

## **PWG assessing IOOS Enterprise**

### **Background/methods**

The Enterprise Excellence Preparatory Work Group (PWG) consisted of IOOS Advisory Committee members Scott Rayder, Sara Graves, Catherine Edwards, Eoin Howlett, and Molly McCammon. It was chaired by Edwards and McCammon. The PWG conducted a series of surveys and interviews during the fall of 2023 and winter/spring of 2024 to better understand the function and performance of the NOAA IOOS Enterprise components as reflected in the IOOS authorizing legislation: the Interagency Ocean Observation Committee (IOOC), the IOOS program office (PO), the IOOS Regional Associations (RAs), and the IOOS Advisory Committee (AC). For the IOOC, we met with the co-chairs and conducted a survey of its members. For the IOOS PO, we conducted interviews with the director, deputy director, operations division chief/former data program coordinator, and other key staff. For the IOOS RAs, we conducted a survey and one-on-one interviews with the directors. We consulted with the director of the IOOS Association (which is a non-profit representing all of the RAs) in developing the RA Director survey, which included questions about the RAs' working relationships with the Association and the Association's effectiveness. For the AC, we conducted a survey of its members; a summary of these results will inform the transition and operation of the next AC.

Two overarching themes emerged from the results of the surveys and interviews. These findings and related recommendations are given here. Raw data and their summaries are included as Appendices.

### **Theme 1: A perception of the insularity of IOOS at regional and national level limits the effectiveness of the Enterprise.**

#### **Findings:**

- a) The perceived insularity of the IOOS PO by the RAs, with regard to national and global agencies and programs (even within NOAA) and tribal governance, reduces the overall effectiveness of the IOOS Enterprise, and limits its ability to more fully integrate regional observations, incorporate traditional expertise and respond to emerging needs.
- b) The PO must both reach up (foster the big picture) and reach down (encourage more coordination at the regional and local level).
- c) The RAs do not always have the bandwidth or opportunities to connect their work with that of other agencies at the regional and national level, both inside and outside of NOAA, and would like the PO to be more proactive in fostering those opportunities.
- d) The PO leadership, regional coordinators, and domain program managers (e.g., HFR, data management, gliders) are not always aware of what the RAs are doing, their regional priorities, and potential opportunities for greater connections and integration.
- e) The IOOC does not have a deep understanding of the IOOS PO and RA needs and priorities, nor its relationship with the AC.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) The IOOS Enterprise components should increase the connections among the components so that there is a better understanding of the needs of the program and the leadership can more effectively advocate for the program and its components. Increased familiarity can create more opportunities for integration. Some recommended ways to achieve this goal follow.
  - The PO leadership should ensure that the regional coordinators and domain program managers have ample travel budgets and should require more travel out to the regions.
  - The IOOC, with support from the PO, should increase its understanding of the IOOS PO and RA priorities and its involvement with the AC and the overall IOOS program. The PO should coordinate with the IOOC to develop procedures that support that involvement, including processes for use of its ex-officio members of the AC.
  - The PO and the IOOC should assess their current partnerships at the national and regional levels and make stronger connections with other existing regional collaboration networks outside of NOAA (EPA, USACE, USGS, BOEM, etc.).
- 2) The NOAA Administrator and the PO should take a more proactive role in advocating for IOOS and the RAs and fostering further collaborations. Some recommended ways to achieve this goal follow.
  - The NOAA Administrator should make IOOS a priority during all levels of the budget process.
  - The NOAA Administrator should include IOOS as a collaboration partner at the level of Sea Grant, NERRS, Sanctuaries, and other regional programs.
  - The PO should advocate for the RAs as collaboration partners within NOAA and with other agency collaboration networks to fill critical data and information gaps.

**Theme 2: The IOOS Enterprise needs a strategic, long-term vision.****Findings:**

- a) The current IOOS PO Strategic Plan is more of an administrative/tactical work plan, and not “visionary”.
- b) PO and RAs are consumed with the operations of short-term funding opportunities (IRA and BIL) and annual budget cycles to the detriment of the overall health of the Enterprise.

**Recommendations:**

- 3) To strengthen the IOOS Enterprise, the PO, with the support of the NOAA Administrator, must develop a “true” strategic plan with a long-term vision of the program and its sustainability. Some recommended ways to achieve this goal follow.
  - NOAA leadership should make a commitment to provide the IOOS Enterprise with strategic and sustainable support.
  - The PO should give more attention to integration with existing programs and long-term needs so that IOOS can position itself as the entity that can observe and forecast what will be important now and into the future.

- The IOOS Association should develop a strategy to support long-term engagement, especially when considering engagement with tribes and First Nations.
- The PO should leverage the upcoming program review to develop the implementation of a strategic plan.

## **Appendices**

### Survey Summaries

Appendix 1: [IOOC Survey - Summary](#)

Appendix 2: [Regional Associations Survey- Summary](#)

Appendix 3: [FAC Self-Assessment - Summary](#)

### Survey Raw Data

Appendix 4: IOOC Survey - Raw Data

Appendix 5: Regional Associations Survey - Raw Data

Appendix 6: [FAC Self-Assessment Survey - Raw Data](#)