain an international commons and the ocean waters and their inhabitants recognize no man-made boundaries, flowing at will from one jurisdiction to another.

To reduce loss of life and property from ocean-related hazards and to sustainably use of the ocean resources we need to understand and, as much as possible, to predict the ocean behaviour. Great opportunities and challenges are associated with the economy of the ocean, but this requires responsible, coordinated and sustainable management.

Understanding and predicting the ocean behaviour and long-term changes require sustained observations on a global scale in analogy with what is in place for the atmosphere. The generation of ocean information products largely depend on the national marine research community (where it exists) with access to ships.

No single country can observe the global ocean alone. Oceanography, just as meteorology, is international by necessity. It requires governmental cooperation as well as coordination and pooling of resources, being costly in terms of manpower and infrastructure. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission - the intergovernmental mechanism to help achieve this - was established in 1960, with the objective to also stimulate and support capacity development, data exchange and storage, and building of trust.

IOC has increased from 40 Member States in 1960 to 148 Member States as of today. IOC is hosted at UNESCO in Paris.

The IOC has for more than 50 years assisted governments to address their individual and collective ocean and coastal problems through the sharing of knowledge, information and technology and through the coordination of national programmes. Without the IOC there would for instance be no: (i) International standards and exchange mechanism for of oceanographic marine observations; (ii) Global Ocean Observing System; and (iii) Global Tsunami Warning Systems.

March 2017
One Planet, One Ocean

Message to Decision Makers in Member States
(managers in marine affairs)

WHAT IS IOC?

- It is an intergovernmental organization established in 1960. Its purpose is to promote international cooperation and to coordinate programmes in research, services and capacity-building, in order to learn more about the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas and to apply that knowledge for the improvement of management, sustainable development the protection of the marine environment, and the decision-making processes of its Member States.

- IOC is a community of Member States, assisted by the Secretariat. It operates by making decisions by consensus through formal governing bodies and primary subsidiary bodies (technical and regional).

VALUE OF OCEAN SCIENCE

- Knowledge of the ocean conditions gives the base of understanding climate, living resources and availability, hazards from the ocean, storms, cyclones, tsunamis and warning systems for them, of marine pollution and impacts; changes in the ocean (acidification, sea-level rise, warming and impacts thereof on coral reefs, coastal conditions, erosion, and how to adapt and mitigate; ocean uptake of CO₂) and impacts thereof). The global ocean can impact local conditions and well-being – and is too big to study by any one country, cooperation is essential.

VALUE OF COOPERATION

- Pooling of resources; development of resources, esp. human; exchange of information, knowledge, best practices, standards, norms, stimulation through exchanges, education and training, data interoperability.

WHAT IS IN IT FOR MY INSTITUTION/COUNTRY

1. The intergovernmental character allows countries to agree on issues as countries, rather than as individual scientists. The mechanism allows such agreements to move upwards to the UN level. It is an advisory body to UNCLOS (IOC has developed guidelines for the transfer of marine technology).

2. Decisions made by the IOC Governing Bodies can assist in decision making by national governments. IOC allows messages arising from marine science to feed in to the governmental (decision-making) level.

3. The intergovernmental mechanism facilitates undertaking joint research/observations in other countries’ waters.

4. IOC agrees on, and promotes applying best practices (technical and political), standards reference materials, guidelines and nomenclature.

5. IOC ensures/promotes sharing of data and information.
6- Participation in IOC programmes allows countries to, through a limited investment, become co-owner of global infrastructures and networks (leveraging their own investment). IOC facilitates the opportunity for marine science experts to meet and discuss issues on a regular basis enables ‘science alignment’ to take place, ensuring that national investment in major infrastructure such as research ships, cruise planning and decisions regarding priority areas for research can be coordinated with partner nations.

7- IOC assists developing countries in acquiring the necessary expertise/capacity to carry out nationally relevant marine research and management. IOC develops and implements “standardized” training mechanisms, emphasizing north-north, north-south, south-south cooperation and training.

8- IOC assists developing countries to participate, in an equitable fashion, in global programmes in marine research, observation and management where global issues/risks impact also at the regional level.

9- IOC assists developing countries to organize and collaborate regionally and to jointly build capacity based on regional needs but in a global framework.

10- IOC assists countries to establish and maintain Disaster Risk Reduction systems [tsunami].

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Message to the scientist and practitioner community

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC) provides opportunities for Member State individual scientists, practitioners, and their institutions in ocean and marine science, planning and resource management to enhance the quality, scope, visibility and societal value of their research.

- The IOC offers scientists and research institutions engaging with the IOC and its activities access to participate in fora which focus their scientific field and which provides a platform for new research partnerships and synergies where the research capacity is scattered, transdisciplinary or emerging.

- Working with the IOC allows formulating complex and societal relevant new science that would otherwise not be addressed systematically and coordinated. Ocean and marine research, observations and technology is expensive, and such coordination implies mechanisms to pooling of resources instead of relying on national resources alone. Research institutions as well as individual scientists and practitioners involved get opportunities to access more data and to communicate and promote a given research area in the context of larger global issues and political priorities and thereby contribute to translate their science into societal value.

- Exchange of experience and approaches in ocean and marine science, strengthened networks and collaboration potentials at regional and global scale enhance both individual and institutional research competencies and thus the likelihood of funding for research in both a short and a long-term perspective.

- Complementing individual or institutional ocean and marine research by engaging in international collaboration, offers involvement in high impact scientific products such as manuals and guides, norm and standard setting, and peer-reviewed publications with other leading scientists, allows more efficient use and benefits from IOC services and products, and adds credibility and recognition of own research at both the national and international level.

The IOC Ocean Science Section (OSS) plays a lead role in creating the conditions for good science and building networks of scientific logistic facilities at global and regional scale. Activities are clustered around the IOC high-level objectives and the priority areas of research include climate change, ocean health and coastal research and management. IOC/OSS also contributes to enhance scientific capabilities in developing nations, especially in Africa, in line with IOC-UNESCO priorities. Specific activities includes the delivery of the first Global Ocean Science Report, support for the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), the GOA-ON Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network, the IOC Harmful Algal Bloom Programme and GlobalHAB research programme, the Biogeochemical Time Series – IGMETS IOC International Group for Marine Ecological Time Series, the GO2NE Global Ocean Oxygen Network, Integrated Coastal Research on nutrient management, the Blue Carbon Initiative, and engagement in GESAMP Working Group 40 on Microplastics and GESAMP WG 41 on Marine Geoengineering.