Summary. This report highlights the main outputs of the intersessional meeting of the Regional Subsidiary Bodies (RSBs) which was held on Monday 24th June 2013. The meeting was well attended by representatives from all RSBs including associated officers and technical Secretaries, a number of the relevant IOC field offices and regional activity networks and Member State stakeholders. The meeting reviewed the main achievements and challenges facing these Bodies and the IOC Secretariat as a whole including: their strong contribution to the IOC’s global mission as regional foci despite the challenges they face in resourcing; on the other hand the challenges they face in reaching full potential because of (i) the inadequate levels of regular budget allocations and extra-budgetary resources; (ii) understaffing of the respective Secretariats of the regional Bodies and; (iii) the sustainability of the IOC’s global and regional programmes. Member State support is crucial to overcome these challenges and field offices have a role to play in mobilizing and facilitating Member States from the regions with fund raising. Finally, the meeting developed a number of propositions aimed at helping to address the common challenges identified and agreed upon with the recognition of the pivotal role of the IOC’s network of regional subsidiaries bodies. The call for an effective regional strategy is a major output of the meeting.

This report is submitted for information.
1. The intersessional meeting of the IOC Regional Subsidiary Bodies (RSBs) was held on Monday 24th June 2013. The IOC Vice-Chair of Group V, Pr Adote Bliiv Bliiv chaired the meeting. All of the IOC’s three Sub-Commissions and the two Regional Committees were represented, as were some of the other IOC regional bodies. Twenty-three Member States representatives were present, including the officers of the Regional Subsidiary Bodies. The Regional Liaison Officer together with the Technical Secretaries of the RSBs and representatives of those other regional bodies present provided technical support to the Meeting. In her opening remarks, the Executive Secretary of IOC stressed the importance of the RSBs in general for the development and implementation of the IOC programmes in the regions. She called upon the meeting to identify ways, means and mechanisms which will enable the IOC Secretariat together with Member States and partners to overcome the challenges which the RSBs and its associated Secretariats are facing at this critical period of financial constraints within UNESCO.

2. The Regional Liaison Officer acting as the Technical Secretary of the meeting provided the background information on the meeting based on the IOC/INF-1299 on the “Update on the Status of the IOC Subsidiary Bodies, 2013”. He highlighted the main expected outputs from each agenda item. He further stressed the key points on which there is a need for advice, guidance and support from Member States as well as from the officers of the RSB and the inputs from the Secretariats of the RSBs and field offices. The key question before the meeting was how the RSBs and IOC global programmes could work collectively to increase the capacity of Member States in the field of competence of IOC.

3. The Technical Secretaries of the RSBs provided brief overviews on major achievements and challenges in the respective regions. The Technical Secretary of the Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (IOCARIBE) highlighted the two major on-going programmes concerning the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem with twenty-four recipient countries sharing marine living resources, and the tsunami early warning system program. Member States provide in-kind contribution to support these large programmes and some of smaller size. The Chairman of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) highlighted the achievements of the main programmes in the key areas of ocean processes and climate in the Indo-Pacific region, ensuring marine biodiversity and food security, and the health of ocean ecosystems, including two regional Global Ocean Observing Systems, nine region-specific scientific programs, and one self-driven IOC Regional Network of Training and Research Centres on Marine Sciences with the first IOC Regional Training and Research Center on Ocean Dynamics and Climate established in Qingdao, China, and others under development with interested Member States. The WESTPAC International Scientific Symposia have been evolving as one of largest gathering among marine scientific communities. The Technical Secretary of the IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Island States provided a brief highlight on the newly established Sub-Commission in Africa. The Sub-Commission developed a work plan for 2013-2015. Its strategic plan will be presented to the 27th Session of the Assembly. Capacity building in ocean sciences; observation and technology is a priority for the region. On-going programmes relate to the Global Ocean Observing Systems in Africa and Ocean Data and Information Network in Africa (ODINAFRICA). The Chairman of the Black Sea Regional Committee (BSRC) informed the meeting that there have been new political conditions favourable for enhanced regional cooperation among Member States of the Committee, leading to the development of programmes related to UNCLOS, capacity building; tsunami and other hazards in cooperation with the Black Sea Fisheries Convention and other partners. A representative from the IOC regional Committee for the Indian Ocean (IOCINDIO) indicated that there is a huge potential for the development and implementation of IOC programmes in the region. The Deputy Executive Secretary gave a brief introduction complemented by the Officer in Charge of the IOC Perth Regional Programme Office on the emerging initiative relating to the 50th anniversary of the International Indian Ocean Expedition, and it was emphasised that this could be used as an excellent opportunity to bring together Member States in general and also partners of IOCINDIO and neighbouring regional bodies to provide a new focus for integration and collaboration amongst them. The meeting welcomed with appreciation the proposed informal consultations initiated by the IOC Secretariat for the revitalisation of the IOCINDIO.
4. Participants positively contributed to the discussions stressing the importance of the RSB in the implementation of global programmes at national and regional levels. The RSBs contribute to the visibility of IOC in the regions because they are closer to Member States needs and priorities. They commended the Secretariat for keeping the good practice of organising the RSBs meeting ahead the Sessions of Assembly. Regarding the IOC Regional Committees, the meeting noted that there is a serious organisational and governance issue which needs to be properly addressed. Member States may wish to consider what should be the future of the Regional Committees. Some participants, mainly African, stressed that for a new Sub-Commission such as the IOCAFRICA, there is still a lot of home work to be done in order to attract experts and mobilize the requisite funding from the region which will facilitate its further development. The UNESCO Field Reform affects the operations of the Secretariat of the IOCAFRICA based at the UNESCO Office in Nairobi, which is changing from the status of Regional Office for Science and Technology for the entire Africa to now cover only the East African Countries. This.

