INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

Thirtieth Session of the Assembly
UNESCO, Paris, 26 June–4 July 2019

Item 3.4 of the Provisional Agenda

TO THE FORTIETH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO

Summary

According to Article 3.2 of the Statutes of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/INF/1148) and Rule of Procedure 49.2 (IOC/INF/1166), the IOC prepares regular reports on its activities, which shall be submitted to the General Conference of UNESCO. The present report covers the period 2018–2019 and focuses on the main achievements in the implementation of the first biennium of the IOC Programme and Budget 2018–2021, contributing to UNESCO Medium-term Strategy 2014–2021 (37 C/4) with respect to Strategic Objective 5 “Promoting international scientific cooperation on critical challenges to sustainable development”.

Upon consideration by the Assembly, the report will be presented to the 40th General Conference of UNESCO as 40 C/REP.9.

The proposed decision(s) is referenced IOC-XXX/Dec.3.4 in the Provisional Action Paper (IOC-XXX/2 Prov.) of the 30th Session of IOC Assembly.
Introduction

1. Established in 1960 by Resolution 2.31 adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its Eleventh session (11 C/Resolutions), the IOC is a body with functional autonomy within UNESCO. The IOC promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation and capacity development in service of its 150 Member States.

2. The implementation of the IOC Medium-Term Strategy 2014–2021 (IOC/INF-1314) is organized in a conceptual framework of Functions required to advance towards the IOC Vision and to achieve the Expected Results defined by the IOC governing bodies for the quadrennial programme of the Commission, 2018–2021. Accordingly, this report provides an overall strategic assessment of programme implementation for the period 2018–2019, while the complete information, with analysis by function, can be found in the report of the IOC Executive Secretary to the 30th Session of the IOC Assembly (IOC-XXX/2 Annex 1).

OVERALL STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Key achievements

3. The end of the year 2017 was very special for the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) with the endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), at its 72nd Session, of the IOC’s proposal to proclaim the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development for the period 2021–2030, through Resolution A/RES/72/73, therein the Decade. In July 2018, the IOC Executive Council at its 51st session approved the Decade “Roadmap” document (IOC/EC-LI/2 Annex 3) intended to guide the preparation process in terms of preliminary objectives, societal outcomes, governance and engagement processes. The Council decided to establish an Executive Planning Group (EPG) consisting of high-level experts and a Stakeholder Forum, open to a broad range of communities (Resolution EC-LI.1). IOC convened the first meeting of the EPG from 17 to 19 December 2018 to brainstorm on scientific, governance, communications, and engagement elements of the Decade ahead of a first Global Planning Meeting and a series of regional consultations foreseen in 2019. Experts also sought to lay out the basis for an effective strategy to communicate the objectives of the Decade, engage stakeholders, and ultimately influence behaviours and perceptions of scientists, decision-makers and the public.

4. The 17th meeting of UN Oceans hosted by the IOC at the UNESCO Headquarters from 26 to 28 March 2018 reinforced the collaborative approach to ensure a meaningful division of labour among the IOC partners in the United Nations system.

5. The United Nations General Assembly, through its Resolution A/RES/71/313, requested ‘the Statistical Commission, through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, to further refine and improve the global indicator framework in order to address coverage, alignment with targets, definition of terms and development of metadata and to facilitate implementation’. As a custodian agency for the SDG Indicator 14.3.1 (Average marine acidity (pH) measured at agreed suite of representative sampling stations) in the course of 2018, IOC and its networks, including the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON), developed the methodology to support its Member States’ reporting on progress. This resulted in the decision to upgrade the indicator from Tier 3 to Tier 2. With the internationally established methodology and available standards, the IOC will now work with countries to ensure regular production of data, which is required to move the indicator to Tier 1 status.

6. The IOC’s Global Ocean Science Report represents the core methodology to measure progress in the achievement of the SDG Target 14.A, of which the IOC has the custodianship. The first edition (2017) resulted in the indicator upgrade to Tier 2, and it is expected that the second edition planned for release in 2020 and started with the support of the Republic of Korea, Belgium
(Flanders) and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), will allow the methodology to achieve Tier 1 status.

7. IOC’s leadership took an active part in the First session of the Intergovernmental Conference on an International Legally Binding Instrument (ILBI) under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) held in the United Nations Headquarters, from 4 to 17 September 2018. This conference kicked off a three-year negotiation process whereby United Nations Member States will, within the framework of UNCLOS, need to agree on a new global regime that regulates access to and shares the benefits derived from marine genetic resources, as well as protect marine biodiversity. Many countries highlighted the potential role of IOC in supporting the future agreement, particularly about capacity development and transfer of marine technology (including data services through the IOC Ocean Biogeographic Information System), to make this instrument universal, serving all its future Parties and developing countries in particular.

8. IOC actively participated in the Sustainable Blue Economy conference organized by Kenya and Canada, from 26 to 28 November 2018 in Nairobi, with a clear message: knowledge must be at the forefront, not the sidelines, of the blue economy debate. Through three flagship events, IOC highlighted the role of science and ocean observation in supporting economic development of maritime nations. As a key framework for organizing marine activities in a sustainable way, IOC also put forward its experience in supporting nations in the implementation of maritime spatial planning.

