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INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
(of Unesco)

A COMPARISON OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION (IOC) AND THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT  
PROGRAMME (UNEP)

WITH

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE  
ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT, STOCKHOLM, 5-6 JUNE 1972

SC-83/WS/6

## INTRODUCTION

The following discussion has been prepared to serve as a supplement to IOC/INF-523, 'The Marine Pollution Research and Monitoring Programme of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), Present and Planned Activities'.

The purpose of this document is to provide readers not familiar with the respective roles and functions of the IOC and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with background information, so that the presentation of IOC's marine pollution research and monitoring activities (i.e., IOC/INF-523) can be considered in light of the respective mandated responsibilities of the two organizations. The information concerning the role and functions of the IOC and UNEP are expressed in quoted excerpts from the IOC Manual (Second Revised Edition, 15 July 1982) and Resolutions adopted by the XXVII General Assembly of the United Nations. Additional quoted excerpts from the Conference on the Human Environment, convened in Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, are included, having been obtained from the report of that meeting. This material has been further augmented by the Annotated Directory of Intergovernmental Organizations Concerned with Ocean Affairs, prepared by the Secretary General for the Fifth Session of the Third Conference on the Law of the Sea, 2 August to 17 September 1976, convened in New York. These sources have been supplemented by other documents as referenced in the text.

## ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

### I - The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)

"The IOC is an autonomous body established within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) by the 11th Session of Unesco's General Conference in November/December 1960. The purpose of the Commission is to promote scientific investigation of the oceans with a view to learning more about the nature and resources of the ocean through the concerted action of its Member States.

The functions of the Commission are to

- define those problems the solution of which requires international co-operation in the field of scientific investigation of the oceans and review the results of such investigation;
- develop, recommend, and co-ordinate international programmes for scientific investigation of the oceans and related services which call for concerted action by its members;
- develop, recommend, and co-ordinate with interested international organizations, international programmes for scientific investigation of the ocean and related services which call for concerted action with interested organizations;
- make recommendations to international organizations concerning activities of such organizations which relate to the Commission's programme;

- promote and make recommendations for the exchange of oceanographic data and the publication and dissemination of results of scientific investigation of the oceans;
- make recommendations to strengthen education and training programmes in marine science and its technology;
- develop and make recommendations for assistance programmes in marine science and its technology;
- make recommendations and provide technical guidance as to the formulation and execution of the marine science programmes of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco)" (1).

"In carrying out these functions, the Commission shall bear in mind the special needs and interests of developing countries, including in particular the need to further the capabilities of these countries in marine science and technology" (1).

"In addition to the responsibilities listed above, the Commission is now also fulfilling a further function as a joint specialized mechanism for certain organizations of the United Nations system. Besides Unesco, these are the United Nations itself through OETB, FAO, WMO and IMO, who use the Commission as an instrument for discharging certain of their responsibilities in the field of marine science. This arrangement is co-ordinated through an Inter-Secretariat Committee on Scientific Programmes Relating to Oceanography (ICSPRO)" (2), established by agreement amongst the above-mentioned organizations.

One of the principal activities of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission since the beginning has been the promotion and co-ordination of international co-operative expeditions and investigations in various regions of the world ocean, where the scientific problems and the exploitation of marine resources was of great importance for the bordering countries, and where environmental information on marine pollution was deficient. Further details of IOC's history and activities can be found in IOC Technical Series No. 20 (3) and in the IOC Manual (1, 4), which contain detailed information on the Commission's technical and regional subsidiary bodies.

## II - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

### Establishment of UNEP

The Governing Council of UNEP was established on 15 December 1972 by Resolution 2997 (XXVII) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (June, 1972, Stockholm), which was organized jointly by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and Unesco.

The main functions and responsibilities of UNEP are to

- "promote international co-operation in the field of the environment and to recommend, as appropriate, policies to this end;
- provide general policy guidance for the direction and co-ordination of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;
- prepare periodic reports on the implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;
- keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments;
- promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;
- maintain under continuing review the impact of national and international environmental policies and measures on developing countries, as well as the problem of environmental programmes and projects, and to ensure that such programmes and projects shall be compatible with the development plans and priorities of those countries;
- review and approve annually the programme of utilization of resources of the Environment Fund" (5, 6).

