

UNESCO BIOSPHERE ISLE OF MAN BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1. In 2016, the Isle of Man was admitted to UNESCO’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Biosphere reserves are ‘learning places for sustainable development’, internationally recognised within the framework of UNESCO’s Programme on Man and the Biosphere (“MAB”).
- 1.2. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status is reviewed every ten years. The Isle of Man ten-year periodic review is due to be delivered to UNESCO in September 2026; with the review outcome likely to follow in summer 2027.
- 1.3. One of the key messages of Our Island Plan is for a “vibrant community set in a beautiful UNESCO Biosphere, with sustainability and resilience at the heart of everything we do”. The Isle of Man is an international site of excellence where active conservation sits alongside responsible development, recognising the balance of people and the rest of nature, and celebrating and protecting the breadth and range of biodiversity.
- 1.4. The **vision** of UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man (“UBIOM”) is “an Island where people and the rest of nature have a sustainable future”. Biosphere Reserves are required to have a management plan or equivalent. The UBIOM plan is its current [Vision and Strategy 2021-2026](#), which will be succeeded by a new strategy developed during the periodic review process, to be completed in 2026.
- 1.5. The UBIOM Board (“the Board”) has the roles and responsibilities set out in these Terms of Reference.

2. REMIT AND GOVERNANCE

- 2.1. The Board will report to the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (“DEFA”). The DEFA Minister delegates authority for UBIOM to the Board as the primary decision-making and advisory body supporting UBIOM’s vision of “Working together for a sustainable future”, including approval of the management plan and any subsequent action plans. Decisions or outputs of the Board will be shared with DEFA before being finalised or made public.
- 2.2. The **mission** of the Board is to be the custodian of the UBIOM vision and brand. It is the overarching coordination body, ensuring accountability and direction in the UBIOM initiative.
- 2.3. The Board is responsible for the effective review, revision, oversight and direction of UBIOM, based on clear and measurable objectives to be defined in the Biosphere Strategy 2027-2036 and subsequent action plans.

- 2.4. The Board is a non-statutory body, has no statutory powers and cannot make commitments regarding Government financial or human resources.
- 2.5. The Board will be provided with regular financial reports by the Coordinator for their information. Revenue decisions will continue to be the responsibility of DEFA Officers including the Coordinator, ensuring compliance with the Government's financial regulations and policies and alerting the Board Chair and DEFA Chief Officer to any risk of contravention. Any bids or business cases for additional funding will be signed off by the Board before submission.
- 2.6. The Board's **objectives** are to:
- Ensure the requirements of the UNESCO MAB programme (including relevant strategies, action plans, and guidelines) are met and that progress is monitored.
 - Ensure the aims and objectives of the current and future strategy (or other equivalent to a management plan) are met, and that progress is monitored.
 - Work with and guide the UBIOM Team in furthering progress in the specific domains and accountabilities relevant to individual board members (see 3.1).
 - Ensure participation of the public, private and third sectors of the Isle of Man in carrying out the functions of UBIOM.
 - Support the management of human use and activities in the buffer zone or zones, as described in the [Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves](#), by working with the relevant organisations and bodies.
 - Identify and maximise potential opportunities in the UBIOM, including opportunities for businesses to deliver their corporate sustainability objectives
 - Explore options for a self-funding UBIOM proposition to enhance engagement with the business and the wider Isle of Man community.
 - Provide oversight to external representations to UNESCO and the UK MAB National Committee.
 - Provide periodic reports to UBIOM stakeholder groups and partners.
 - Ensure the UBIOM budget is managed in accordance with government accounting controls and is underpinned by value for money. The Chief Officer of DEFA will remain the accounting officer.
- 2.7. Subgroups may be formed for the delivery of specific tasks with the agreement of the Board. Subgroups will agree their own Terms of Reference on formation (see [Appendix I - Subgroup Terms of Reference template](#)). Subgroup Terms of Reference can be considered as appendices to these Terms of Reference.
- 2.8. The Isle of Man Government provides officer resource and budget to support UBIOM. The UBIOM Team is based in DEFA and reports to its Director of Environment. The Team will provide regular updates to the Board, with the Biosphere Coordinator ("the Coordinator") attended as a non-voting member of the Board and other team members invited to attend and contribute to meetings as required.
- 2.9. These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Board. Any amendments to them will be agreed by consensus and must be approved by the DEFA Minister or a delegated representative.

