ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED

This document is intended to reflect the views and the concerns for the future of the IODE rather than a progress report during the intersessional. It highlights the financial difficulties of the Programme and the need to address them. In parallel it outlines some of the major outcomes from the past two years activities for which detailed progress reports can be found at the relevant agenda items.

DECISIONS/ACTIONS REQUIRED FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Committee is requested to note the information contained in this document when considering the decisions of the meeting.

APPENDIX: DRAFT TEXT FOR INCLUSION IN THE SUMMARY REPORT OF IODE-XXII

1 The IODE has experienced challenging times since IODE XXI mainly related to financial constraints resulting from UNESCO’s budget cuts. The same financial constraints occurred in almost all IOC Member States thus affecting, in many cases, the activities of NODCs and ODINs. Struggling with a cut on IODE’s budget of about 80% for a good part of the intersessional period, Groups of Experts, projects and activities continued to pursue their goals at different paces. Bearing these in mind, it stands to reason that not all the goals and objectives set at IODE XXI were met, and several had to be reprogrammed. Especially the budget allocations to the ODINs were affected as there was no way providing funds to all ODINs.

2 Cooperation and interaction with other IOC Programmes as well as with other Organizations was maintained amidst the aforementioned difficulties, rendering appropriate outcomes.

3 IODE has been actively involved in JCOMM activities and has contributed significantly in the revision of MCDS documentation (see agenda item 7).

4 A simple review of the activities, meetings, workshops and training courses that have taken place in the intersessional period renders a quite impressive picture in such difficult
circumstances. To a large extent we have to thank the Government of Flanders for this as they have continued their substantial support to the IOC Project Office for IODE. This meant that we could continue our training programmes as well as meetings of our expert groups and several steering groups.

The progress report of the IODE programme at the 26th Session of the IOC Assembly was well received by all Member States and Resolution XXVI-10 was adopted including, inter alia, the establishment of an IODE Group of Experts for OBIS, an IODE Steering Group for OBIS, and establishing the IOC Project Office for IODE/OBIS (albeit not at Rutgers University – this will be discussed under agenda item 5.2.1). In turn, the 45th Session of IOC Executive Council approved the decision EC-XLV/Dec.4.2.1 on the establishment of a Centre for the Ocean Data Portal at RIHMI-WDC of Roshydromet in Obninsk, Russian Federation which will give a great impulse at the future ODP operation and improvement (more details under agenda item 5.2.3).

Nevertheless, in a rapidly changing environment and after more than fifty years, IODE is at a cross-road and some serious challenges must be faced.

- There is a need to take a careful view on the emergence/growth of well-funded data systems, their decision to link with data systems in some regions, jointly with our progress and achievements with, for example, ODP and ODS. Put more simply IODE NODCs are participating in other networks that are better funded and that are linking with other similar systems. If this continues then should IODE continue to exist as such?

- The level of response to IODE related emails and difficulties in having people available for IODE activities. In this regard we refer to the low level of response to the IODE national reports survey (less than half of the IODE national coordinators responded by the deadline).

- The ODIN’s developments have slowed down, something that can be explained partially due to the budget cuts.

- Individual experts have less time to spend on IODE work versus their need to focus on funded project work. This is related with the participation of the NODCs in parallel networks. Of course if you need to choose between tasks for which you get paid vs tasks that you are doing for free then the choice is easily made. But again this puts in question the future of IODE which has to rely on volunteer work that benefits the community. Is this model sustainable today?

- After adopting OBIS and issuing a Circular Letter asking Member States for funding, no contributions were received and the OBIS Project Officer position may have to be terminated by April 2014. It is easy for our Governing Bodies to make decisions on the adoption of new activities but it has to be clear that this comes with obligations, including financial.

So an important question we need to ask is: is the current volunteer based model that has allowed IODE to grow still valid today? Is there still a role for IODE while regions are embarking on projects that take over some of the coordinating role of IODE? If the answer is yes then we need to re-define the role of IODE in the new global ocean data and information management architecture.

These are fundamental questions that we need to address in this meeting. If we do not address them now then IODE will not cease to exist immediately but will die slowly over a period of 5-10 years, but die it will. So we have allotted an entire day for these discussions during this Session. We welcome out-of-the-box views and solutions and we ask you all to carefully think about these issues.

Closely related to this is the issue to the target community of IODE and its users. For 50 years our community was composed of NODCs: single national entities that were responsible for all ocean related data management. Is this centralized structure still the most
appropriate? Today there are many ocean research and observation “entities”. They include universities, research institutions, projects and even small groups of researchers. Today’s technology allows every one of these to host a data centre and many do so. Are we reaching these as IODE? The answer must be “no”. Most of these do not even know about the existence of IODE. This does not help. We therefore need to find new ways of including these stakeholders, as they complement the work of our NODCs.

Another question is whether IODE should be involved in the development of technology. For over 10 years now we have been developing online services like OceanExpert, OceanDocs, OceanDataPortal, African Marine Atlas, Caribbean Marine Atlas, OBIS, etc. Should we continue doing so or leave these to individual member states or well-funded projects? If we decide that such services should be maintained then we also need to identify where the resources should come from that will sustain them. We then also must make sure that our own governments focus on the resource needs of our IODE rather than supporting similar parallel and competing efforts. These other initiatives should then use our IODE services.

To conclude, the past two years have been a notable period. Despite the obstacles due to the financial difficulties of IOC, IODE accomplished significant achievements and created new expectations. But we need to answer to the fundamental questions raised above before we proceed with the next steps to the future which are really very promising for our sciences and our societies.