INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
(of UNESCO)

Forty-fifth Session of the Executive Council  
Paris, 26–28 June 2012

Summary of discussions by Dr Sang-Kyung BYUN, IOC Chair

The Executive Council met in plenary session during three days from 26 to 28 June 2012, considered 19 items on its agenda (of which 11 were substantive) and approved 21 decisions and no resolutions. The plenary meeting was supported by some 11 preparatory meetings held the day preceding the opening of and during this session. Seven information side meetings were held during the session. The 45th Session of the IOC Executive Council was opened on Tuesday 26 June 2012 amid concerns for the budget challenges caused by reduced regular budget support from UNESCO.

A session under financial constraints

In order to maximize time and cost efficiencies, the Executive Council was urged to work in an abbreviated and somewhat different manner for the Session, including having this summary report by the Chair on the achievements and discussions. The summary Report of the Executive Council will consist of three parts: Decisions approved during the session and available in the working languages of the Commission on the Council website; a Summary of Technical Items; and the Chair’s Summary Session Report on the discussions of the Member States. This Report summarizes the wide ranging discussions of the Member States. The detailed interventions, submitted by delegations, are also recorded in an Annex to the Final Report. These items will be assembled to constitute the final summary report, a practice similar to that used by other UNESCO bodies and proposed by the Secretariat to this Executive Council. The final report will be adopted in coming weeks by correspondence as allowed by IOC Rules of Procedure (XV-48-1).

Following the Chair’s Statement on the State of the Commission and the Executive Secretary’s Report on Programme Implementation and Report on the Budgetary Situation, the Executive Council congratulated the IOC Chair on his election and the Executive Secretary and the Secretariat on their work in continuing to achieve the objectives of the Commission in the face of financial constraints.

IOC High Level Objectives

Relative to High Level Objective 1, Prevention and reduction of the impacts of natural hazards, the draft decision on enlarging the Area of Responsibility (AoR) of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for Tsunami and other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (ICG/CARIBE-EWS) was not accepted. Interventions made by Member States made it clear that this proposal requires analysis of the need and feasibility of such change. Argentina, supported by Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru suggested that a study be made before the decision is taken, at least for the Southern Atlantic. The Secretariat agreed with this approach and requested that funding be made available through the IOC Special Account toward the requested feasibility study.
In the context of High Level Objective 2, Mitigation of the impacts of, and adaptation to climate change and variability, the Executive Council supported IOC’s role in the UN World Ocean Assessment (Regular Process).

The Executive Council also noted a continuing commitment to GOOS and the further development of operational oceanography and sustained observations. The key role of JCOMM was noted. The Executive Council also emphasized the need for IOC contributions to the success of these programmes.

Concerns were highlighted about the potential permanence of the ‘temporary’ transfer of staff to other institutions such as WMO, and Member States were encouraged to contribute resources in order to maintain the Commission's capacity and strength in ocean science, services and observations.

The Executive Secretary reaffirmed GOOS as a priority for IOC, and noted the first meeting of the recently created Interim GOOS Steering Committee, held in Paris, from 20 to 22 June. Concerns were expressed about the geographic balance of the new GOOS Steering Committee. The Executive Secretary pointed out that the group was close to geographic balance, exceeded gender balance goals, had an appropriate scientific and technical discipline balance, and most importantly was committed to working with all GOOS Regional Alliances.

The Council agreed that the International Polar Initiative concept document should be presented to the consideration of the Assembly at its 27th Session to allow Member States to comment on IOC’s role.

The Islamic Republic of Iran expressed the desire to make an in-kind contribution through the creation of support centres for each of IOC's High Level Objectives, wanting to work with IOC, GOOS, IOTWS and other programmes, with a minimum investment of US$1 million.

No particular issues were raised by Member States regarding High Level Objective 3, Safeguarding the health of ocean ecosystems.

In the context of High Level Objective 4, Management procedures and policies leading to the sustainability of coastal and ocean environment and resources, members of the Executive Council noted the activities implemented during the intersessional period, by the three Regional Sub-Commissions (Africa and the Adjacent Island States (IOCAFRICA), Caribbean (IOCARIIBE), and Western Pacific (WESTPAC)) and in particular the outcomes of the First Intergovernmental Session of IOCAFRICA (May 2012, in Kenya) and the Ninth Intergovernmental Session of WESTPAC (May 2012, in Republic of Korea).

Regional Subsidiary Bodies

A large number of Member States stressed the important role of the Regional Subsidiary Bodies as a key mechanism and vehicle of IOC for the development and implementation of the IOC programmes and Medium-Term Strategies, and expressed support for their continuous strengthening. Collaboration among the Regional Subsidiary Bodies, such as the proposed exchange programme between IOCAFRICA and WESTPAC, was welcomed as there is a need to further synergize the efforts between IOC Global Programmes and IOC Regional Subsidiary Bodies.

