IOC Circular Letter No 2692
(Available in E, F, R, S)

To: IOC National Official Coordinating Bodies of IOC Member States

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: International Decade of Ocean Sciences for Sustainable Development – Consideration of IOC Resolution XXIX-1 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at its 72th Session

By means of this circular letter, I would like to inform Members States of the steps undertaken towards the establishment of the International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development under the auspices of the United Nations.

The IOC Assembly, at its 29th session, unanimously adopted IOC Resolution XXIX-1 endorsing the proposal for an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, to be established for the period 2021–2030. The Resolution also requested that the Executive Secretary convey this resolution to the UN General Assembly for consideration at its 72nd session, with a view towards the establishment of the Decade under the auspices of the United Nations and offering the IOC as coordinator.

The proposal to proclaim the Decade will be considered in the context of the Omnibus Resolution on Oceans and the Law of the Sea to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017. To facilitate the work of Member States in preparing the Omnibus resolution, two rounds of informal consultations will be held from 25 to 29 September 2017 (5 days) and from 15 to 21 November 2017 (5 days) in New York at the United Nations Headquarters. The informal consultations are closed meetings open only to the representatives of Member States.
With a view to conveying the IOC Resolution on International (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development to the UNGA and providing inputs in this regard to the Omnibus Resolution negotiations, a Background Note, annexed to this circular letter, has been prepared by the IOC Secretariat and distributed to all UN Delegations. The Background Note contains proposed language for inclusion in the Omnibus Resolution.

The formulation and adoption of UNGA Resolutions is a Member States-led process. It is critical therefore that **Member States, through their representation at the UN in New York**, actively support the Ocean Science Decade proposal during the informal consultations. Building on the proposed language as contained in the Background Note, Member States, **through their representation at the UN in New York**, are kindly encouraged to transmit their proposals to the UN Division on Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea, as soon as practicable, for their timely circulation before the start of the first round of informal consultations (25 to 29 September 2017).

I also wish to inform Member States that a dedicated IOC side event will be held on Monday 25th September at the UN in New York on the margins of the first consultation meeting, with the objective to share the IOC vision for the development of the Decade and allow for exchanges of view with UN Member States representatives.

Finally, the Director-General of UNESCO has also decided to include a supplementary item on the provisional agenda of the UNESCO General Conference (39th session) under the heading 'International (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)', for its consideration in November 2017.

[signed]  
Vladimir Ryabinin  
Executive Secretary

**Enclosures:**  
- Background Note  
- Proposed Text to UNGA Resolution XXIX-1 adopted by the IOC Assembly at its 29th session on 29 June 2017, Paris, France
Background Information note

International (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development for consideration by the 72th session of the UN General Assembly

Background

According to its Statutes\(^1\), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is a body with functional autonomy within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). IOC promotes international cooperation and coordinates 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. The IOC responds, as a competent international organization, to the requirements set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and other international instruments related to marine scientific research, services and capacity-building.

At its 49\(^{th}\) session (2016), having considered the role of ocean in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and having noted the major developments in ocean research and governance that followed the International Decade of Ocean Exploration (1971–1980), the IOC Executive Council requested the IOC Officers and Executive Secretary to pursue the development of the concept of an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) – Towards the ocean we need for the future we want – potentially under the auspices of the United Nations.

Following consultations with the IOC Officers in January 2017, an initial concept note describing the preliminary objectives of the Decade was prepared. This note was further enriched following a consultation with IOC Member States and was presented to the IOC Assembly at its 29\(^{th}\) session as Document IOC/INF-1341 Rev. Prov.\(^2\). The document provides a broad rationale and context of the Decade and outlines its possible goals and activities, themes and expected results. The document is intended to serve as a starting point for further elaboration through discussion with Member States of IOC, UNESCO, and the UN as well as other UN bodies and external collaborators.

In May 2017, the IOC Executive Secretary wrote a letter to the Heads of UN Agencies, international organizations, and scientific unions with potential interest in ocean science, and invited them to engage in the development of the Decade proposal. Positive written responses were received from the International Seabed Authority, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Hydrographic Organization, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, and the North Pacific Marine Science Organization. The United Nations Environment (UNEP) and The International Council for Science (ICSU) expressed strong support during a panel debate at the IOC Assembly.

