



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**Thirty-third Session of the Assembly**  
UNESCO, Paris, 25 June – 3 July 2025

Items 3.2, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of the Provisional Agenda

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE IOC INTERSESSIONAL FINANCIAL ADVISORY GROUP (2024–2025)**

Summary

This document provides a brief report of the Chair of the Intersessional Financial Advisory Group (IFAG) on the work accomplished in the intersessional period September 2024–June 2025.

Decision proposed is referenced Dec. IOC/A-33/5.1 in the Provisional Action Paper [IOC/A-33/AP Prov.Rev.](#)

1. In accordance with IOC Resolution EC-57/2 adopted by the IOC Executive Council at its 57<sup>th</sup> session, the open-ended Intersessional Financial Advisory Group (IFAG) was reconstituted through a call for nominations addressed to Member States in the IOC Circular Letter [3003](#) of 6 August 2024. 26 Member States – Australia, Belgium, Benin, Canada, China, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Togo, Tunisia, Türkiye, UK and USA – nominated experts for the ‘core’ membership of the Group, chaired by IOC Vice-Chair Juan Camilo Forero Hauzeur (Colombia).
2. In line with Member States’ instructions, through [IOC Resolution EC-57/2](#), regarding ‘*keeping Member States apprised of and involved with all relevant developments during the intersessional period, including through regular and timely online meetings of the IFAG*’, three such online meetings were organised by the Secretariat in November 2024, and February and April 2025. In addition, a pre-Assembly Member States information meeting was held online on 28 May 2025, with a special invitation to IFAG core members, as it provided an opportunity for the Secretariat to share the latest information on 2024–2025 budget implementation.
3. These online meetings covered all the relevant matters in follow-up to IOC Resolution EC-57/2:
  - *2024-2025 Programme and Budget implementation*
  - *2026-2027 Programming & Budgeting (Draft 43 C/5)*
  - *External assessment of IOC’s governance and management processes*
  - *IOC and the Future of the Ocean Member States’ consultation process, and*
  - *the IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management, that was presented to IFAG members by one of the working group co-chairs.*
4. The usual pre-session face-to-face meeting on 24 June 2023 allowed the Group to further exchange on all the documents covered by its mandate and be better prepared for the discussions at the Assembly of the four main parts of its mandate as follows:

I.

**Report on 2024–2025 (42 C/5) budget implementation as at 31 December 2024  
and Financial situation of the IOC Special Account as at year end 2024  
and forecast for 2025**

5. IFAG took that the IOC budget for 2024–2025, as reported in [IOC/A-33/3.2.Doc\(2\)](#), has been executed as at 31 December 2024 in accordance with the Approved Programme and Budget 2024–2025 (42 C/5), with an overall satisfactory implementation rate of 42% (expenditure of \$20.2M against the approved integrated budget of \$48.1M. Voluntary contributions representing 56% of the approved integrated budget, the Group noted that the overall resource mobilisation target was achieved, including through a significant increase of commitments at year end 2023, but with considerable variances across functions and regions.
6. IFAG noted with great concern the information provided by the IOC Executive Secretary with regard to management actions taken by UNESCO to safeguard against the risk of a potential loss of income for regular programme budget, resulting in a higher reduction of the 2025 regular budget allotment for the IOC than could be anticipated.
7. All members agreed that the IOC’s share of the overall UNESCO regular budget, even in the context of 2025 allotment reductions, should remain at 3%, as agreed by Member States at the 216<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO Executive Board and endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference in the 42 C/5 Appropriation Resolution.
8. In this context, in taking measures to safeguard against a potential loss of \$75M in 2025 income, IOC’s share of the ‘budget freeze’ should not exceed \$2.25M, while the set of measures

implemented over the period of March–May 2025 resulted in the freeze of \$3.8M of IOC regular programme non-staff and staff savings budgets.

9. Member States were concerned that the ‘budget freeze’ had a particularly negative effect on the areas of work identified by them as critically vulnerable—GOOS, IODE and capacity development, with some of these areas experiencing under expenditure due to chronic understaffing.

10. The IOC Executive Secretary updated that negotiations with UNESCO central services to this effect already resulted in approximately \$0.5M already released for the most immediate needs: \$332.5K on regular budget non-staff lines, \$93K on staff savings and \$116K on the USA 2023 Special Account.

11. Member States encouraged continued monitoring of the situation and careful and thorough planning to optimise the delivery of 2025 workplans.

## II.

### **Revised Programme and Budget for 2026–2027 (Draft 43 C/5), first biennium of the 2026-2029 quadrennium**

12. IFAG took note of the three scenarios for the Draft 43 C/5 presented to the UNESCO Executive Board at its 221<sup>st</sup> session as respecting Member States’ decision to allocate 3% of the overall UNESCO regular budget to the IOC.

