OBIS and Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA resolution 69/292 on 19 June 2015) established a Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) on the development of a new legally-binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

The 49th IOC Executive Council (June 2016) established an Intersessional Working Group (IWG) on the IOC relevant issues related to the PrepCom with the tasks to examine the possible contribution of the IOC in relation to BBNJ, particularly in areas related to marine scientific research, capacity development and transfer of marine technology, as well as data and information management, with a view to informing the participation of the IOC representative in the BBNJ process. The IWG has representatives from 25 Member States.

There is general agreement in the IWG that data management and data exchange constitute one of the areas of IOC’s potential contribution to BBNJ. IODE and OBIS are regarded to be uniquely positioned to provide expertise in data curation, data integration, standards and open and free access to data, information, data products and services. It is also pointed out that capacity development on data standards, metadata and best practices is of great importance. Nevertheless, there is a call for a seamless query of associated data from other global repositories.

The creation of new mechanisms or structures with similar functions and roles should be avoided. However, some IWG members pointed out that both IODE and OBIS would require additional resources both in terms of financial and human. In addition, as for areas or topics for improvement, the IWG raises the need to improve the awareness of IODE and OBIS work, services and potential, as well as a widespread promotion to encourage submission of data to existing repositories. Some Member States indicated that interaction with user
communities should be pursued, while others indicated the importance of capacity development.

The IODE Steering Group for OBIS also discussed the potential role of OBIS in BBNJ and concluded that OBIS could provide foundational technology and methodology for robust data integration, products, and services, and in fundamentally being a science mission can serve as a neutral party with regard to laws and regulations. However, while OBIS already provides much of the capability that a BBNJ data system can use, there are several areas that would require supplemental funding to focus on BBNJ-specific needs. The OBIS network, both applicable nodes providing data from areas beyond national jurisdiction and the international OBIS secretariat, will need to be further expanded with new resources to address the specific requirements for using OBIS in a legal instrument context. Increased scrutiny needs to be applied to flag data appropriate or inappropriate for specific uses in consultation with legal experts and communicate uncertainty in ways consumable by non-scientist users. In addition, support for developing training packages and for organizing training workshops will also be needed. The SG-OBIS identified that the OBIS secretariat will require up to 3 extra staff members for coordination, training and product development as well as funding to assist the deep-sea and other key OBIS Nodes through a targeted funding program.

Draft Recommendation.

The SG-OBIS strongly encourages IOC Member States to continue supporting the national, regional and thematic OBIS nodes, which they host, that contribute data, technical infrastructure and scientific expertise that can support the BBNJ and other relevant international processes.

OBIS and the Convention on Biological Diversity

Sustainable Ocean Initiative

OBIS was presented at the Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fisheries Bodies on Accelerating Progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, held in Seoul from 26 to 28 September 2016.

During the discussion OBIS was referenced under Scientific collaboration and cooperation at regional scale and Opportunities for future collaboration, information-sharing and exchange of experiences. The Seoul Outcome document referred to OBIS, in particular in point 11 (d) Promoting harmonized approaches for collecting and accessing data, and exchanging scientific information produced by a wide range of entities, including governments, universities, research institutions/partnerships, non-governmental organizations, and United Nations agencies, e.g., information on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) and vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) as well as from the Ocean
Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) and the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS); Seoul Outcome: 

SOI Workshops

In 2016 OBIS was also present in three training workshops of the SOI. In both cases, a brief introduction of OBIS was presented to the participants and an exercise on Marine Spatial Planning was conducted using data derived from OBIS. The material for the course is hosted at Ocean Teacher Global Academy:


https://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SOIWS-2016-01

https://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SOIWS-2016-02

Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) / Pacific Ocean Alliance Regional Workshop for the Pacific Islands. Apia, Samoa. 31 Oct - 04 Nov 2016
https://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SOIWS-2016-03

CBD-COP13 Ecologically or Biologically Significant marine Areas (EBSA)

OBIS is mentioned in the CBD Decision XIII/12: Marine and coastal biodiversity: ecologically or biologically significant marine areas

2. Approaches for incorporating new information and new consideration of existing information in future description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, including both scientific and traditional knowledge:

- Facilitating relevant training opportunities, in partnerships with relevant United Nations/international organizations or initiatives, such as and the Ocean Biogeographic Information System/ the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative.
3. Enhancing the EBSA repository and information-sharing mechanism:

- Providing links to relevant open-access information portals, such as the Ocean Biogeographic Information System or other relevant global/regional information portals related to areas described as meeting the EBSA criteria.

Also, at COP13 OBIS was invited to collaborate in three side events:

1. 2nd CDB Technical Workshop on Monitoring of Marine and Coastal Biodiversity (10/DEC/2016). EBSAs, GOIS, OBIS and Capacity Building. OBIS was presented as part of a global biodiversity monitoring program along with MBON and GOOS initiatives.

2. Sustainable Ocean Initiative: Global Platform for Capacity Building and Partnerships for achieving Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals in marine and coastal areas (08/DEC/2016). Marine spatial planning through role-playing (OBIS-IOC/UNESCO). The exercise used in the SOI workshop where OBIS data is used was presented.

3. Marine Spatial Planning in support of achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets and Sustainable Development Goals in marine and coastal areas. Global level capacity building on MSP (OBIS-IOC/UNESCO). The OTGA site was presented and OBIS was used as an example of a global training program.

**OBIS and GOOS BioEco and GEO BON MBON**

On 15 December 2016, OBIS signed a collaboration agreement with the Global Ocean Observing System Biology and Ecosystem (GOOS BioEco) Panel and the Marine Biodiversity Observation Network (MBON) of the Group on Earth Observations Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO-BON) to join efforts towards a sustained, coordinated global ocean system of marine biological and ecosystem observations to support management decisions and address relevant science and societal needs. Both GEO BON MBON and GOOS BioEco agreed that OBIS will play a key and central role in fostering wider data sharing, data curation and aggregation in order to streamline the feeding of integrated and quality controlled datasets into models and forecasts.

OBIS attended the MBON Pole to Pole of the Americas startup meeting in Cancún (Sep 2016). This is a pilot project that pretends to demonstrate the viability of a continental wide marine biodiversity network. It was agreed that OBIS could be the platform for data storage, integration and dissemination for the project.