5. Capacity Building is a priority for all the RSBs and should include the reinforcement of infrastructures and Masters and Ph. D programmes at national and regional levels. There are several approaches of capacity building and countries should define for themselves what are the most critical elements for building their national and regional capacity in marine sciences, technology and innovation. The traditional approach which consists of training one or two experts overseas had failed and there is a need for the regions to reinforce national and regional training and education institutions with adequate infrastructures. IOC should undertake capacity building assessments in each region for a better understanding of regional needs.

6. Successful fund raising requires that project development be demand-driven taking into consideration national and regional policy needs focussed on environmental issues, coastal degradation and development, tsunami, natural hazards and climate change which are important challenges for Member States at local, national and regional levels. To ensure their sustainability, the RSBs should demonstrate to their constituencies that they provide an effective mechanism for regional cooperation in the fields of marine sciences, research applications and technology development. Synergy with other regional organisations such as the FAO Regional Fisheries Commissions, UNEP Regional Seas Conventions and WMO regional centres is important to help maximize resources. The intersessional financial committee of IOC should take into consideration the needs of regional programmes and activities during the budget planning process. The mobilisation of Member States is key to the success of the RSBs. Ownership is a key element to ensure the commitment from the Member States. The economic valuation of ocean resources could help to sensitize Member States which can provide contributions in various ways such as manpower, vessel time; fellowship that will facilitate the implementation of the agreed programmes and activities.

7. The meeting also discussed the item related to the formalisation of the Perth Regional Programme Office.

Finally, the meeting identified and agreed on common challenges impacting on the RSBs as follows: (i) the inadequate level of the regular budget allocations; (ii) insufficient and discontinued extra-budgetary resources; (iii) understaffing of the Secretariat of the RSBs with only one UNESCO professional for each of them.; and (iv) the sustainability of the IOC global and regional programmes.

8. Based on the above, and taking into consideration the current financial constraints, the RSBs meeting recommended the following to the Assembly:

1- Maximize the existing IOC resources though limited, while keeping exploring other possible extra budgetary resources, by enhancing the involvement of RSBs in the development, implementation of IOC Medium-Term Strategy and IOC global programs with a view to synergizing the strengths of IOC at global level and regional level.
2- Develop regional strategies which will reinforce the integration of Headquarters, the RSBs and field offices Secretariats to facilitate monitoring of regional programmes.

3- Establish mechanisms which enable the Headquarters, IOC Global Programmes and the RSBs to work together to develop and implement projects tapping on new funding sources.

4- Request Member States to second highly qualified experts to serve the Secretariats of the RSBs for short to long terms depending on the needs.