



IHB Files No. S1/5015- S3/2513

**CIRCULAR LETTER 63/2015**  
**27 August 2015**

**REVIEW BY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
ON ITS ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE GEBCO PROJECT**

References:

- A. Document IRCC7-INF 13C - *Information Paper on the Governance and Administration of the GEBCO Project* (copy attached)
- B. IOC Circular Letter 2589 dated 12 August 2015 (copy attached)

Dear Hydrographer,

1. The General Bathymetric Chart of the Ocean (GEBCO) Project was originally proposed in 1899 and established in 1903 with the strong support of Prince Albert I of Monaco. The management of the GEBCO Project was transferred to the IHO (then IHB) in 1929. The IHO programme was joined by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO in 1974 as a co-sponsor and supporter. However, IOC involvement has been diminishing since 2003. As a result of this situation, the Directing Committee has had cause to question the current governance and administration arrangements of the GEBCO Project. This was brought to the attention of the Inter-Regional Coordination Committee at its last meeting (see Reference A) in June and discussed at length with the Executive Secretary of the IOC, who subsequently brought the matter to the attention of IOC Member States at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of their Assembly.
2. The 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC Assembly decided to establish a Review Group to consider the role and involvement of IOC in the GEBCO Project. IOC Circular Letter 2589 (Reference B) now calls on IOC Member States to nominate representatives to participate in the Review Group.
3. Noting that many national Hydrographers are also Member State representatives to the IOC or have close links with their IOC representative, the Directing Committee considers that it is appropriate to provide all Hydrographers with its views on the matter, for your consideration.
4. It is the view of the Directing Committee that the current arrangement of shared governance of the GEBCO Project is, at the very best, suboptimal. The IHO is providing both financial and administrative support - whereas the financial and administrative contribution from the IOC is almost nil. GEBCO is not even acknowledged in the IOC Programme as far as we can ascertain. While there are active IOC representatives in GEBCO meetings - they are largely self-motivated, and are neither following, nor bound to, the programmes and objectives of the IOC.
5. Even if there was the same level of interest and activity (financial, administrative and technical) from the IOC as there is from the IHO - which at the moment there is not - then the concept of the same Member States, in most cases, of both the IHO and the IOC being required to consider and adopt the same proposals from GEBCO is not efficient.
6. We acknowledge that the IOC and its programmes may have a significant interest in ensuring improvements in hydrography and ocean bathymetry since they may be fundamental enablers to many programmes that it pursues, but it is not the fundamental purpose of the IOC.

History and the current IOC work programme quite clearly show this to be so. Meanwhile, hydrography and bathymetry lie at the heart of all that drives the purpose of the IHO. This has always been the case and, in our view, will continue to be so.

7. For all these and related reasons, the Directing Committee is of the view that the IOC should seriously consider relinquishing its executive role over the GEBCO Programme while at the same time ensuring that the IOC and the IHO acknowledge each other as a primary stakeholder in the areas of competence of the other. For IOC, its competence is obviously oceanography, for IHO it is hydrography and bathymetric mapping.

8. In recognising the role of IHO, the IOC may wish to recognise the IHO as its competent authority and collaborative partner in satisfying the technical aspects of its hydrographic, ocean mapping and charting requirements. Such an arrangement would be entirely in line with the long-standing, successful relationships and functions that the IHO fulfils with the IMO, UN-DOALOS, EC, ACS, UN-GGIM, SPC, PMAWCA, IALA, and other intergovernmental or international organizations.

9. A counter argument that may arise is that the current (and prospective) IOC representatives in the GEBCO Guiding Committee and its Sub-Committees would be disenfranchised and unable to continue to participate in GEBCO meetings and activities. This is absolutely not so. All the current IOC representatives are eminently qualified to represent their countries through IOC. There is no reason why those same people could not be nominated by their national hydrographic representative to IHO, in exactly the same way as they presumably enjoy the support from their national representative in IOC. In fact, even without national nomination, the IHO rules would allow them to be invited as expert contributors, in any case.

10. In our view, reverting to the pre-1974 situation where the IHO alone governs GEBCO would provide a far more efficient, results-based focus for the GEBCO Project. This in turn could only be of benefit to IOC activities and to its participant Member States. But, in addition, it would reap significant dividends for the global community at large, since hydrography, bathymetry, the mapping of the seas and the wide availability of the fundamental underpinning data set are core activities of the International Hydrographic Organization.

On behalf of the Directing Committee

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ward', with a period at the end.

