**Special Session Title: Strengthening Regional Ocean Governance**

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**Organisers:** Secretariat of the South African Chapter of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Academic Group (SA IORAG) and SA IORAG Network Members

**Background**

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was launched in 1997 with the broad objective to promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the Region. The Association is an economic cooperative community of littoral and island States whose shores are washed by the Indian Ocean, comprising twenty-three Member States and ten Dialogue Partners\(^1\). WIOMSA has had Observer Status within IORA as of 2019.

Development priorities of IORA are focused on the six priority areas and two cross-cutting areas of: Maritime Safety and Security; Trade and Investment Facilitation; Fisheries Management; Disaster and Risk Management; Academic Cooperation, Science and Technology; Tourism and Cultural Exchanges; Transformation and Gender Equality (cross-cutting theme); and Blue Economy (cross-cutting theme). The IORAG constitutes the academic arm of the IORA and its role is to be both advisory and catalytic.

South Africa, as the current chair of the IORAG, seeks to engage with other IORA Member States and the WIOMSA Secretariat to strengthen regional cooperation and collaboration in the region.

**Session Objectives and Outputs**

With the start of the UN Ocean Decade 2021-2030, the focus on ocean governance has been highlighted as an area that would benefit from strengthened collaboration and networking.

This session will seek to address this theme by engaging through the regional platform the WIOMSA Symposium provides, to bring together academics and other stakeholders working through WIOMSA and IORA to discuss topics relevant to both associations of sub-regional, regional and international importance.

The special session will aim to build on the previous sessions the SA IORAG Secretariat has facilitated at the WIOMSA Symposium in 2017 and 2019; continue promoting IORA among the African marine science community; engage with WIOMSA as a recent IORA Observer member; collate information on regional ocean governance programmes and policy needs; and develop ocean governance research themes.

A report will be made available to all session participants and the WIOMSA and IORA networks.

**Target Audience**

All participants working within the IORA priority areas listed above, and ocean governance.

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Tentative Special Session Programme

1. Welcome and Opening/Introduction to IORA and the IORAG – Prof Juliet Hermes (NRF-SAEON/IORAG Chair)

2. Research needs identified within IORA – Ms Nicole du Plessis (NRF-SAEON/SA IORAG Secretariat)

3. Overview of the IORA Special Fund – Ms Nicole du Plessis

4. Regional ocean governance research and policy engagement programmes – TBC

5. Break out sessions to discuss ocean governance needs and possible research outputs

6. Closing/Wrap-up - Prof Juliet Hermes