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1 IOC Statutes- IOC/INF-1148 (2000)
The IOC Assembly (June 2017, Paris) unanimously endorsed Resolution XXIX-1 (annexed to this note) proposing an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development for the period 2021–2030 under the auspices of the United Nations, and offering the IOC to serve as coordinator.

**Decade and UN Ocean Conference**

As reflected in paragraphs 68 and 197 of the UN Ocean Conference Report (A/CONF.230/14), during the preparatory committee for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (The UN Ocean Conference, 5–9 June 2017, New York) and the Conference itself, several UN Member States spoke in favour of the Ocean Science Decade.

**Rationale for an International Decade**

An international decade on ocean science, referred hereto as the Decade, preferably under the auspices of the United Nations, would bring out increased understanding of the need to take urgent actions to maintain a life-supporting ocean and ensure adequate protection and adaptive management of the marine environment. This understanding, based on effective communication of scientific knowledge and the need to support oceanographic research and observations, is a prerequisite for generating commitments of governments and other stakeholders and for creating a new level of awareness in the public about the state and future of the ocean.

Science is indeed central for managing such a complex system as the ocean. The Decade would establish or strengthen existing but weak links of science to marine applications of direct societal benefit, such as adaptation to climate change. This may include substantial technological developments and related transfer of marine technology, including modelling tools, through persistent cooperation over time, also stimulating capacity building.

The Decade would provide a framework and a focus for partnership and concerted action to implement the UN Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda with respect to the marine environment. The Decade would also address the marine aspects of other related UN agreements such as those under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The main objectives of the Decade would be: 1) to make a decisive step for turning the scientific knowledge and understanding of the ocean and sea floor processes and conditions about marine resources into effective actions supporting improved ocean management, stewardship and sustainable development of the ocean (blue) economy; and 2) to identify and fill significant gaps in our knowledge, including through capacity development and transfer of marine technology to address the specific context of SIDS and LDCs.

**Preparation of Draft Implementation Plan**

In accordance with guidelines contained in the annex to the UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/84 of 24 May 1989, as well as guidance contained in resolutions 35/424 and 53/199, a draft programme of action/implementation plan with clearly defined objectives and activities to be carried out at the international, regional and national levels should be formulated to support the implementation of any international decade under the auspices of UN.

The draft programme of action/implementation plan should indicate:

1. organizational arrangements;
2. arrangements for financing from both budgetary and extrabudgetary sources;
3. procedures for monitoring implementation;
4. public information activities;
5. where appropriate, advisory services upon request from governments;
6. the lead agency or agencies for the decade;
7. mechanisms for coordinating the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system and those of other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned;
8. the establishment at the national level of mechanisms to mobilize public support and carry out the related activities.

**Action by the UNGA**

The UNGA is invited to consider, under item 78 a) of its provisional agenda, “Oceans and the law of the Sea”, the establishment of an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development by proclaiming as the Decade the ten-year period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2030 and by inviting the IOC to act as the lead coordinating agency, tasking it with the preparation of a draft international implementation plan. The preparation of the Implementation Plan will/would take place in 2018–2019 in consultation with Member States, United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and bodies, other intergovernmental organizations, as well as all other relevant stakeholders. The Plan will/would be presented for consideration or endorsement to the UNGA at its 74th session in 2019.
Proposed Text to UNGA

The General Assembly,

Recalling the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG 14 ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’,

Further recalling the cross-cutting role of ocean science in SDG 14 as also noted in target SDG 14.a that, inter alia, calls for Member States to “increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer of marine technology taking into account the IOC Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology (IOC CGTMT) in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries”,

Bearing in mind the ‘Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action’3 agreed in New York in June 2017 by the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 regarding, inter alia, the need to further increase marine scientific research and to encourage scientific and technological innovation to promote decision-making based on the best available science (paragraphs 10 and 13.f),

Bearing in mind also the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway,

Considering the scientific requirements underpinning the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with reference, inter alia, to Parts XIII and XIV of the Convention,

Considering also the scientific needs arising from, in particular, the Paris Climate Agreement,

Emphasizing the need to address existing gaps in scientific knowledge of the ocean,

Recalling the United Nations Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, which reinforces the science-policy interface by providing policy-makers with information necessary to make decisions regarding the ocean in recognition that a scientific understanding of the ocean is fundamental to carry out an effective management of the human activities that affect the marine environment and the biota that it contains,