Robert WARD  
President

Attachments:

1. Document IRCC7-INF 13C
2. IOC Circular Letter 2589 dated 12 August 2015

IRCC7-INF 13C

**7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IHO- Inter Regional Coordination Committee (IRCC-7)****Mexico City, Mexico, 1-3 June 2015****Information Paper on the Governance and Administration of the GEBCO Project**

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Submitted by:</b>      | Directing Committee  |
| <b>Executive Summary:</b> | This paper summarizes a number of concerns over the governance and administration of the IHO-IOC GEBCO Project |

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Over the last three years, the GEBCO Guiding Committee (GGC) has faced a significant budget crisis that has been averted only by certain of its debts being paid by the IHO, on the authority of the Directing Committee. As a result of this situation, the Directing Committee has had cause to question the governance and administration arrangements of the GEBCO Project and has made extensive investigations, particularly in relation to:

- a. the custody and management of some GEBCO funds, until recently held by the University of Stockholm on behalf of the GGC,
- b. the policy of paying some of the expenses of IOC representatives to attend meetings,
- c. the policy of providing an annual bursary payment to the secretary/treasurer of the GEBCO Project,
- d. the lack of comprehensive reporting of the activities of the GGC and its subordinate bodies to the IHO Member States; and
- e. the diminishing involvement of the IOC as a co-sponsoring organization since 2003.

**2. History**

2.1 The GEBCO programme was originally proposed in 1899 and established 1903. It was transferred to the management of the IHO (then IHB) in 1929. The IHO programme was joined by IOC in 1974 as a co-sponsor and supporter. IOC involvement has been diminishing since 2003.

2.2 Funding support was significantly reduced by the IOC Assembly in 2005 and furthermore in 2007. The GEBCO project has been implemented without financial support from the IOC since 2010. The ocean mapping programme of the IOC was discontinued in 2009. Bathymetric mapping as a data gathering activity no longer features in the IOC programme. IOC no longer provides any funding support for the GEBCO project.

**3. Discussion**

3.1 While there remains a core group of individuals nominally representing IOC that are participating in the GEBCO programme, the active involvement of IOC as an organization is now minimal.

3.2 The GGC is classed as a Joint Group of Experts under the IOC guidelines for subsidiary bodies but there is no link to its activities from the IOC website.

3.3 In recent times, the nomination of IOC representatives to the organs of GEBCO, including the GGC, seems to have been left to the initiative of the current members.

3.4 The direct involvement of IOC Member States is now limited to reviewing proposed Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the GGC and its subordinate bodies as and when they are presented. This protracted process of approval, conducted only at annual IOC meetings, has introduced delays in the approval process that can be measured in years and may now be hindered by political considerations.

3.5 Funding for the GEBCO Project and the activities of the GEBCO Guiding Committee and its subordinate bodies is based on annual contributions from the IHO budget and a separate specific annual allocation from the Government of Monaco. These funds are supplemented by sales of some data, grants from the Nippon Foundation, contributions from other benefactors from time to time, and until recently expended, the residue of

profits from the GEBCO centenary celebrations held in 2003. Although the annual financial reports to the GGC are posted on the GEBCO website, the details of the non-IHO funding contributions has never been reported formally to the IHO Member States.

#### **4. Ongoing Actions**

4.1 As a result of the existing situation, the Directing Committee has approached the recently appointed Executive Secretary of IOC and indicated that In the light of the shift in the priorities of the IOC as described above, the continued involvement of the IOC as a co-sponsoring organization for the GEBCO programme warrants review.

4.2 As a result, the Executive Secretary of IOC intends to raise this issue at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC Assembly, 18-25 June 2015, with a view to establishing a review group to consider IOC's continuing interests in the GEBCO programme (see document IOC-XXVIII/2 Annex 7 attached). If a review group is established, it is proposed that the IHO is represented by the Directing Committee.

4.3 Meanwhile, the Directing Committee has attempted to forge a way forward with the Chair of the GEBCO Guiding Committee. This has met with only limited success because of communication issues on the part of the Chair and a resultant lack of responses.

4.4 However, last week, the IHB received a transfer of all the funds previously held by the University of Stockholm on behalf of the GEBCO Project. The IHB will now act as the treasurer for the GEBCO Project.

4.5 Meanwhile,

- a. there are still no published records of the GGC meeting held 12 months ago,
- b. the 2015 WP for the GEBCO GC was only published recently, as a submission to this Committee,
- c. neither the IHB nor this Committee has received a proposed budget for 2015,
- d. any proposed WP and budget for 2016 raised later this year will have to be reviewed by this Committee by correspondence.