#### Environment Secretariat

The General Assembly of the United Nations decided that a small secretariat would be established in the United Nations to, inter alia, "serve as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system in such a way as to ensure a high degree of effective management" (5).

#### Environment Fund

It was also decided that, "in order to provide for additional financing for environmental programmes, a voluntary fund would be established, with effect from 1 January 1973, in accordance with existing United Nations financial procedures" (5).

"In order to enable the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme to fulfil its policy-guidance role for the direction and co-ordination of environmental activities, the Environment Fund shall finance wholly or partly the costs of the new environmental initiatives undertaken within the United Nations system - which will include the initiatives envisaged in the Action Plan for the Human Environment adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, with particular attention to integrated projects, and such other environmental activities as may be decided upon by the Governing Council - and that the Governing Council shall review these initiatives with a view to taking appropriate decisions as to their continued financing" (5).

"The Environment Fund shall be used for financing such programmes <sup>\*)</sup> of general interest as regional and global monitoring, assessment and data-collecting systems, including, as appropriate, costs for national counterparts; the improvement of environmental quality management; environmental research; information exchange and dissemination; public education and training; assistance for national, regional and global environmental institutions; the promotion of environmental research and studies for the development of industrial and other technologies best suited to a policy of economic growth compatible with adequate environmental safeguards; and such other programmes as the Governing Council may decide upon, and that in the implementation of such programmes due account should be taken of the special needs of the developing countries" (5). Further, the Environment Fund, in pursuance of the objectives just stated, "shall be directed to the need for effective co-ordination in the implementation of international environmental programmes of the organizations in the United Nations system and other international organizations" (5).

As a consequence of the above, "UNEP should be understood as a co-ordinating, stimulating, catalyzing and financing body, rather than an organization which plans activities to be carried out internally. UNEP reinforces and co-ordinates the efforts of the world community in the environmental field, and therefore its role should be non-operational. However, (as of 1978) some 20% of UNEP's budget relates to projects implemented by UNEP; examples are Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS), International Referral System (IRS), International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) and the Regional Seas Programme" (2).

#### Environment Co-ordination Board

The General Assembly also decided that, "in order to provide for the most efficient co-ordination of United Nations environmental programmes, an Environment Co-ordination Board, under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, would be established under the auspices and within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination" (5). In addition, it was decided that "the Environment Co-ordination Board would meet periodically for the purpose of ensuring co-operation and co-ordination among all bodies concerned in the implementation of environmental programmes and that it would report annually to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme" (5).

#### Programme Activity Centres

As stated above, "the Co-ordination of all environmental activities within the UN system is one of the main objectives of UNEP. Within this framework UNEP's role is non-operational, the actions being implemented by other organizations. Only where no such implementation can be realized, UNEP may take executive action. For such tasks the secretariat sets up Programme Activity Centres" (2).

<sup>\*)</sup> All underlining in this document has been added to the quotations.

EXCERPTS FROM THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE REPORT - RECOMMENDATIONS

I - Recommendation 85

"It is recommended that any mechanism for co-ordinating and stimulating the actions of the different United Nations organs in connection with environmental problems include among its functions:

- (a) Development of an internationally accepted procedure for the identification of pollutants of international significance and for the definition of the degree and scope of international concern;
- (b) Consideration of the appointment of appropriate intergovernmental, expert bodies to assess quantitatively the exposures, risks pathways and sources of pollutants of international significance;
- (c) Review and co-ordination of international co-operation for pollution control, ensuring in particular that needed measures shall be taken and that measures taken in regard to various media and sources shall be consistent with one another;
- (d) Examination of the needs for technical assistance to Governments in the study of pollution problems, in particular those involving international distribution of pollutants;
- (e) Encouragement of the establishment of consultation mechanisms for speedy implementation of concerted abatement programmes with particular emphasis on regional activities" (7).

II - Recommendation 87

"It is recommended that Governments:

- (a) Support national research and monitoring efforts that contribute to agreed international programmes for research and monitoring in the marine environment, in particular the Global Investigation of Pollution in the Marine Environment (GIPME) and the Integrated Global Ocean Station System (IGOSS);
- (b) Provide to the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, as appropriate to the data-gathering activities of each, statistics on the production and use of toxic or dangerous substances that are potential marine pollutants, especially if they are persistent;
- (c) Expand their support to components of the United Nations system concerned with research and monitoring in the marine environment and adopt the measures required to improve the constitutional, financial and operational basis under which the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission is at present operating so as to make it an effective joint mechanism for the Governments and United Nations organizations concerned (United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Meteorological Organization, International Maritime Organization, United Nations) and in order that it may be able to take on additional responsibilities for the promotion and co-ordination of scientific programmes and services" (7).

