



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

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Summary Report

IOCINDIO Consultation on the potential transformation of the IOC Regional Committee for the Central Indian Ocean (IOCINDIO) into an IOC Sub Commission 16 February 2021 (online)

Furthering the **Decision IOC-XXX/3.3.4**, by which the IOC Assembly at its 30th session requested the IOCINDIO Chair to prepare, with the help of the IOC Secretariat, a proposal for changing the status of IOCINDIO that would contain the mission, the objectives, terms of references, budgetary implications, secretarial arrangements and other necessary provisions for the consideration of the IOC Executive Council in 2020, the IOC Secretariat organised online Consultation meeting extended to all IOC Member States and partners on the 16th February, 2021. The Meeting was well attended by approximately 138 participants representing the following countries: Angola, Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Cameroun, Canada, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Japan, France, Gabon, Guinea, India, Italy, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Madagascar, Monaco, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, The Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, United Kingdom, USA, Vietnam.

The IOC Chair addressed the meeting and stressed the important role of the Regional Subsidiary Bodies in the implementation of the IOC global programmes, taking into consideration national and regional priorities with the goal to foster regional and international cooperation.

The Executive Secretary of the IOC chaired the meeting. In his introductory remarks, he recalled the Decision IOC-XXX/3.3.4, with the efforts of the IOCINDIO Chairman who worked with the Secretariat and the IOCINDIO Officers as well as the IOC Vice-Chair of Group IV for the region, and developed the proposal for changing the status of IOCINDIO into an IOC Sub Commission. In April 2020, the IOCINDIO Chair submitted to the IOC Secretariat the initial proposal document intended for the 53rd session of the Executive Council. Upon submission to the IOC Secretariat, the document was discussed with the IOC Chair, the Executive Secretary, and senior members of the IOC Secretariat. It was emphasized in that discussion that a large-scale transformation of an IOC primary subsidiary body is not just a formal exercise. The IOC needs indeed a vibrant body for the Indian Ocean, and the change of IOCINDIO status calls for a broad, inclusive, and comprehensive consultation on this subject among IOC Member States, especially all those bordering or with interest in the Indian Ocean. This rationale was the basis for the Consultation meeting which provided opportunities to all IOC Member States to express views, advices and positions regarding the further potential transformation of the IOCINDIO into an IOC Sub Commission.

The Chairman of IOCINDIO presented the proposal and explained the open, consultative, and iterative process between the IOCINDIO Officers and the IOC Secretariat as well as the IOC Chair for Group IV leading to the development of the proposal. He recalled that upon the request of the IOC Chair and Executive Secretary, he revised the document, originally intended for the Executive Council, which was postponed due to COVID.19 sanitary restrictions. This document served as the basis for discussions at the consultation meeting.

The IOCINDIO Chair stressed that the document very carefully reviewed the development of IOCINDIO throughout the years and its current state and, as requested by the IOC Assembly, also proposes initial elements of the organisation of IOCINDIO as an IOC Sub-Commission, potentially for the whole Indian Ocean with the view to foster intraregional and interregional cooperation with the overlapping IOC Sub commissions, namely IOCAFRICA and WESTPAC. Ongoing active national, regional and international programmes and stakeholders in the IOCINDIO region fully supported by national commitments and partners countries outside region are good justification for the transformation of the Committee into a vibrant Sub Commission at the same level of administrative arrangements and resources support like the other existing IOC Sub commissions.

He expressed that the ultimate goal of the transformation of the IOCINDIO into a sub commission is to facilitate coordinated, focussed, and energized IOC activities in the region, which is the ultimate *raison d'être* of the IOC and its Sub-Commissions. He also provided background illustrations with existing good cooperation among IOCINDIO Member States with interested Member States of WESTPAC and IOCAFRICA. There are only positive implications, not only for current IOCINDIO Member States, but also for Member States of IOCAFRICA and WESTPAC based on the ongoing good cooperation among interested Member States of these three regional bodies. Regarding the overlap with those Sub commissions, he reminded participants that there is a precedence within existing Regional Subsidiary Bodies of IOC, with no negative implications of countries and regions concerned. At least, nobody complains about the existing overlap. He noted with appreciation that African countries from Indian, Atlantic, Mediterranean and Red Seas coasts as well as the Pacific countries are well representing at the consultation. This is a good indication of their interests in the Indian Ocean basin. There are good bilateral diplomatic relations and cooperation among countries across oceans and lands in the region with successful joint ventures and programmes and as such the overlap can only reinforce existing mutual benefits for Member States in the regions concerned.

Finally, he reminded participants that the IOC Executive Secretary provided a short briefing on the transformation process of IOCINDIO into an IOC Sub-Commission in his report to the 53rd session of IOC Executive Council which was held 3–9 February 2021, after a postponement from summer 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of Member States and partners took the floor and commended the efforts of the Chairman, the officers and the IOC Secretariat and expressed views and positions:

From the discussions, the following positions emerged:

1. The following 8 IOCINDIO Member States strongly supported the transformation of IOCINDIO into an IOC Sub Commission: Bangladesh, France, India, I.R. Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia.

2. Some IOCINDIO Member States spoke about the need for strengthening scientific cooperation in the Indian Ocean (France, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Qatar) implying the benefit of strengthening IOCINDIO.
3. Several African IOC Member States spoke in favour of the transformation: Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Angola, Egypt, Benin.
4. Thailand and Japan raised some issues requiring clarification and further discussions.
5. Some countries (Tanzania, Thailand, WESTPAC) expressed a reservation about the geographic coverage of the further Sub Commission and pointed out potential issues resulting from overlapping with IOCAFRICA and WESTPAC. Some speakers called on the need to propose a mechanism for collaboration between the regional bodies for the Indian Ocean.
6. USA, UK, Australia expressed the view that a feasibility study is required. Thailand asked a question if any evaluation of IOCINDIO was undertaken.

In his response to Member States, the IOCINDIO Chair, pointed out that from the IOC regulations and practices for establishing the existing Sub Commissions, a feasibility study is not a requirement and that the two years delay will only ruin the current momentum and efforts of the countries and partners active in the region. It was suggested that chairs of IOCAFRICA, WESTPAC and IOCINDIO discuss and finalise the modalities for collaborations in future.

Member States agreed that further consideration will be conducted by the IOCINDIO Member States at the 8th session with a view to present the final proposal to the Assembly for a formal decision at its 31st session.

The oral records of the meeting in French and English are available for consultations at the IOC Secretariat.