#### **5. Actions required from IRCC7**

5.1 IRCC may wish to:

- a. **take note** of the concerns of the Directing Committee and seek further updates from the Secretariat of the IHO and the GGC at its next meeting.

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**IOC-XXVIII/2 Annex 7**

Paris, 28 May 2015

Original: English

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
(of UNESCO)****Forty-eighth Session of the Assembly**  
UNESCO, Paris, 18–25 June 2015*Item 6.2 of the Revised Provisional Agenda***REVIEW OF THE ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE IOC  
IN THE GENERAL BATHYMETRIC CHART  
OF THE OCEAN (GEBCO) PROJECT**Summary

The General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) project became a joint project under co-sponsorship of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the IOC established through Resolution VIII-3 of the Assembly in 1973. The involvement of the IOC in the Project over the recent years has been adversely impacted by the budgetary difficulties IOC have been facing resulting in an increasing imbalance between IHO and IOC contributions in supporting GEBCO. This development opens a debate on the review of the GEBCO project and the role of the IOC in its development.

Purpose of the document: This document intends to provide situational briefing on the involvement of the IOC and the IHO into the GEBCO project. It supports an open discussion on the review of the GEBCO project and its governance.

Financial and administrative implications are covered in paragraph 10.

The proposed decision is referenced IOC-XXVIII/Dec.6.2(II) in the Action Paper (document IOC-XXVIII/2 Prov.)

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## Introduction

1. GEBCO was proposed in 1899 and became a reality in April 1903 when HSH Prince Albert I of Monaco offered to organize and finance the production of a new chart series designated: "The General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans", under the Prince's Scientific Cabinet. In 1922 the responsibility for GEBCO was passed to the Director of the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and in 1929 was transferred to the International Hydrographic Bureau (today the International Hydrographic Organization: IHO). In the years leading up to 1974, the IOC took an increasingly active interest in the work of the GEBCO project until it co-sponsored the Guiding Committee of the GEBCO project with IHO. The GGC oversees the conduct of the Project. Its 10 member experts are appointed on an equal basis (5-5) by IHO and IOC. This collaboration culminated in the very successful celebration of centenary of the project in 2003.

2. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by IHO and IOC in 1984, and then was revised in 2000. The GEBCO project has been recognized as one of the activities of common interest to both organizations to be cooperated under the MoU.

## Changing Circumstances

3. Since 2003, the level of active involvement by the IOC as part of its ongoing project of activities has diminished progressively. On the other hand, in recent years, the prominence and relevance of the GEBCO project in the IHO work programme has increased as part of the IHO's stated aim, "to ensure that all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted". This situation has resulted in the inefficiency of the management of the GEBCO project through the existing IHO-IOC co-sponsorship.

4. From the view point of the IHO, for all practical purposes, the Secretariat of the IHO has assumed responsibility for the governance oversight and operational direction of GEBCO. This is because GEBCO continues to be a core activity of the IHO and because of the severe resource constraints and other priorities that have been placed upon the IOC in recent years. The IHO allocates an annual financial contribution to the GEBCO project through its budget. The IHO undertakes the role of publisher and maintenance authority for all the international standards, guidelines and documentation supporting the activities of the GEBCO project including the printing, editing and composition of those documents. For instance, the IHO administers the GEBCO fund to support the GEBCO project, and its contribution to the GEBCO project through the fund was approximately € 85,000 in 2014 and € 86,000 in 2015. In addition, the IHO provides € 16,000 per year for tasks as part of the IHO 2013–2017 Workplan (as reported by the Guiding Committee in IOC/INF-1325).

5. Underpinning all GEBCO products is a substantial quantity of bathymetric source data and metadata, most of which is stored and maintained within the IHO Data Centre for Digital Bathymetry (DCDB), located in Boulder, Colorado (USA). This worldwide digital data bank of oceanic soundings was established in 1990 and can be freely accessed and downloaded via an online service. The IHO is currently supporting the enhancement of the DCDB to further improve its capability and services to the wider community.

6. In the meantime, while there remains a core group of individuals from IOC Member States that are participating in the GEBCO project, the active involvement of the IOC as an organization may be considered minimal, aside from some ocean mapping activities of regional subsidiary bodies. In recent years, the IOC has mainly been involved in appointing experts to serve for GGC and its subsidiary bodies, and reviewing proposed Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure for the GGC and its subordinate bodies. Funding support was significantly reduced by the IOC Assembly in 2005 and furthermore in 2007. The GEBCO project has been implemented without financial support from the IOC since 2010. Whilst the GEBCO project continued to receive extrabudgetary support until 2010, it stopped receiving an IOC regular programme allocation from 2008 until present.

