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Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

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Marine geospatial information

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

At its seventh session, held in New York from 2 to 4 August 2017, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 7/111, in which it endorsed the terms of reference and establishment of the Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information, noting the need for appropriate technical expertise and broad geographical representation. Also in decision 7/111, the Committee noted that, given the complexity and broad scope of marine geospatial information, it was critical to ensure that the Working Group remained focused, within its scope, and not political in nature, and the Committee encouraged the Working Group to address issues related to the availability, accessibility and application of marine geospatial information, and linkages to national spatial data infrastructure. In this report, the Working Group provides information on the progress made towards establishing its modalities, developing a workplan for the biennium 2018-2019 and focusing on the objectives and functions set out in its terms of reference. The working group reports on its graduated approach to managing and promoting the value of marine geospatial information, including the preparation of a communications plan, the gathering of information in order to better understand existing capacity development initiatives being taken by international organizations, including the International Hydrographic Organization, and the application of use case approaches to understanding and promoting the benefits of readily available, standards-driven marine geospatial information.

* E/C.20/2018/1

I. Introduction

1. At its third annual meeting convened in December 2016 in New York, the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau considered a proposal by the United States of America for the Committee of Experts to begin addressing substantive issues related to the marine environment. The proposal was supported by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). The Expanded Bureau supported the proposal, agreed to move forward, and to bring this topic to the attention of the Committee of Experts as a specific agenda item at its seventh session. The proposal was to establish a new working group to substantively address marine geospatial information, and to include issues related to inland water bodies and waterways. The new working group would have an overarching proviso to focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and where relevant, also consider Goal 6 – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
2. At its seventh session, the Committee of Experts discussed a new agenda item on marine geospatial information and the report prepared by the Secretariat. The report included draft terms of reference which assisted the Committee's consideration of this new agenda item, inclusive of a proposal by the United States of America to establish the Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information that will consider both inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans.
3. The Committee of Experts adopted decision 7/111, in which it endorsed the terms of reference and establishment of the Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information, and noted the need for appropriate technical expertise and broad geographical representation. Given the complexity and broad scope of marine geospatial information, the Working Group understood the guidance by the Committee of Experts that it should remain focused, stay within its scope, that it remains technical and not political in nature. The Committee encouraged the Working Group to address issues related to the availability, accessibility and application of marine geospatial information, and linkages to national spatial data infrastructures.
4. Marine geospatial information is an integral component of global geospatial information management, supporting the availability and accessibility of comprehensive location-based information in helping Governments develop strategic priorities, make decisions, and measure and monitor outcomes. The Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information provides a forum for dialogue and coordination between Member States, the International Hydrographic Organization, the United Nations system, and other international organisations and experts with a view to encourage enhanced global cooperation to substantively address issues related to the availability and application of marine geospatial information that encompasses inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans.
5. This present report provides the Committee of Experts with an update on the progress of the Working Group since its establishment at the seventh session. It describes the process to compose the membership of the Working Group, efforts to develop a work plan, and activities related to its work plan. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report, express its views on the work plan and provide guidance on the activities of the Working Group. Points for discussion and decision are provided in paragraph 17.

II. Membership of the Working Group

6. The Secretariat reached out to Member States that had made interventions during the seventh session of the Committee of Experts, and whom had expressed their willingness to participate in and contribute to the activities of the Working Group. A total of 15 Member States were contacted, of which 13 confirmed their willingness to participate and contribute to advance this new agenda. In addition, one United Nations systems entity, one international organization and one organization from the UN-GGIM Private Sector Network requested to join and contribute to the activities of the Working Group.

7. The Working Group presently comprises experts from 13 Member States, and three other entities. The present list of members of the Working Group is listed under Annex I. The Working Group is co-chaired by Burkina Faso and United States of America.

III. Work plan and activities

8. Approximately 70% of the Earth's surface is water - inland water bodies and waterways, seas and oceans. Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development, energy and food production, healthy ecosystems and for human wellbeing and survival. Water is also at the heart of adaptation to climate change, serving as the crucial link between society, economy and the environment. It is estimated that more than three billion people depended on these waters for their primary source of protein.

9. Geospatial information about these waters – inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans, is needed to support its administration and management, and to meet the demand for critical analysis when questions arise pertaining to the governance of these waters and their resources. The information gathered will play a vital role in measuring, monitoring and mitigating climate risk in coastal zones, deltas and tributaries, in supporting national development priorities, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

10. In recognition of these global needs, the Working Group finalized its work plan at its first online meeting on 26 March 2018. The work plan on marine geospatial information is cognizant of the objectives of the Committee of Expert as they relate to inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans, in five aspects:

- (a) Leadership: Provide leadership in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information and to promote its use to address key global challenges;
- (b) Coordination: Provide a forum for coordination and dialogues with and among Member States and relevant international organizations;
- (c) Capacity Development: Provide a platform for the development of effective strategies and to strengthen national capacity and capability, especially in developing countries;
- (d) Standards: Proposed work plans, frameworks and guidelines to promote common principles, policies, standards and mechanisms for the interoperability and use of geospatial data and services; and
- (e) Inclusion: Make joint decisions and set the direction for the production and use of geospatial information within and across national regional and global policy frameworks.