13. The Group welcomed the UNESCO Executive Board decision 221 EX/Dec.20 that ‘*bearing in mind that the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is established as a body with functional autonomy within UNESCO, with the IOC Assembly being the principal organ under the IOC Statutes, invites the Executive Secretary of the IOC to submit the sections relating to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in Volumes I and II of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2026-2029 (43 C/5) to the IOC Assembly at its 33<sup>rd</sup> session and to forward the recommendations of the IOC Assembly to the General Conference at its 43<sup>rd</sup> session*’.

14. All members expressed their thanks to Japan for proposing the inclusion of this paragraph in the UNESCO Executive Board decision and to all Member States for unanimously adopting it.

15. IFAG thanked the Secretariat for the effort put in the development of the new Draft IOC Results Framework 2026–2027, aligned with the IOC Medium Term Strategy 2022–2029, as presented in Part II of [IOC/A-33/5.1.Doc\(1\)](#). This was noted as a very positive development and the sessional Financial Committee will discuss it more in-depth.

16. Member States noted with great concern that the proposed budgetary scenarios for 2026–2027 may be further affected by the potential loss of income from Member States’ assessed contributions to UNESCO, adversely impacting the allocations to the IOC, while some of the Commission’s critically vulnerable areas are still understaffed and under resourced.

17. IFAG emphasized that Member States guidance in the resolution to be adopted by the Assembly will once again need to be ‘resilient to the unknown’. Timely and regular intersessional consultations with Member States through IFAG will be of particular importance. In this context, IFAG welcomed and the Executive Secretary’s proposal to better align the schedules of IOC subsidiary bodies meetings with those of primary IOC Governing Bodies and the entire UNESCO programming and budgeting cycle.

## III.

### **Assessment of Governance and Management Processes**

18. IFAG took note of the analysis and findings and recommendations from interviews prepared by the external consultant Farman & Partners and contained in document [IOC/A-33/5.2.Doc\(1\)](#) and

welcomed the significant material input by Member States to the process, in particular the very informative [background document presented to IFAG by electoral group I](#).

19. The Group agreed that current governance and management practices are often suboptimal and need to be brought into compliance with the IOC Statutes.

20. IFAG emphasized that all IOC Member States, whether or not they are Member States of UNESCO, have an equal right to exercise governance over the IOC and hold its Secretariat and Executive Secretary to account; and that this necessitates the distinct governance of the IOC devised under its Statutes. Under the Statutes, the Assembly is the principal organ of the IOC and *'shall perform all functions of the Commission, unless otherwise regulated by these Statutes or delegated by the Assembly to other organs of the Commission'* (Article 6.2). Therefore, under the authority of and accountability to the IOC Assembly, the IOC Executive Secretary is in charge of executing all purposes and functions of the Commission, including:

- a. the design of the IOC Medium-Term Strategy and programme and budget and their submission to the IOC Assembly, as well as the execution of the programme and budget and reporting to the IOC Assembly and Executive Council;
- b. the financial and human resource management of the IOC within the budget approved by the IOC Assembly and the General Conference of UNESCO;
- c. the management, in keeping with the IOC Statutes, of collaboration with multilateral and Member State institutions and processes, including management of the independent IOC accreditation to intergovernmental institutions and processes;
- a. the dissemination and use of the results of its programmes, including the reinstating of the distinct visual identity of the IOC in communications and publications.

#### **IV. IOC and the Future of the Ocean Consultation Process**

21. IFAG welcomed of the summary of the first phase of the consultation process presented in [IOC/A-33/5.3.Doc\(1\)](#) and identifying the most underserved Member States needs across three issues (Sustainable Ocean Planning, UN Conventions and Frameworks and Sustainable Ocean Economy). The Group noted the inclusive approach and methodology with in-depth interviews completed with 15 Member States, UN bodies and private sector actors, regional focus group or plenary discussions in regional subsidiary body meetings, discussions in the working group on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management, as well as survey of IOC Member States (59 responses).

22. The following key elements presented to and discussed by IFAG:

- *Main messages*: need for increased access to and interoperability of data; expanded, sustained observing and monitoring coverage; and increased support to Member States to generate and apply scientific knowledge in areas where gaps persist;
- *Common themes emerged*: strengthened action in a small number of core areas will lead to multiple benefits;
- *Priority needs in science, knowledge, capacity & infrastructure*: marine biodiversity, nutrient pollution and HAB, physical oceanography, DRR/EWS including in spatial planning, MPA planning cf. BBNJ preparedness, climate resilient SOP and spatial planning;
- *Cross cutting issues requiring increased support*: science -policy interface through timely and relevant synthesis and assessment, broader application of ocean literacy across society, sustained capacity development, sustained investment models for ocean observations, practical toolkits and resources, industry engagement;

- *Regional differences exist* and will necessitate tailored analyses in next phases of the Consultation

23. The Group also took note of the updated on the implementation of the Action Plan in response to the IOC Strategic Positioning and the fact that the implementation of the outstanding recommendations will continue in parallel to the next phases of the IOC and the Future of the Ocean consultation process.