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Joint IOC-WMO Circular Letter JCOMM No. 00-2

(Available in English, French, Spanish and Russian)

Paris, 7 February 2000

Annexes: 2 (available in English only)

Subject: Argo Project

Action required: To inform the GOOS Project Office, within two months of receipt of this letter, of the name, address, phone and fax number and e-mail address of your national focal point for Argo

To: Permanent Representatives of Members of WMO
Member States of IOC (Action Addressees)

Dear Sir/Madam,

You will recall that the Thirteenth World Meteorological Congress (Geneva, 4-28 May 1999) and the Twentieth IOC Assembly (Paris, 29 June – 8 July 1999) both accepted the Argo project as an important component of the operational ocean observing system, as well as a major contribution to scientific research programmes. A copy of Resolution XX-6 of the IOC Assembly is given in Annex 1, and the relevant statement of WMO Cg-XIII is given in Annex 2 for information. The purpose of this letter, in accordance with Resolution XX-6, is to:

- (i) inform all IOC Member States and WMO Members (hereinafter jointly referred to as Member States) of the acceptance of the Argo Project by IOC and WMO;
- (ii) inform Member States how to access float data and determine float locations;
- (iii) indicate how Member States might participate in and benefit from the Argo Project; and
- (iv) appeal for international cooperation from Member States in making the Argo Project a success.

The Argo Project represents a major advance in global oceanography, made possible by the development of profiling floats during the World Ocean Circulation Experiment (WOCE). It will provide data operationally and globally for the first time on the temperature and salinity of the upper ocean. It is part of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), which is an intergovernmental operational programme sponsored by IOC, WMO, and UNEP, and also part of the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), and will directly support operational oceanography and meteorology through the provision of data in near real time. Argo will fill substantial gaps in the global coverage by the IOC-WMO Ship of Opportunity Programme (SOOP), which was developed under the Joint IOC-WMO Integrated Global Ocean Services System (IGOSS). Through global coverage, Argo will fill major gaps in the present observing system by expanding it to provide the global coverage of the upper ocean needed for integration with space-based measurements of the ocean surface in numerical models as the basis for the credible climate observing system required by the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The provision of Argo data in near real time will contribute to weather and climate forecasting, enabling Member States to better protect life and property and to plan effectively for the effects of seasonal to inter-annual variability. It will also serve a variety of important purposes in the research community, notably in support of the goals of the Climate Variability and Predictability (CLIVAR) Programme of the World Climate Research Programme.

The Argo Project was endorsed by the Fourth Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (Buenos Aires, November 1998), and subsequently during 1999 by the Steering Committees for GOOS, GCOS, and CLIVAR, as well as by the Intergovernmental Committee for GOOS (I-GOOS) at its fourth meeting (Paris, June 1999), and by the Twentieth IOC Assembly and the Thirteenth World Meteorological Congress.

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Argo Project floats will be deployed in such a way as to provide data from the open ocean every 3 degrees latitude x 3 degrees longitude square. The floats will drift at a depth of up to 2000m, for periods of up to 4 years. At intervals of about ten days they will rise to the surface, collecting information on temperature and salinity. They will transmit their information to designated data centres ashore via a communication satellite. Floats will be deployed from Volunteer Observing Ships, or Research Vessels, or (in remote areas) by aircraft.

Consistent with the data policies of WMO and IOC for data exchange, all Argo data will be available to all interested parties without restriction, both in near real-time and in delayed mode. The designated Argo data centres will perform initial quality control on profile data, and transmit profiles in near real time via the WMO's Global Telecommunications System (GTS) for operational forecast use. The data will then be subjected to a higher level of scientific quality control and made publicly available by the data centres in delayed mode within 3 months of collection. The WMO will provide a WMO GTS Bulletin of Argo data, enabling the data to be easily identified and extracted from the GTS.

Argo floats deployed on the high seas may drift into EEZs, as is presently the case with the surface drifters deployed by many Member States and coordinated through the WMO-IOC Data Buoy Co-operation Panel (DBCP). Recognizing this, Resolution XX-6 of the Twentieth IOC Assembly requires that *"the concerned coastal states must be informed in advance, through appropriate channels, of all deployments of profiling floats which might drift into waters under their jurisdiction, indicating the exact location of such deployments."*

To meet this requirement, the IOC is establishing an international Argo Information Centre staffed by a Co-ordinator, who will work directly under the supervision of Mr Etienne Charpentier, the Technical Co-ordinator of the DBCP and SOOP Programmes in Toulouse, France. The Centre will inform designated contact points in Member States about planned float deployments, how to track float positions, and how to access float data, in compliance with the IOC Resolution.

Overall operational coordination of the Argo floats in the context of a global ocean observing system will take place through the newly formed Joint WMO-IOC Technical Commission for Oceanography and Marine Meteorology (JCOMM).

Member States may participate in the Argo Project, either as individual members, or in regional groups. Participation may include: (i) procurement of floats from manufacturers; (ii) production of floats, by using existing designs which are available at nominal cost; (iii) logistical support for float deployments; (iv) data analysis and assimilation activities. Information about Argo can be found on the Argo web site at (<http://www.argo.ucsd.edu>). Advice on participation may be obtained from the Technical Coordinator, Mr Etienne Charpentier, at the Argo Information Centre (charpentier@cls.fr). The IOC and WMO capacity building programmes will help to provide training for developing countries to participate in and benefit from the programme, under the aegis of JCOMM, which is developing an integrated strategy for handling this and related training.

We would be grateful if you would provide the GOOS Project Office (GPO) at IOC headquarters in Paris (Attn. Dr Colin Summerhayes, e-mail c.summerhayes@unesco.org, fax +33 (0) 1 45 68 58 12), within two months of the receipt of this letter, with the name, address, phone and fax numbers and e-mail address of your national contact point for Argo, so that the GPO can provide this person with appropriate information.

Finally, we appeal for your co-operation in enabling this critically important international project to make the intergovernmental programmes of IOC and the WMO yet more successful in meeting the needs of important constituencies - notably the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Yours faithfully,

P. Bernal
Executive Secretary IOC

M.J.P. Jarraud
for the Secretary-General of WMO

cc: Members of Interim JCOMM Management Committee
Chairmen of GOOS and GCOS Steering Committees
Permanent Delegations of IOC Member States to UNESCO