9. The two millionth profile taken by an Argo float in November 2018 in 20 years was emblematic of the sustained operation by Member States of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), and the continuous challenge of coordination and advocacy for the system, led by the IOC. Twenty-six Member States deployed Argo floats, and more than seventy are active contributors to GOOS through one of its observing networks or GOOS Regional Alliances. The observations are a foundation of ocean science, as well as delivery information used in operational services improving safety and the ocean economy, climate mitigation and adaptation, and sustaining ocean ecosystem services and ocean health.

10. After more than four years of international collaboration, coordinated by IOC, the South China Sea region has now its own dedicated Tsunami Advisory Centre. Inaugurated on 8 May 2018, it serves as a warning system for nine countries in the region. IOC convened a high-level panel event on Reducing Human and Economic Impacts from Tsunamis at UNESCO as a contribution to the third edition of World Tsunami Awareness Day. The meeting exemplified real impacts of tsunamis for small island developing States (SIDS) and their coastal tourism sector, and underscored the need for continued community preparedness to avoid complacency. IOC led Tsunami Exercises to raise awareness and exercise the systems. The Indian Ocean Exercise in 2018 (IOWave18) took place on 4 and 5 September 2018 and involved 24 countries. During the exercise 119,000 people were evacuated.

11. The tsunami that hit Palu, Indonesia, on 28 September 2018 caused significant loss of lives and property damage. Initial findings about the nature of that dramatic event are emerging from the post-tsunami field investigations led by the International Tsunami Survey Team (ITST), coordinated by IOC at the request of Indonesia.

12. In collaboration with the International Blue Carbon Initiative, IOC developed a methodology to measure blue carbon storage to assist national reporting to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). At the side events held during the UNFCCC COP-24 in December 2018, the Commission highlighted the potential of blue carbon ecosystems as a nature-based solution for the nationally determined contributions to mitigate climate change under the Paris Agreement.

13. The implementation of the voluntary commitment #OceanAction15187 “Ocean Literacy for All: A Global Strategy to Raise the Awareness for the Conservation, Restoration, and Sustainable
Use of Our Ocean” announced at the first UN Ocean Conference in June 2017 continued thanks to the support of the Swedish Government. The IOC has launched the Ocean Literacy Portal and produced a toolkit (IOC/2017/MG/80 Rev.), which is currently being tested in schools of 36 countries through the UNESCO associated Schools Project Network (ASPNet).

Global Priority Africa


16. Several activities were organized under the framework of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) for African Member States bordering the Indian Ocean. Capacity development continues to be a key area of focus, with the Ocean Teacher Global Academy (OTGA) regional training centres in Africa having trained 52 trainees from 18 Member States. IOCAFRIKA organized four workshops on Marine Spatial Planning attended by 75 trainees from 20 Member States. A workshop on Strengthening Global Governance of Large Marine Ecosystems and their coasts, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), gathered 30 participants from 14 countries in Dakar, Senegal (3–4 September 2018).

Global Priority Gender Equality

17. Within the framework of the Implementation Plan for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and in accordance with Resolution EC-LI.1 adopted by the IOC Executive Council in July 2018, every effort has been made to ensure that a gender-sensitive approach is applied at all levels, from science to policy, identifying and addressing ocean science capacity and knowledge needs before and during the Decade. Special attention is being paid to develop synergies between SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 14 (Ocean) by focusing on the role of women in ocean science, improving global ocean knowledge, and supporting informed and inclusive decision-making.

Funds mobilized and partnerships established

18. IOC broadened its partnership with the European Commission by launching the Marine Spatial Planning Global (MSP Global), a new joint initiative to promote cross-border maritime spatial planning. The success of the 9th GEF (Global Environment Facility) Biennial International Waters Conference (IWC9) held in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 5 to 8 November 2018, ensures the continuity of IOC’s partnership with GEF and UNDP.

19. Communication and outreach efforts have intensified to present the objectives of the Decade and engage various stakeholders through a number of creative means (events, videos, newsletters, website, press releases and social media). The High-Level Scientific Conference (UNESCO Headquarters, 10–11 September 2018) organized in cooperation with the Ocean and Climate Platform and with the support from Canada, as well as the Ocean session of the UNESCO Partners Forum (11–12 September 2018) can be cited as examples of this work. IOC established a partnership with the Velux Foundations (Denmark) with a view of reaching out to the philanthropy sector through an engagement event in the fall of 2019, funded by the Velux Foundations and the Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters.
Major challenges encountered in implementation and remedial actions

20. Overall, the main challenge for the Commission’s small Secretariat is the dual task to raise not only extrabudgetary resources necessary to maintain its core operational programmes but also significant additional resources to lead and coordinate the Decade preparation phase. A new approach to fundraising and outreach is being developed, based on highlighting the societal benefits of IOC’s work and demonstrating the return on investment in ocean science and observation.