7. Ocean mapping projects of the IOC have been largely defunct since 2009. Without support from the IOC, some International Bathymetric Charts (IBCs) such as International Bathymetric Chart of the Arctic Ocean (IBCAO) and International Bathymetric Chart of the Southern Ocean (IBCSO) are left mainly for the initiatives of scientists and/or hydrographers who have interest in bathymetry in the region. With regard to International Bathymetric Chart for the Western Pacific (IBCWP), WESTPAC at its 9th session (Busan, Republic of Korea, 9–12 May 2012) endorsed the recommendation made by WESTPAC advisory group that IBCWP, “*with consideration of the suggestion made on reforming as one WESTPAC Working Group with emphasis on the technical exchange on the marine cartography and the applications of bathymetric chart in marine and coastal area integrated management, establish the network, develop a complete working group proposal via correspondence and technical workshops, and submit the proposal to the next Session for approval.*” In the IOCARIBE region, countries have been developing the International Bathymetric Chart of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico (IBCCA) and the Pacific area of Central America and related map products. In the IOCAFRICA region, Member States participated in the development of the International Bathymetric Charts for the Western Indian Ocean (IBCWIO) and for the Eastern Atlantic (IBCEA). However in recent years, IOCAFRICA has been less involved in regional ocean mapping.

### Status in 2015

8. In the light of the above, the Secretariat of the IHO has expressed in 2015, through communications to the IOC, the following view on the co-sponsorship of the IHO and the IOC of the GEBCO project:

- (i) The existing governance arrangements for the GEBCO project are not working. In fact, they are impeding the IHO in the pursuit of one of its principal aims – “*to ensure that all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted*”. The IHO places a high priority on this theme.
- (ii) Under the current arrangements, all decisions related to the governance and management of the GEBCO project, which is a key element of the IHO programme, require the agreement of both IHO and IOC. This is inherently inefficient and is even more problematic when the IOC does not rank or support the GEBCO project with any priority in its own programmes.
- (iii) It may be more appropriate for the IHO to revert to the situation that existed prior to 1974, when the GEBCO project was governed and administered solely by the IHO.
- (iv) The two organizations should nevertheless continue to maintain close contact and provide and welcome opportunities for mutual support and cooperation on all matters of common interest. In this regard, the Secretariat of the IHO considers that there are a number of such areas of common interest existing in the work programmes of the two organizations where close liaison should be encouraged. These could all be reflected easily in a revised MoU between the two organizations.

9. In this regard, the IOC may be better placed to facilitate and guide the use of GEBCO bathymetric data sets and products through the user communities that represents its own programmes, primarily GLOSS, GOOS, IODE, JCOMM, Tsunami as well as its regional subsidiary bodies. This approach would relieve the IOC from the responsibility to support the operation of the GEBCO project, whilst still contributing to its development. In this context, it is timely to consider the necessity of reviewing the continued involvement of the IOC as a co-sponsoring organization for the GEBCO project. If the review is necessary, it is proposed that the review of the project from an end-user-perspective should be initiated and should include new governance options of the project for consideration by IOC governing bodies.

### **Financial and administrative implications**

10. The review of the project may be carried out by external experts appointed by relevant IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies. Those experts will conduct the review by correspondence until the review will be submitted to the IOC Executive Council at its 49th session in 2016. No budget is required for this activity.

### **Proposed decision**

11. In light of the foregoing, the IOC Assembly may wish to consider IOC-XXVIII/Dec. 6.2(II) proposed in the Action Paper (IOC-XXVIII/2 Prov.).

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 МЕЖПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННАЯ ОКЕАНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ  
 اللجنة الدولية الحكومية لعلوم المحيطات  
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**IOC Circular Letter No 2589**  
 (Available in English, French, Spanish and Russian)

IOC/VR/OM  
 12 August 2015

- To** : IOC Member States (Official National Coordinating Bodies for liaison with the IOC)  
 Permanent Delegates/Observer Missions to UNESCO and National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States
- cc.** : The Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission  
 Officers of Major IOC Subsidiary Bodies (Scientific, Technical and Regional)

**Subject : Nomination of experts to serve on the Review Group with regard to IOC's Role and Involvement in the GEBCO Project**

This circular letter has been prepared further to Dec.6.2(II) of the IOC Assembly at its 28<sup>th</sup> session (Paris, 18–25 June 2015), to establish a Review Group with regard to IOC's Role and Involvement in the GEBCO Project, mainly from a view point of users of GEBCO bathymetric dataset and products. In accordance with its terms of reference the review group will be comprised of representatives of IOC Member States and one expert each from the GEBCO Guiding Committee, and various IOC technical and regional Subsidiary Bodies (GOOS, GLOSS, JCOMM, IODE, TOWS-WG, IOCAFRICA, IOCARIBE and WESTPAC).