III - Recommendation 88

"It is recommended that the Secretary-General, together with the sponsoring agencies, make it possible for the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution (GESAMP):

- (a) To re-examine annually, and revise as required, its "Review of Harmful Substances", with a view to elaborating further its assessment of sources, pathways and resulting risks of marine pollutants.
- (b) To assemble, having regard to other work in progress, scientific data and to provide advice on scientific aspects of marine pollution, especially those of an interdisciplinary nature" (7).

IV - Recommendation 89

"It is recommended that the Secretary-General ensure:

- (a) That mechanisms for combining world statistics on mining, production, processing, transport and use of potential marine pollutants shall be developed along with methods for identifying high-priority marine pollutants based in part on such data;
- (b) That the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution (GESAMP), in consultation with other expert groups, propose guidelines for test programmes to evaluate toxicity of potential marine pollutants;
- (c) That the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency encourage studies of the effects of high-priority marine pollutants on man and other organisms, with appropriate emphasis on chronic, low-level exposures;
- (d) That the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, explore the possibility of establishing an international institute for tropical marine studies, which would undertake training, as well as research" (7).

V - Recommendation 90 <sup>\*\*)</sup>

"It is recommended that the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, jointly with the World Meteorological Organization and, as appropriate, in co-operation with other interested intergovernmental bodies, promote the monitoring of marine pollution, preferably within the framework of the Integrated Global Ocean Station System (IGOSS), as well as the development of methods for monitoring high-priority marine pollutants in the water, sediments and organisms, with advice from the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution (GESAMP) on intercomparability of methodologies" (7).

<sup>\*\*)</sup> It should be noted here that time has overtaken this recommendation. Although action was initiated in response to this recommendation, programmatic changes in both the IOC and the WHO have resulted in IOC acting independently in promoting the subject programme, and under the umbrella of the Global Investigation of Pollution in the Marine Environment (see Ref. 8).

VI - Recommendation 91

"It is recommended that the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission;

- (a) Ensure that provision shall be made in international marine research, monitoring and related activities for the exchange, dissemination, and referral to sources of data and information on baselines and on marine pollution and that attention shall be paid to the special needs of developing countries;
- (b) Give full consideration, with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Hydrographic Organization and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and other interested and relevant organizations, to the strengthening of on-going marine and related data and information exchange and dissemination activities;
- (c) Support the concept of development of an interdisciplinary and interorganizational system primarily involving centres already in existence;
- (d) Initiate an interdisciplinary marine pollution data and scientific information referral capability" (7).

VII - RESOLUTION ON INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

"Convinced of the need for prompt and effective implementation by Governments and the international community of measures designed to safeguard and enhance the human environment for the benefit of present and future generations of Man,

Recognizing that responsibility for action to protect and enhance the human environment rests primarily with Governments, and in the first instance, can be exercised more effectively at the national and regional levels,

Recognizing that environmental problems of broad international significance fall within the competence of the United Nations system,

Bearing in mind that international co-operative programmes in the environment field must be undertaken with due respect to the sovereign rights of States and in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and principles of international law,

Mindful of the sectoral responsibilities of the organizations of the United Nations system,

Conscious of the significance of regional and subregional co-operation in the field of human environment and of the important role of the regional economic commissions and other regional inter-governmental organizations,



Emphasizing that problems of the human environment constitute a new and important area for international co-operation and that the complexity and interdependence of such problems requires new approaches,

Recognizing that the relevant international scientific and other professional communities can make an important contribution to international co-operation in the field of the human environment,

Conscious of the need for processes within the United Nations system which would effectively assist developing countries to implement environmental policies and programmes compatible with their development plans, and to participate meaningfully in international environmental programmes,

Convinced that, in order to be effective, international co-operation in the field of the human environment requires additional financial and technical resources,

Aware of the urgent need for a permanent institutional arrangement within the United Nations for the protection and improvement of the human environment" (7),

(Environment Secretariat)

(1-3 not pertinent to the present consideration)

