

News from GEBCO

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Launching NF-GEBCO Seabed 2030

NF-GEBCO Seabed 2030 – which will facilitate the complete mapping of the ocean floor by the year 2030 – as announced by Mr Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation (NF) at the UN Ocean Conference in New York on 6 June – is a collaborative project between the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) and The Nippon Foundation. GEBCO is the only long-term international project with a mandate to map the entire ocean floor.

The Nippon Foundation is planning to contribute US\$ 18.5 million for the first ten years of the project. The aspiration is for Seabed 2030 to compile all available and newly collected bathymetric data into a high quality, high resolution digital model of the ocean floor and to promote international efforts to collect new data.

The work will be done through the establishment of four Regional Data Assembly and Coordination Centres (RDACCs) and a Global Data Assembly and Coordination Centre (GDACC) based at the British Oceanographic Data Centre, National Oceanography Centre, United Kingdom. The RDACCs will be based at: the Alfred Wegener Institute, Germany, covering the Southern Ocean; the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, Wellington, New Zealand, covering the South and West Pacific Ocean; the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, USA, covering the Atlantic and Indian Oceans; and Stockholm University, Sweden, for the North Pacific and Arctic Ocean.

“It is emphasised that the ultimate objective is dependent on bringing the world community with us to map the gaps”, say GEBCO. Seabed 2030 will take responsibility for bringing collected depth data together, find and highlight the unmapped gaps, and help coordinate mapping by working with the established ocean mapping community within academia, offshore industry and government. A particular initiative will be to work with the fishing industry to increase the amount of data from fishing vessels that operate worldwide as well as recreational and merchant vessels. A working group with industry is planned through the World Ocean Council. The initiative of the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) on Crowd Source Bathymetry, of which Seabed 2030 is a part, will also be a contributor.

Seventy percent of the Earth is covered by the world’s oceans for which the bottom topography (bathymetry) is far less known than the surfaces of Mercury, Venus, Mars and the moons of several planets, including Earth’s. Yet knowledge of the shape of the seafloor is crucial for understanding ocean circulation patterns relating to regional and global ocean-atmosphere processes that distribute heat between the tropics and the poles – a key component of Earth’s climate system. Detailed measurements of depth are also critical for predicting tsunami inundation. In addition, ocean bathymetry is important for the study of tides, wave action, sediment transport, underwater geo-hazards, cable routing, fisheries management, resource exploration, establishment of sovereign rights over the extension of the continental shelf and military and defence applications.

According to GEBCO, “the more data we acquire about the details of the shape of the seabed, the more we recognise that the ocean and its floor are more dynamic than we ever thought. Given the vast expanse of the oceans of our planet, the goals of Seabed 2030 can only be achieved by international coordination and collaboration with regard to data acquisition, assimilation and compilation. Seabed 2030 therefore has a vital role to play in helping to coordinate and initiate new bathymetric surveys that target unmapped areas of our oceans. This remains a substantial challenge. With the ultimate objective of leaving no features of the world ocean floor larger than 100 metres unmapped, a series of targets with varying resolutions as a function of water depth will be set. But it will require a major international effort by the world community to reach the ultimate goal”.

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Notes to editors

GEBCO

The General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) is an organization that has worked with The Nippon Foundation for more than a decade. Founded more than 100 years ago with a vision of portraying the world's ocean floor, GEBCO operates under the auspices of its two parent organizations, the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. It is the only international project mandated to map the ocean floor of the entire world.

The Nippon Foundation

The Nippon Foundation, since its establishment in 1962 by Ryoichi Sasakawa as the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, has put considerable effort into the ocean and maritime field, as well addressing a wide-ranging variety of social issues at home and abroad, in areas including humanitarian activities, public welfare, and international cooperation. The Foundation's main objective in the ocean and maritime sphere is to pass on the riches of the oceans to future generations by cultivating human resources able to create a better future for the seas, and building networks to enable those people and organizations to work together. It addresses the problems related to the ocean by implementing global programmes in conjunction with leading research institutions and universities, governments, NGOs, and UN agencies.