Recognizing that a global and multi-stakeholder framework of concerted and cooperative actions is needed to support sustained scientific research about the ocean and coastal areas with related capacity development, including in accordance with Parts XIII and XIV of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the IOC CGTMT, with the view to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Taking note that the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) at its 29th Assembly4 endorsed the proposal for an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, to be established for the period 2021–2030,

1. Decides to proclaim the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development for the ten-year period beginning on 1 January 2021;

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3 See UNGA Resolution A/RES/71/312
4 IOC Resolution XXIX-1 adopted by the IOC Assembly at its 29th Session, Paris, 21–29 June 2017, on 29 June 2017
2. **Invites** the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to lead the promotion of the Decade and to coordinate the development of its draft international implementation plan in consultation with Member States, United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and bodies, as well as other intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders;

3. **Decides** to invite the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to present the draft international implementation plan at its 74th session in 2019.
Annex 1

Resolution XXIX-1 adopted
By the IOC Assembly at its 29th session on 29 June 2017, Paris, France

International (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission,

Recalling the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG 14 ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’,

Further recalling the cross-cutting role of ocean science in SDG 14 and particularly target SDG 14.a that inter alia calls for Member States to “increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer of marine technology taking into account the IOC Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology [IOC CGTMT] (…)”, and IOC’s custodianship role for SDG 14, particularly under targets 14.3 and 14.a,

Acknowledging the role of IOC in providing technical and scientific support to Member States in achieving commitments towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Bearing in mind the ‘Call for Action’ agreed in New York in June 2017 by the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (The UN Ocean Conference) regarding inter alia the need to further increase marine scientific research and to encourage scientific and technological innovation to promote decision-making based on the best available science (Para. 10 and 13.f),

Recalling IOC’s Voluntary Commitments made for the UN Ocean Conference and its follow-up, including the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (#OceanAction 15527),

Considering the internationally agreed frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

Recognizing the need to address existing gaps in ocean scientific knowledge, and that a global and multi-stakeholder framework of concerted and cooperative actions is needed to support ocean research, its applications and links to policy-making, sustained observations and services, with related capacity development and in accordance with the IOC CGTMT, in order to meet the 2030 Agenda,

Considering Document IOC/EC-XLIX/2 Rev. entitled “Contribution to the future of the IOC Executive Roadmap” and its Appendix II – Concept Note on a Second International Decade of (Integrated) Ocean Exploration, 2021–2030, presented at the 49th Session of the IOC Executive Council,

Recalling IOC Executive Council Decision EC-XLIX/5 that endorses the course of action on the “Roadmap” including the Concept Note for a Second International Decade,
Having further considered documents IOC-XXIX/2 Annex 9 and IOC/INF-1341 Rev. Prov.,

Endorses the proposal for an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (herein after the Decade), to be established for the period 2021–2030, with the following preliminary objectives:

(i) stimulate international cooperation regarding marine science requirements needed to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

(ii) understand the impacts of cumulative stressors and seek sustainable solutions for sustaining benefits from the ocean;

(iii) share knowledge and enhance interdisciplinary marine research capacities leading to benefits for all Member States, particularly for SIDS and Least Developed Countries (LDC);

(iv) gain a better quantitative knowledge of ocean dynamics, ecosystems and their contribution to society, through the whole ocean column, from the surface to the bottom, and from the perspective of both natural and anthropogenic forcings;

(v) complete the map of the ocean floor and its resources to support their sustainable management;

Requests the IOC Executive Secretary to:

(i) convey this resolution to the UN General Assembly for consideration at its 72nd Session, with a view towards the establishment of the Decade under the auspices of the United Nations for the period 2021–2030 and to offer the IOC as coordinator;

(ii) bring this resolution to the attention of the Director-General of UNESCO for inclusion of the Decade as a specific item in the agenda of the UNESCO General Conference for consideration at its 39th Session (Paris, 30 October–14 November 2017) with the view of its endorsement by UNESCO;

(iii) encourage UN agencies and programmes, international scientific and academic organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to join the Decade, to refine the objectives and expected outcomes, and to prepare the draft implementation plan of the Decade, for further consideration by the UN General Assembly in 2019;

(iv) present a progress report thereon to the IOC Executive Council at its 51st session;

Urges Member States to express support to the establishment of the Decade under the United Nations auspices and to contribute to the development of the Decade implementation plan;

Further urges Member States to provide voluntary contributions for the implementation of the Decade, preferably to the IOC Special Account, and through in-kind support such as staff secondments to the Secretariat.

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