- 2.10. While the Board aims to grow UBIOM beyond Government, these Terms of Reference are written with reference to the [Isle of Man Government Corporate Governance Principles 2005](#).
- 2.11. When invited to represent the Board and/or UBIOM at e.g. public events, meetings, or interviews, a discussion or briefing should be held beforehand with the Chair, involving or referring to the Coordinator as appropriate. A briefing document with key information and messages will be provided to all Board members and will be reviewed and updated at least once a year.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1. The Board's membership is drawn from Government Departments, the private sector and non-governmental organisations ("NGO"s) that have an interest in or are responsible for the various activities that affect our Biosphere. Diversity is important within the Board: see [the Equality Act 2017 Code on Services, Public Functions and Associations](#). Diverse groups/organisations will actively be encouraged to apply to join the Board, and board members will be encouraged to think about diversity when selecting representatives.

Chair of the Board ("the Chair"): is a part-time, two-year position with a possible two-year extension, filled through an open recruitment process.

Board Members: voluntary domain-specific positions filled by application. The structure will vary depending on the needs of UBIOM, but will include representatives from key areas:

- **Community** (e.g. youth; community groups; social and cultural NGOs and experts in social, cultural, and related matters)
- **Economy** (e.g. private sector and industry; experts in economic and related matters, - particularly sustainable economics)
- **Environment** (e.g. environmental NGOs; experts in environmental, ecological, and related matters)
- **Governance & Strategy** (e.g. those with expertise to provide guidance on structures, systems, and assessment; Government departments; political representatives; local authorities)

See [Appendix II Roles, domains and accountabilities](#) for further information on current structure; see the [Biosphere website](#) for current membership.

Observer status will be granted to the Environment Director of DEFA, to facilitate the strategic direction of UBIOM delivery.

- 3.2. The Board's structure and membership will be reviewed annually (note points 2.7-4.5) along with these Terms of Reference (see [5.1](#)). The Board may also amend its membership between these annual reviews if necessary and appropriate. Any amendments will be agreed by consensus and must also be approved by the Minister of

DEFA or the Minister's delegated representative. Amendments will be recorded in the Version Table (see [VERSION TABLE](#)).

- 3.3. The Chair will be appointed following an open recruitment process. The recruitment panel will comprise of one or more Board members a senior representative of DEFA and a member of the UBIOM Team. The Chair will be contracted with DEFA; they will hold the position on an initial two-year term, to be reviewed after three months, with a possible extension of two years.
- 3.4. Applications to become members will be considered by the Board and ultimately decided by the Chair. DEFA reserves the right to veto applications for membership of the Board.
- 3.5. A minimum of eight (8) attendees, including one (1) of the three (3) senior Government representatives with voting rights, is required for a meeting of the Board to be quorate. In the absence of the Chair, the meeting will agree an acting Chair.
- 3.6. The Board may invite other parties to attend meetings as the agenda requires.

4. MEMBERSHIP TERMS

- 4.1. Membership of the Board will be for an initial period of three years, with the option of a further term of either two or three years, as recommended by the Chair and subject to the confirmation of DEFA: considering the needs of the Board and the terms of other members.
- 4.2. Members will serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, to be followed by a three-year period before they can reapply for membership of the Board.
- 4.3. In the event of a member resigning during their first term, they may apply again for membership at any time; if successful, it would be considered their second term. In the event of a member resigning during their second term, they must wait three years before applying for membership again.
- 4.4. If a member becomes Chair, their term limits reset, noting that the Chair can serve two terms of two years.
- 4.5. Membership of the Board shall cease:
 - automatically at the end of a term of membership (unless renewed);
 - in the event of resignation by the member; or
 - in the event of expulsion or termination by the decision of the Chair and/or DEFA (e.g. based on the Government Code of Conduct).
- 4.6. Where a member does not attend two meetings in a row without having submitted apologies one week in advance, the Board may reallocate membership to another representative or organisation from the relevant sector.