Some Member States were commended for their continued support to regional activities, and in particular the Government of Korea for its financial support for the First Session of the IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Island States. Nevertheless Member States are urged to increase their support for the Regional Subsidiary Bodies, including via secondments of experts in IOC Regional offices.

Recruitment of the next Executive Secretary

While considering the process for the recruitment of the next Executive Secretary of the IOC, the Council noted the need to review and update the post announcement to reflect its functions and the agreed post grade of ADG, common to the United Nations system, and acting at the service of the Commission.
On governance

The Executive Secretary reported on the very successful involvement of the IOC in the RIO+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which concluded during the week before the 45th Session of the Executive Council. The Executive Secretary reported on significant work accomplished since the 26th Session of the IOC Assembly, in preparation for Rio+20, including the production of the interagency publication, *A Blueprint for Ocean and Coastal Sustainability*, and participation in several preparatory workshops.

The Executive Secretary described the IOC’s participation in Rio+20 noting in particular the three major events directly organized or co-organized by the IOC.

Finally the Executive Secretary reported that the Rio+20 outcome document, contains 18 paragraphs on ‘Oceans and Seas’, several directly relevant to IOC.

The Rio+20 intergovernmental process will continue as the UN General Assembly formulates Sustainable Development Goals. A specific Ocean Sustainable Development Goal seems to be supported by Member States. With respect to this, the IOC could provide scientific and technical inputs to the SDG process, and has offered a Voluntary Commitment on Capacity Building through its Capacity Development survey and strategy on Marine Science.

There was ample recognition that the IOC played a key role in significantly raising the profile of oceans on the agenda at Rio+20. In the context of the outcome document, Brazil announced two concrete proposals: first, Brazil offered to host the next IOC/PICES/ICES International Symposium on Effects of Climate Change on the World’s Oceans in 2015; and second, Brazil announced that it has initiated dialogue with Africa (under ZOPACAS: Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic) to develop new cooperation in marine science in the South Atlantic with the participation of the IOC.

What future?

There was a substantial debate on Agenda item 4.2 “The Future Needs for Intergovernmental Coordination and Governance for Sustained Observation and Services and the Future of the Commission”, as amended by the Council in response to the interest of Member States in the subject. Thirty-three countries requested to serve on a sessional working group which met twice to begin the debate and prepare the decision for this item.

The debate continued during plenary session.

Member States noted that the science of oceanography has evolved and is increasingly expanding into an applied science. This provides societal benefit and is based on sustained observations and services. Even if a definition of “operational oceanography” did not exist, this activity is widely recognized.

Some Member States noted that issues of ocean governance are under the responsibility of the State Parties to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN General Assembly. The chair of IOC/ABE-LOS noted that IOC could refer issues outside of its mandate and areas of competence to the UN General Assembly through their annual resolution on ocean affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Many Member States expressed the need for IOC to continue discussion, in particular to identify the scientific and technical issues related to sustained ocean observations and services in IOC’s areas of mandate and competence, and to be proactive in working to reaffirm its leadership in operational oceanography. After long discussion there was consensus on a decision to establish, by correspondence, an inter-sessional consultation to identify these issues.

A number of Member States felt that this consultation should take place in the context of a parallel process defining the new Medium-Term Strategy of IOC, and touched on questions related to the future of the Commission within the UN system.

Several Member States recommended further action to reduce barriers to observations and data exchange in regional seas through regional or bilateral agreements.
Partnerships

The Secretariat presented an overview of the IOC’s network of regionally distributed offices and a proposed revision of the guidelines for the establishment of decentralised offices (IOC/INF-1193) with the addition of “partnership centres”. Partnership centres would share characteristics with UNESCO Category II centres at the IOC level, and would be established as in-kind contributions by Member States to underpin technical needs of international IOC programmes.

The idea of partnership centres was welcomed but further work was deemed necessary to address in a more comprehensive way issues concerning requirements, establishment procedures, reporting, and renewal methods.

The Secretariat was tasked to pursue intersessionally the definition of guidelines for partnership centres, in consultation with the Officers and Member States as appropriate, and to present these results at the Assembly at its 27th Session.

On the offer of the National Oceanographic Committee of the Russian Federation to establish a facility in Obninsk to support the IODE Ocean Data Portal development, Member States recognized the importance of the IODE Ocean Data Portal as a mechanism to promote and facilitate the exchange of and access to oceanographic data, as well as a mechanism for interoperability between similar data systems, such as the WMO’s WIS. Noting that the operation of IODE will require substantial human resources, Member States welcomed this offer. The Secretariat pointed out that some institutional issues need further clarification in view of establishing the proposed centre for Ocean Data Portal as a partnership centre of IOC.

