Summary. This report highlights the main outputs of the intersessional meeting of the Regional Subsidiary Bodies (RSBs) which was held on Monday 15th June 2015. The meeting reviewed the main achievements and challenges of the RSBs and re-emphasised their pivotal role with a particular focus on their unique contribution to the IOC’s global mission as regional foci despite the depleting allocations from the IOC regular budget and discontinuity in extra budgetary resources. The main challenges IOC Regional Subsidiary Bodies face are: (i) the inadequate levels of regular budget allocations and extra-budgetary resources; (ii) the understaffing of the respective Secretariats of the regional Bodies; (iii) the lack of integration and coherence between the IOC’s global and regional programmes; and (iv) the insufficient level of communication and consultations among the Headquarters Secretariat and the sub commissions.

Member State ownership and subsequent support is crucial to overcome these challenges and field offices should play a key role in resources mobilization and facilitating cooperation among Member States from the regions owing to their local knowledge and close links with country needs and priorities. Finally, the meeting developed a number of recommendations aimed at solving common challenges identified and agreed upon with the recognition of the vital role of the IOC’s network of regional subsidiaries bodies in the future of IOC.
1. The IOC Vice-Chair from Group V, Prof. Adote Blim Blivi chaired the meeting. The participation in the meeting was uneven as from the three IOC Sub-commissions, only WESTPAC Officers including the Chair, Dr Somkiat Khokiattiwong (Thailand) and Dr Youn-Ho Lee (Republic of Korea) attended the meeting. The past Chair of IOC, Captain Javier Valladares (Argentina) attended the meeting with substantial contribution. Six Member States attended the meeting with eleven Representatives including Japan, Republic of Korea, Portugal, Thailand, UK, and the United States of America. From the IOC Secretariat, the Executive Secretary, the Technical Secretaries of the three IOC Regional Sub commissions, the Heads of Sections with several professionals from all IOC Sections were present. The absence of Representatives of the two inactive Regional Committees, notably the IOC Regional Committee for the Central Indian Ocean (IOCINDIO) and the Black Sea Regional Committee (BSRC) were noted.

2. The Chair of the meeting introduced the agenda and asked for comments. The agenda was adopted without changes. He then proceeded according to the agenda, calling up the Executive Secretary for his opening remarks. The IOC Executive Secretary recalled first, the importance of the RSBs meeting prior to the Assembly which should be seen as a think-tank with a focus on solutions, opportunities and best practices for the operations of IOC regional bodies, rather than a reporting mechanism before the Assembly. He highlighted his occupations since he took office on the 2nd March this year. He recognized the challenges in terms of integrating global and regional priorities of IOC within an overhaul programmatic framework. Equitable, active, coordinated work of IOC at national, regional, and global scale with a co-design approach is needed for a greater coherence and integration. Increased synergy with partners and related programmes is needed. He stressed the forthcoming major global agenda which will require IOC to adjust itself for a better alignment with the view to serve the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for the benefits of Member States including Blue Economy, poverty reduction, and further translation into the value of ocean sciences, observations, services, capacity development including education, and technology transfer. He further reminded the meeting that the IOC is not its Secretariat. IOC is 147 Member States supported by a Secretariat. Therefore, the leadership role and ownership of the Member States are crucial for the success of the IOC programmes. IOC should also pay attention to the governing bodies of UNESCO which decides on the regular budget of the Commission. He finally 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.

3. The Regional Liaison Officer acting as the Technical Secretary of the meeting provided the background information on the meeting. 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 RSBs and 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 ocean sciences, observations and services as public goods. The Head of the newly created Marine Policy and Regional Coordination Section presented an overview of functions of that Section.

4. The Technical Secretary of the Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (IOCARIBE) stressed that with the IOC regular budget as seed money, successful fund raising requires a demand-driven approach based on national and regional policy needs and priorities from the regions and Member States. 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, climate change and the post 2015 development Agenda. The Chairman of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) highlighted that the leadership of WESTPAC is based on the ownership and commitments of Member States of that region which provides both in-cash and in-kind resources to support the activity and coordination role of the Sub-commission. He noted with regret that IOC Secretariat provides only a little resource to the Sub-commission with no contribution to cruises and operational activities. The Technical Secretary of WESTPAC reinforced the intervention of the Chair and indicated the need for IOC Headquarters
to fully involve the RSBs in the planning and budgeting process of IOC. WESTPAC in its efforts to deliver services to its Member States developed programmes that are not related to IOC global programmes because based on the priorities of Member States from that region. The Technical Secretary of the IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Island States (IOCAFRICA) recalled that this Sub-commission is still new and is at a critical early stage of development. Thus, lack of adequate level of staffing and activities funds is a serious impediment to success and sustainability. The meeting considered that IOCINDIO has a key role to play in the context of the International Indian Ocean Expedition-II and regretted the fact that there is no dedicated Secretariat for that Committee as well as for the BSRC, both which are inactive for many years. The meeting called upon the IOC to revitalise coordinating mechanisms and agreement for the Mediterranean region.

5. Heads of Sections, and the Capacity Development Coordinator provided information of their respective activities in the regions including ocean sciences, ocean observations and services, tsunami, IODE and capacity building. It was noted that in a number of cases, the Sub-commissions are not associated with these activities and there are obvious overlap which should be avoided with a better integration and co-design of activities and programmes. The Tsunami Unit has field office staff based at UNESCO offices in IOCARIBE and WESTPAC and even in the IOCINDIO regions. Member States representatives made substantive contributions calling upon both the Secretariat and Member States to develop adequate two-ways communication systems.

6. Capacity Development is a priority for all the RSBs and should take bottom-up approach based on the needs from regions as defined by Member States concerned and should include the reinforcement of infrastructures, Masters and Ph.D. programmes into the education institutions at national and regional levels. There are several approaches of capacity development and countries should define for themselves what are the most suitable elements for building their own 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.

7. Responding to the question of the Chair to define the challenges of the RSBs, the IOCAFRICA Technical Secretary exemplified that the challenges are all known for many years because every two years the RSBs meet prior to the Assembly and repeat almost the same challenges which are well recorded in the Report of the meeting of RSBs dated 2013 as follows:

(i) 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
(iv) Insufficient coherence and integration of IOC global and regional programmes
(v) Lack of consultations and communication between the Headquarters, the RSBs and the Member States.

7. Based on the above, the meeting recommended the following to the Assembly:

(i) Develop two-ways communication systems within the Secretariat ensuring regular communication between the Headquarters and the Regions on one hand and; between the Secretariat and Member States on the other.
(ii) Include the Regions as a central component and success factor of the future of IOC because without the regions, there may be no future for IOC.
(iii) Define a balance between the global and regional programmes and establish mechanisms which enable the Headquarters, IOC Global Programmes and the RSBs
to work together to co-design and implement projects tapping on new funding sources.

(iv) Request Member States to support the RSBs both in-cash and in-kind including the secondment of the highly qualified experts to the Secretariats of the RSBs for short to long terms depending on the needs.

(v) Develop cooperation between Sub commissions with the view to ensure transfer of best practices. IOC should reinforce its own leadership within the United Nations systems in order to assist the other agencies in oceans sciences and marine affairs. Synergy with other international and regional organisations is important to help maximize resources.