



IHO File No.S1/5051

**CIRCULAR LETTER 38/2017**  
**08 June 2017**

**PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A UN-GGIM WORKING GROUP  
ON MARINE GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION**

References:

- A. IHO CL 66/2011 dated 3 November - IHO Participation in the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.
- B. IHO Assembly document A.1/WP1/01 - Reports on the work of the IHO for the period 2012-2016 - Work Programme No. 1 - Corporate Affairs.
- C. IHO CL 38/2016 dated 16 August - Sixth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM).
- D. IHO Assembly document A.1/MISC/03 - List of Decisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the IHO Assembly.

Dear Hydrographer,

1. Reference A reported on the establishment by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of a UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the opportunities that participation offers to the IHO and its Member State organizations by raising awareness and encouraging top-down government interest and support for national hydrographic programmes.
2. Following the decision of ECOSOC in 2016 to broaden and strengthen the mandate of the Committee as the relevant UN body on geospatial information, the UN-GGIM has the leading role in setting the agenda for global geospatial information management and promoting its usefulness in addressing key global challenges, particularly in relation to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UN-GGIM is the UN forum for liaison and coordination among Member States, and between Member States, international organizations and stakeholders to bring about coordination and coherence in geospatial information management, including for the marine environment.
3. Since 2011, the IHO Secretariat has represented the IHO in the annual meetings of the UN-GGIM and several of its inter-sessional high-level forums and has contributed actively to the relevant agenda items. As reported to the Member States at the first session of the IHO Assembly (A-1), the participation of the IHO has resulted in the increased acknowledgement of the need to consider the maritime geospatial information domain as part of the UN-GGIM work (see Reference B).
4. As announced in Reference C, the UN-GGIM will hold its 7<sup>th</sup> session from 31 July to 4 August 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New-York. The IHO Secretariat has received confirmation that the UN-GGIM will specifically consider marine geospatial information for the first time at this session. In particular, as mentioned in the discussion of proposal 7 at A-1, it is proposed to establish a new working group to develop appropriate top-level guidance on the availability and accessibility of comprehensive location-based information that will help UN Member States to develop strategic priorities, make decisions and measure and monitor outcomes in the marine environment. In other words, the UN-GGIM is now focussing attention on providing top-level guidance on Marine Spatial Data Infrastructures (MSDI) as well as land-based SDI.
5. In the view of the IHO Secretariat, including the maritime domain in the work of the UN-GGIM is a logical and helpful progression and is a recognition of the role and the influence that the IHO Secretariat has exerted in the UN-GGIM on behalf of its Member States in the last few years. It will,

for the first time, provide top-level global guidance and encouragement to governments to join the land and sea together as far as geospatial information is concerned.

6. It is expected that the role and inclusion of the IHO in a working group considering marine geospatial information will be acknowledged specifically in the proposed Terms of Reference, given that many of the issues to be considered by the working group are being addressed in detail in the IHO work programme. Common topics include MSDI, crowd-sourced bathymetry, data exchange and data interoperability.

7. As indicated by the Secretary-General at A-1, it is now more than ever vitally important that the IHO and its Member State representatives play an active part in the work of the UN-GGIM and in particular in the proposed UN-GGIM working group on marine geospatial information.

8. Consequently, and in accordance with Decision 22 of A-1 (see Reference D) all Member States are encouraged to ensure that, at a minimum, their national delegation attending UN-GGIM are fully briefed on all relevant hydrographic issues or consequences that may be discussed, and wherever possible, that IHO Member State representatives join national delegations and contribute directly to the work of the UN-GGIM.

9. The Terms of Reference for the UN-GGIM call upon UN Member States ... *to designate experts with specific knowledge drawn from the interrelated fields of surveying, geography, cartography and mapping, remote sensing, land/sea and geographic information systems and environmental protection.* In this context, IHO Member States representatives are the obvious *experts with specific knowledge* when it comes to any discussion by the UN-GGIM related to marine geospatial information.

10. Meanwhile, the IHO Secretariat will continue to maintain its close liaison with the UN-GGIM Secretariat and will represent the Organization at all relevant meetings whenever resources allow.

11. Information about the UN-GGIM and details of its next session can be found on the UN-GGIM website at: <http://ggim.un.org>. The documents for the session are posted when available at: [http://ggim.un.org/ggim\\_committee.html](http://ggim.un.org/ggim_committee.html).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ward', with a period at the end.

Robert WARD  
Secretary-General