11. The work plan covers the period 2018 – 2019 and comprises a list of ten activities with expected outcomes, and can be accessed at http://ggim.un.org/documents/WG_MGI_Work_Plan_2018-19.pdf. Since its composition and its first online meeting, the Working Group embarked on eight of its ten agreed activities.

12. The Working Group collated materials and prepared its draft communication plans to describe the benefits and value of marine geospatial information, along with the role and relevance of the Working Group, principally to raise awareness. This included efforts to:

(a) Understand the broader stakeholder community, since the Working Group considers matters related to inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans; and

(b) Outline existing capacity development activities or initiatives known to the Working Group which may be beneficial to Member States and benefit from the expertise within the Working Group.

13. The Working Group had its second online meeting on 25 June 2018 and discussed its progress with respect to the eight activities it has embarked upon. During this online meeting, there were robust discussions on the draft communication plan, and the need for a message that:

(a) Is addressed to policy and decision-makers to highlight and raise the awareness on the importance of marine geospatial information;

(b) Is broad, addressing lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of communities, linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and

(c) Seeks to foster an enabling environment for marine geospatial information to have a vital role in measuring, monitoring and mitigating impacts such as climate variabilities on inland water bodies and waterways, and coastal zones, seas and oceans.

14. The Working Group discussed its progress on its compilation of relevant international organizations and the rationale for engaging and relating with these organizations. It also reviewed the listing of existing capacity development initiatives and activities within IHO and noted that any capacity development considered would need to be extended beyond just IHO's member nations. The Working Group understood that it is about encouraging and promoting the use of internationally agreed standards particularly across all marine activities. Two use cases were suggested and will be further considered by the Working Group at its subsequent meeting. These use cases seek to elaborate the benefits of readily available and accessible marine geospatial information.

15. The Working Group plans to convene a side event at the eighth session with the support of the International Hydrographic Organization S-121 Maritime Limits and Boundaries Project Team and United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. The side event will allow Member States to appreciate the progress in developing a specification for marine limits and boundaries that allows for the representation of legal aspects of marine areas and their associated rights, restrictions, and responsibilities in alignment with the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The standard is also based on ISO standard 19152 Land Administration Domain Model.

16. The Working Group is planning to hold its first expert meeting, a physical meeting back-to-back with the meeting of International Hydrographic Organization Marine Spatial Data Infrastructures Working Group (MSDIWG) scheduled for the first week of March 2019 in

Busan, Republic of Korea. This will allow the Working Group to begin consideration of its activity in this aspect, as well as an opportunity to consider, together with MSDIWG, the inputs and consideration vis-à-vis national geospatial information systems and its infrastructures.

IV. Points for discussion

17. The Committee of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report and the progress of the Working Group, including its present membership. The Committee may wish to encourage the Regional Committees of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management to consider the need for broad geographic representation in the Working Group;**
- (b) Express its view and provide guidance to the Working Group on its work plan and activities; and**
- (c) Take note of the planning to convene the first expert meeting of the Working Group in Busan, Republic of Korea, in March 2019.**

ANNEX I

Members of the Working Group

1. Member States

- 1.1. Burkina Faso (Geographic Institute of Burkina)
- 1.2. Chile (Hydrographic and Oceanographic Services, Chilean Navy)
- 1.3. China (Department of Oceanic Surveying, Mapping and Geoinformation, Ministry of Natural Resources)
- 1.4. Denmark (Danish Hydrographic Office, Danish Geodata Agency)
- 1.5. Italy (Hydrographic Institute, Italian Navy)
- 1.6. Jamaica (National Land Agency)
- 1.7. Malaysia (Department of Survey and Mapping)
- 1.8. Mexico (National Institute of Statistics and Geography)
- 1.9. Netherlands (Netherlands Hydrographic Office, Royal Netherlands Navy)
- 1.10. Norway (Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority)
- 1.11. Republic of Korea (Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency)
- 1.12. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Hydrographic Office)
- 1.13. United States of America (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

2. United Nations system

- 2.1 Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations

3. International Organization

- 3.1 International Hydrographic Organization

4. Other Organizations

- 4.1 UN-GGIM: Private Sector Network (Esri)