- "4. Recommends that a small secretariat be established in the United Nations to serve as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system in such a way as to ensure a high degree of effective management;
5. Recommends further that the environment secretariat be headed by the Executive Director, who shall be elected by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Secretary-General, and who shall be entrusted, inter alia, with the following responsibilities:
  - (a) To provide substantive support to the Governing Council;
  - (b) Under the guidance of the Governing Council, to co-ordinate environmental programmes within the United Nations system, to keep under review their implementation and assess their effectiveness;
  - (c) To advise, as appropriate, and under the guidance of the Governing Council, intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system on the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes;
  - (d) To secure the effective co-operation of, and contribution from, the relevant scientific and other professional communities from all parts of the world;
  - (e) To provide, at the request of all parties concerned, advisory services for the promotion of international co-operation in the field of the environment;

- (f) To submit to the Governing Council, on his own initiative or upon request, proposals embodying medium- and long-range planning for United Nations programmes in the environment field;
- (g) To bring to the attention of the Governing Council any matter which he deems to require consideration by it;
- (h) To administer, under the authority and policy guidance of the Governing Council, the Environment Fund;
- (i) To report on environment matters to the Governing Council;
- (j) To perform such other functions as may be entrusted to him by the Governing Council" (7),

(Environment Fund)

- 6. "Recommends that, in order to provide for additional financing for environmental programmes, a voluntary fund be established in accordance with existing United Nations financial procedures;
- 7. Recommends further that, in order to enable the Governing Council to fulfil its policy guidance role for the direction and co-ordination of environmental activities, the Environment Fund finance wholly or partly the costs of the new environmental initiatives undertaken within the United Nations system. These will include the initiatives envisaged in the Action Plan adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, with particular attention to integrated projects, and such other environmental activities as may be decided upon by the Governing Council. The Governing Council shall review these initiatives with a view to taking appropriate decisions as to their continued financing;
- 8. Recommends that the Fund be used for financing such programmes of general interest as regional and global monitoring, assessment and data-collecting systems, including, as appropriate, costs for national counterparts; improvement of environmental quality management; environmental research; information exchange and dissemination; public education and training; assistance for national, regional and global environmental institutions; promotion of environmental research and studies for the development of industrial and other technologies best suited to a policy of economic growth compatible with adequate environmental safeguards; and such other programmes as the Governing Council may decide upon. In the implementation of such programmes due account should be taken of the special needs of the developing countries;
- 9. Recommends that the costs of servicing the Governing Council and providing the small core secretariat be borne by the regular budget of the United Nations. Operational programme costs, programme support and administrative costs of the Fund shall be borne by the Fund;

10. Recommends that, in order to ensure that the development priorities of developing countries shall not be adversely affected, adequate measures should be taken to provide additional financial resources on terms compatible with the economic situation of the recipient developing country. To this end, the Executive Director, in co-operation with competent organizations, will keep this problem under continuing review;
11. Recommends that the Fund, in pursuance of the objectives stated in paragraphs 7 and 8 above, be directed to the need for effective co-ordination in the implementation of international environmental programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system, and other international organizations;
12. Recommends that, in the implementation of programmes to be financed by the Fund, organizations outside the United Nations system, particularly those in the countries and regions concerned, also be utilized as appropriate, in accordance with the procedures established by the Governing Council; such organizations are invited to support the United Nations environmental programmes, by complementary initiatives and contributions;
13. Recommends that the Governing Council formulate such general procedures as are necessary to govern the operations of the Fund" (7).

#### References

- (1) IOC Manual - Part I, Second Revised Edition, 15 July 1982.
- (2) Environmental Programmes of International Organizations, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, The Netherlands (with supplements through 1979), 1977.
- (3) Focus for Ocean Research, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, History, Functions, Achievements; Roll, H.U.; IOC Technical Series No. 20, 1979.
- (4) IOC Manual - Part II, Fourth Revised Edition, 15 July 1982.
- (5) Resolutions adopted by the XXVII General Assembly of the United Nations, 1972, (2997).
- (6) Annotated Directory of Intergovernmental Organizations Concerned with Ocean Affairs (UN-A/Conf. 62/L.14), 10 August 1976.
- (7) Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UN-A/Conf. 48/14 Rev. 1) Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972.
- (8) The Marine Pollution Research and Monitoring Programme of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, IOC/INF-523, January 1983.