IOC Circular Letter No. 2441  
(Available only in English)  

IOC/WWW/PP/wa/lf  
21 May 2012

To: IOC Member States (main national co-ordinating bodies for liaison with the IOC)

cc: Permanent Delegates/Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States
National Commissions for UNESCO in IOC Member States
Officers of the IOC and Major Subsidiary Bodies
IODE National Coordinators for Oceanographic Data Management
IODE National Coordinators for Marine Information Management
Members of the IODE Steering Group for OBIS

Subject: Request for contributions to the IOC special account for the support of the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS)

Sir, Madam,

On the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity “Marine Biodiversity”, 22 May 2012, Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, stressed that to protect it, we must first better understand marine biodiversity. Although there is a wealth of information available, data are still patchy, and many places in the ocean are still unexplored.

Ms Bokova also said “good data is essential for good policy” and recognized the role of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, and specifically the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), part of the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE).

Indeed, OBIS integrates over a thousand datasets from several hundred institutions worldwide, to provide access to 32 million observations of >100,000 marine species. It is by far the largest global information source of marine species distributions and becomes a powerful tool to provide quantitative baselines of biodiversity at the regional and global level.

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Being one of the most important legacies of the 10-year Census of Marine Life, the IOC is proud to be the new home for OBIS since the IOC Assembly in June 2009 adopted OBIS within its IODE Programme (Resolution XXXV-4). OBIS plays a key role in IOC/IODE and UNESCO’s programmes and Strategy for Action on Climate Change, as well as contributes to the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In February 2010, we established a multi-source account for the support of OBIS, within the IOC Special Account. Contributions were kindly provided by Australia, Brazil and Canada, and in-kind support was received from Belgium, India, U.S.A. and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela assisting us with OBIS activities in 2011 and 2012. In addition OBIS is a partner in the iMarine project funded by the European Commission. **However, it is now necessary to mobilize extra-budgetary funding for the continued operation of the OBIS programme for 2013 onwards.**

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to contribute to the IOC Special Account, dedicated to OBIS, so as to enable the IOC to fulfill the commitment it made to the continuation and further development of OBIS.

Contributions to, and participation in, the IODE/OBIS programme will ensure the maintenance and further growth of marine biodiversity data within UNESCO and will facilitate the complex multidisciplinary studies necessary to understand ocean processes, their relation to global change and their interaction with human activities.

For the practical details regarding a contribution to the Trust Fund we invite you to contact the Office of the IOC Executive Secretary or Mr Peter PissiersSENS (p.pissiersSENS@unesco.org).

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation,

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Wendy Watson-Wright
Executive Secretary, IOC
Assistant Director-General, UNESCO