



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**Thirty-second Session of the Assembly**  
UNESCO, 21–30 June 2023

Item 4.4. of the Provisional Agenda

**REVISION OF THE IOC OCEANOGRAPHIC DATA EXCHANGE POLICY (2003, 2019)**

Summary

The purpose of this document is to inform the IOC Assembly on the process leading to the revision of the 20-year-old IOC data exchange policy further to Decision A-31/3.4.2 (Part III), which established the IOC Intersessional Working Group on the Revision of the IOC Oceanographic Data Exchange Policy (2003, 2019) (IWG-DATAPOLICY) in 2021.

Financial and administrative implications: There are no financial and administrative implications.

The proposed decision is referenced Dec. IOC-32/4.4 in the Action Paper (document IOC-32/2 Prov.) and contains the proposed 'IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)' for the consideration of the Assembly.



## Background

1. The IOC Assembly, at its 22nd Session, adopted the “IOC Oceanographic Data Exchange Policy” through [Resolution XXII-6](#) in 2003 with a further revision of Clause 5 in 2019.
2. At its meeting on 17 February 2021, the Management Group of the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange Programme (IODE) agreed that there were enough elements that warrant a revision of the IOC data exchange policy. A new IOC data policy should further promote and support free and open exchange of data in the framework of IOC activities and programmes. The Management Group acknowledged the amount of effort that went into building consensus on the current policy, especially with respect to acknowledging the rights of countries and the non-binding nature of the policy, so any changes should be carefully considered. Suggestions were made to build on other models such as the data policy of WMO that has a main policy with core principles, and modular extensions pertaining to specific data types or applications and products. This way the scope of the policy could be further expanded more easily if needed without opening a debate on the core elements. The ultimate goal of the IOC policy is to increase global cooperation, to improve the sharing and use of data. It is therefore important that data policies do not hinder this process, but streamline it within under mutually agreed terms (e.g., use of a Creative Commons licence). The review of the current policy should ensure better alignment with data policies at national, regional and international levels as well as those from other sectors, and should reflect current international principles (such as FAIR), which did not exist in 2003.
3. In view of the complexity of the issue and the need for the most extensive inclusiveness possible, the IODE Co-Chairs subsequently agreed on a 8-steps process as described in IOC Circular Letter [2864](#) of 9 November 2021 in order to facilitate the work of the inter-sessional working group starting January 2022 with the following tentative timeline.

## The development process

4. STEP 1: a desk study on existing policies (IOC, UN, non-UN) was prepared by the IOC/IODE Secretariat (Mr Greg Reed) and was published on 8 February 2022 as Document IOC/IWG-DATAPOLICY-I/5.
5. STEP 2: IOC global and regional programmes were invited to designate their representatives to the inter-sessional working group: Regional Subsidiary Bodies (IOCAFRICA, IOCARIBE, WESTPAC, IOCINDIO): 1-2 representatives each; IODE: 1-2 representatives; Ocean Science (HAB, Ocean Acidification and GOSR): 3 representatives; GOOS: 1-2 representatives; and Marine Policy and Regional Coordination: 1-2 representatives; Tsunami: 1-2 representatives. This process was completed in February 2022.
6. STEP 3: the First meeting of the IOC Inter-sessional Working Group on the Revision of the IOC Oceanographic Data Exchange Policy (IWG-DATAPOLICY-I) was held as a hybrid meeting on 5-6 April 2022. The report is available as Document [IOC/IWG-DATAPOLICY-I/3](#). The meeting recommended that revisions should add “terms of use/licensing” to the policy. The meeting also agreed on a work plan, timetable and assignment of responsibilities and identified UN and non-UN organizations and other partners that should be consulted in the process. The IWG designated Mr Taco De Bruin (IODE Co-Chair) as its Chair.
7. STEP 4: online drafting by the IWG members took place in April and May 2022 of a draft ‘IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)’. This draft was shared with 18 organizations identified under Step 3 in June 2022 for their comments.
 

STEP4A: Based on the comments received by the mentioned organisations, the Secretariat prepared a revision of the text and shared it with the IWG members for further discussion on 23 September 2022.

8. STEP 5: on 30 September 2022, IOC Member States (through their official focal points) were invited to an online briefing session with English/French, Russian/Spanish interpretation. On 21 October 2022, the session was organized in two parts to allow participants from different time zones to attend. During this information session the draft version of the new policy (IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)) was presented, explained and opened to discussion. The main comments and feedback received are summarized as follows:

- Licenses may be different for each data centre/data provider or even between individual data sets. Data centres or data services that collect these from various sources may face huge challenges dealing with this variety of licenses;
- There should be a stronger focus on “free and open” as was the case in the 2019 data policy and more encouragement of Member States to share data;
- It was noted that, unlike organizations like WMO, IOC does not operate under a convention so all participation in IOC is based on voluntary participation and contributions;
- Need to split FAIR and CARE;
- Need to elaborate more regarding best practices (documented);
- Should the principles of Ocean InfoHub (OIH) be mentioned?

9. STEP 6: based upon the feedback in steps 4 and 5 a revised version of the draft policy was prepared.

STEP 6A: The version of the draft policy mentioned in Step 6 was shared with the IODE community of IODE national coordinators for data management, IODE national coordinators for marine information management, ADU contact points and AIU contact points in December 2022.

10. STEP 7: The IWG-DATAPOLICY submitted the first draft of the new IOC data policy to IODE at its 27<sup>th</sup> Session (UNESCO HQ, Paris, 22-23 March 2023) through [Document IOC/IODE-XXVII/6.4](#). The IODE Committee expressed its great appreciation to the inter-sessional working group as well as all other experts who participated in the process leading to the new Policy and adopted [Recommendation IODE-XXVII/6.4](#) for the consideration of the IOC Assembly (IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)), which constitutes STEP 8 of the process.

11. It is important to note that the ‘IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)’ is an “umbrella” policy that provides general guidelines agreed upon across all IOC programmes and projects. The IWG noted that IOC projects/programmes deal with a wide variety of data types that require different timelines, conditions of sharing and use licenses. It is therefore recommended that each of these communities develop more detailed implementation guidelines that respect the ‘IOC Data Policy and Terms of Use (2023)’ but take into account specific issues related to the data types they handle. Similarly, these programmes/projects will need to consider that data centres / data systems that collect and disseminate data from a wide variety of data sources may face substantial technical challenges if they need to deal with widely varying use licenses. Specific agreements may be needed in such cases.

### **Proposed decision**

12. In light of the foregoing, the IOC Assembly may wish to consider Decision IOC-32/Dec.4.4 and the new ‘IOC Policy and Terms of Use (2023)’ proposed in the Action Paper (IOC-32/2 Prov.).