As per the Assembly Decision attached hereafter, the group will conduct the review of the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) project during the intersessional period by correspondence and will produce a report in consultation with IHO for consideration and further action of the Executive Council at its 49<sup>th</sup> session in June 2016. The objectives of the group are described as follows:

- (i) Generally consider IOC's role and involvement in the GEBCO project, and specifically identify the user needs in bathymetry from the relevant IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies in relation to the GEBCO bathymetric dataset and products;
- (ii) Consider IOC's role and involvement in the GEBCO project, based upon needs identified under (i) above;
- (iii) Recommend key elements for future governing mechanism of the GEBCO project in relation to IOC's role and involvement.

**Chairperson**

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I therefore invite Member States to designate representatives who will serve on the review group with experts of IOC programmes and Sub-commissions. I would appreciate receiving your letters of nomination no later than **23 September 2015** by e-mail to Osamu Miyaki ([o.miyaki@unesco.org](mailto:o.miyaki@unesco.org)).

A similar invitation to nominate experts has been sent to chairpersons of the IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies concerned.

Looking forward to your earliest reply, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

*[signed]*

Vladimir Ryabinin  
Executive Secretary

Attachment to IOC Circular Letter No 2589

Decision IOC-XXVIII,Dec.6.2(II)

*28<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC Assembly, Paris, 18–25 June 2015)*

**IHO-IOC General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans  
(GEBCO) Project**

The Assembly,

[...]

**II. Review of IOC's Role and Involvement  
in the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO)**

Taking note of document IOC-XXVIII/2 Annex 7,

Recalling Resolution VIII-3 on the formation of the Joint IHO-IOC GEBCO Guiding Committee (1973),

Further recalling that the Memorandum of Understanding, concluded in 1984 and then revised in 2000, between the IHO and IOC, includes GEBCO and International Bathymetric Charts (IBC) as activities of common interest to both organizations and their Member States,

Considering that bathymetry is of relevance to several on-going IOC programmes, components of programmes and mechanisms of cooperation,

Decides that:

- (i) the IHO-IOC GEBCO project will be reviewed to consider IOC's role and involvement in the project, mainly from a view point of users of GEBCO bathymetric dataset and products;
- (ii) the review will be carried out by a review group, which will be comprised of external experts nominated by IOC Member States and the chairpersons of Guiding Committee of GEBCO, GLOSS, GOOS, IODE, JCOMM, TOWS-WG, IOCAFRICA, IOCARIBE and WESTPAC, during the intersessional period by correspondence;
- (iii) the report of the review will be submitted to the Executive Council at its 49th session (2016) for consideration and further action;

Requests the Executive Secretary to establish the review group in accordance with the terms of reference as contained in Annex 2 to this decision.

Annex 2 to IOC-XXVIII/Dec.6.2(II)

**Terms of Reference of the Review Group  
with regard to IOC's Role and Involvement in the GEBCO Project**

**(Objective)**

The review group shall:

- (i) Generally consider IOC's role and involvement in the GEBCO project, and specifically identify the user needs in bathymetry from the relevant IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies in relation to the GEBCO bathymetric dataset and products;
- (ii) Consider IOC's role and involvement in the GEBCO project, based upon needs identified under (i) above;
- (iii) Recommend key elements for future governing mechanism of the GEBCO project in relation to IOC's role and involvement.

**(Composition)**

The review group shall be comprised of representatives of IOC Member States and one expert each from the GEBCO Guiding Committee, GOOS, GLOSS, JCOMM, IODE, TOWS-WG, IOCAFRICA, IOCARIBE and WESTPAC.

The experts will be appointed by the IOC Executive Secretary through nomination by the chairpersons of the said IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies.

The review group will elect its own Chair.

**(Functions)**

The review group should conduct the review of the GEBCO project in line with the above-mentioned objectives, in consultation with the relevant IOC programmes and regional subsidiary bodies as well as the IHO, mainly based on a questionnaire developed by the Secretariat.

The review should be produced by the review group and submitted in draft form by its representative to the GEBCO Guiding Committee for their comments. A report should be submitted to the next ordinary session of the Executive Council (June/July 2016).

**(Working arrangements)**

The review group should conduct its business by electronic means.