- 4.7. In addition to the involvement of members in Board meetings, members may be invited to attend events or other meetings on behalf of the Board.

5. MEETINGS AND MINUTES

- 5.1. DEFA will provide or arrange secretariat support for the board meetings. All minutes and other Board related documents may be subject to a Freedom of Information (FOI) enquiry.
- 5.2. The Board will initially meet a minimum of six times per year, or bi-monthly. This is to be reviewed by the Board after the initial year, or earlier if the Board so decides, and potentially revised.
- 5.3. The Chief Minister and Government CEO will be invited to join meetings twice a year, preferably six months apart. One meeting will focus on strategic planning, and the other will provide a progress update on UBIOM activities and alignment with Government priorities. The timing and agenda for these meetings will be agreed in advance by the Chair in consultation with the Board and Government representatives; see also [2.2](#).
- 5.4. Reports and Papers for items to be included on the agenda should be sent to the Chair and secretariat at least two weeks before the meeting.
- 5.5. Papers and an agenda will be approved by the Chair and circulated to members and observers at one week before the meeting.
- 5.6. Members will declare any conflicts of interest with items on the agenda at the start of the meeting, if not before.
- 5.7. Minutes of Board meetings will be drafted and circulated to members within five working days of the meeting and will be agreed by the Board at the next following meeting, prior to publication on the UBIOM website.
- 5.8. The board will agree action points which will be circulated to the relevant persons once the meeting minutes are agreed, reviewing progress at the next meeting.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 6.1. Whilst transparency is important, there are nevertheless circumstances in which, for good reasons, confidentiality must be observed. Board members must be sensitive to communication protocols and disclosures and confirm with the Chair the timing and nature of information to be shared collectively.
- 6.2. The Board will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2015 and Manx data protection laws, complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements as applicable in the Isle of Man.

- 6.3. Nominated Board members will be required to make a full disclosure of interests prior to their appointment in line with the conflict of interest policy. Upon appointment, Board members will be required to complete a register of interests, which will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, at a minimum once a year. In addition to the filing of disclosures, where members see a potential or recognised conflict of interest, they should make a disclosure, at the first opportunity, to the Chair and the other Board members.
- 6.4. Should a potential conflict be identified by a third party (e.g. another member of the board), this situation must be brought to the attention of the Chair for due consideration. If the conflicted member is the Chair, as perceived by a third party, the matter must be raised with the Chief Officer and the Minister of DEFA.
- 6.5. The Chair may request a Board member to leave the board, and DEFA also reserves the right to do so, in the unlikely event that a situation should arise where a Board member’s continued attendance will bring the reputation of the Board, UBIOM, DEFA or the Government into disrepute.
- 6.6. Each case will be considered by the Minister of DEFA, and, in all cases, the Minister has the power, without appeal, to remove a Board member.
- 6.7. A Board member is at liberty to resign from the Board at any time. In such circumstances, the remaining Board members will work with the Chair to identify a suitable replacement from the relevant sector.

See also:

Appendix I: Template Board Subgroup Terms of Reference

Appendix II: Roles, Domains, and Accountabilities

VERSION TABLE

Version	Amendments	Approved (Board)	Approved (DEFA)
1.0	Original	Jan 2026	
1.1	Amended 5.4 for papers and reports to be received 2 weeks prior to meetings, and 5.5 for papers to be sent to Board members one week prior to meetings.	Mar 2026	
1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.2 Inviting CM and CEO of IOMG twice a year – removed (the CM and CEO can still be invited to meetings). • 2.6 (now 2.5) Amended to clarify that financial decisions remain the responsibility of DEFA Officers, but that the Board will need to approve any bids for additional funding. • 3.1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Amended to remove “by nomination” 	Mar 2026	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplified membership structure, current roles are still included in Annex II ○ Environment Director invited as observer – removed section on potential exclusion from meetings. ○ Removed reference to CM/CEO as per 2.2 ● 3.3 Amended to align with Chair’s term ● 3.4 Removed reference to initial recruitment 		
--	---	--	--