Consultative Bodies

Coming to the review of IOC/ABE-LOS, discussions took place during two parallel meetings in addition to the discussion in plenary session. Prof. Adoté Blim Blivi, IOC Vice-Chair, presented (i) the deliberations of the intersessional working group and (ii) the IOC/ABE-LOS Review and the analysis of the Questionnaire on the IOC Advisory Body of Experts on Law of the Sea.

Most Member States recognized that IOC/ABE-LOS had shown its ability to provide advice and had produced a number of guiding documents, although these were not being fully utilized for the advancement of marine scientific research.

The Executive Council discussed ways for IOC/ABE-LOS to operate and suggested that the setting up of ad hoc task teams for discussing new issues could be one method of working; IOC/ABE-LOS could also provide a platform for experts from different disciplines to discuss ways of addressing marine scientific research.

The Executive Council agreed that IOC/ABE-LOS should continue its work focused on priorities as tasked by IOC.

The Assembly at its 26th Session (Paris, 2011), by Decision 8.1 requested the Executive Secretary to reconvene the ad hoc Advisory Group for the IOC Ocean Sciences Section to help in the preparation of the next Medium-term Strategy (2014–2021) and the prioritization of the OSS activities.

Dr Atanas Palazov, Vice Chair of IOC and Chair of the ad hoc Advisory Group for Ocean Sciences, reported on the main elements and conclusions delivered by the Advisory Group: strategic context, overall scientific strategic priorities, barriers and implementation pillars.

Member States expressed support for and satisfaction with the vision and general content of the Advisory Group’s report, stressing its aspirational approach and considering the report as a valuable document for future IOC planning. Discussion took place on ways to reinforce the recommendations of the Advisory Group and about the steps to be taken to develop a workplan in agreement with the IOC Medium-term Strategy still under development.
Prof. Peter Haugan, Vice Chair of IOC and Chair of the Programme and Budget and the Financial Committee, presented the report of that committee and the decisions resulting from its four meetings as well as one from the Intersessional Financial Advisory Group and Working Group on Medium-term Strategy. The decisions were made available on-line in all languages and were adopted with little debate in plenary session. The report of Prof. Haugan will be annexed to the full report.

An intersessional group to advise on the revised text of the Guidelines for Draft Resolutions met and submitted revised guidelines and one decision. The decision was adopted with little discussion.

**Next Governing Body sessions**

Given the present financial difficulties, the Executive Council decided that the 27th Session of the Assembly should have a duration shorter than decided by the Assembly at its 26th Session (26 June–9 July 2013). The 27th Assembly will start on 25 June 2013, with the Executive Council at its 46th Session acting as the Steering Committee of the Assembly and meeting on 24 June.

The Executive Secretary and the Officers will explore options for raising resources to organize the session with duration commensurate to the needs of the items on the agenda.

Although the possibility for any IOC Member State to host a session of the IOC governing bodies, some Member States noted their preference for holding the session in Paris.

**Report of the session**

To conclude with the adoption of the report, it is Unfortunate that this agenda item was delayed until after the interpreters were dismissed due to the unexpected duration of previous discussions.

Pursuant to Rule of Procedure 48, the Executive Council decided that this summary of the discussion, after being reviewed by the Chair and the Rapporteur, would be circulated by the Executive Secretary to all attendees of the session within two weeks and approved by heads of IOC Delegations to this Council by correspondence. The decisions approved during the session are available on line in all IOC languages and will be compiled in the final report.

The summary report of the session will be completed in final form by the Secretariat, taking into account the comments received concerning the draft. The summary report will be structured as follows:

- Part 1: The procedural report for each item on the agenda inclusive of the decisions taken and the names of Member States which provided a national statement
- Part 2: The Chair’s summary of the discussion (this report)
- Annex : Member States interventions (in the original language)
- Annex I: The report of the Chair of the Financial Committee if available (in the original language)
- Annex II: The closing speech of the Director-General
- Annex III: List of documents
- Annex IV: List of participants
- Annex V: List of acronyms

Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO concluded the session by reiterating her strong support for the IOC and emphasizing that IOC programmes are important to all UNESCO goals. She made a strong call for action to the Member States in this difficult time for UNESCO and the IOC.

In concluding I should like to express sincere gratitude to the members of the Council and the IOC Secretariat for supporting me in the performance of my duties as Chairperson and for working genuinely in a spirit of consensus and dialogue albeit many changes in our proceedings. Allow me to pay tribute also to the Vice-chairs who supported the Council throughout these proceedings and Frederico A. Saraiva Nogueira in particular for his role as rapporteur for this session.

The 45th Session of the Executive Council was closed at 18:25 on 28 June 2012.