IOC Circular Letter No. 2301

To: IOC Member States (Official National Coordinating Body for liaison with the IOC in IOC Member States)

Cc: IOC Officers Permanent Delegates/Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States Officers of Major Subsidiary Bodies (Scientific, Technical, and Regional)

Subject: PRE-RELEASE OF THE ASSESSMENT OF ASSESSMENTS REPORT

This letter is to inform your Government that a pre-release version of the "Assessment of Assessments" (AoA) report and its Summary for Decision Makers is now available to serve as the basis for consultations leading up to the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole convened by the United Nations General Assembly in New York from 31 August – 4 September 2009.

As you are aware, in 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg recommended the establishment of a Regular Process under the United Nations for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects (the "Regular Process"). After endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly and examination of the idea by two international workshops, the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/30 put in place arrangements for a start-up phase of the Regular Process. This start-up phase is a review of the global marine assessment landscape for the purposes of determining possible options and a framework for a Regular Process. More information can be found on the AoA website: www.unga-regular-process.org

The arrangements for this start-up phase provided for an Ad Hoc Steering Group consisting of representatives of UN Member States (selected on a balanced regional basis) to oversee the process, a Group of regionally represented Experts to conduct the AoA, and two UN specialized bodies (UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC/UNESCO)) to co-lead the process.

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The report is based on the examination of a large number of assessments of the oceans and seas. The assessments to be examined were chosen partly on the basis of work by the UN Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre in creating a database of marine assessments, and partly by the Group of Experts based on their expertise and knowledge, their review of national, regional and global assessments, and from discussions with regional organisations. Summaries of these examinations were prepared for 21 regions (regions were defined solely for the purposes of the Assessment of Assessments) and for a number of supra-regional issues which affect the world’s oceans on a scale greater than that of the regions.

The report has been developed on the basis of the information contained in these summaries as well as on an analysis of assessment best practices and covers:

- a. a description of the Assessment of Assessments (AoA) process;
- b. the definitions and analytical framework that has been used;
- c. a review of existing assessments and findings;
- d. best practices, in establishing and conducting assessments of the marine environment;
- e. a framework and options for the future of the Regular Process.

A Summary for Decision makers has also been developed and is included.

Following an extensive and open peer review process (December 08-February 09) which allowed experts and Governments to provide comments on the draft report and its annexes, the final draft report was presented at and welcomed by the Ad Hoc Steering Group at its fourth and final meeting (15-17 April 2009, UNESCO, Paris). It was decided at that meeting that the Secretariat would make available the pre-release AoA report and the Summary for Decision Makers report to Governments as soon as possible in order to allow Member States to prepare for the timely consideration of the report for the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, established through UN General Assembly Resolution 63/111, in order to recommend a course of action to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session based on the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Steering Group. These reports are currently under-going copy-editing, but are considered final. They are available at the AoA website: www.unga-regular-process.org in the "AoA Report" section.

Please accept, Your Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Patricio Bernal
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Executive Secretary IOC