

Meeting of the executive committee of the European Marine Research Stations Network, Venice July 1 2000

Participants

Giorgio Bernardi, Anastasios Eleftheriou (Vice-President), Jean-Pierre Féral (Secretary - Treasurer), Carlo H.R. Heip (President/co-organiser), Pierre Lasserre (DIVERSITAS/co-organiser), Richard Warwick

Special guests: Luigi Alberotanza (CNR-ISDGM Venice), Bruno Battaglia (Univ. Padua), Sandro Rabitti (CNR-IBM Venice)

Liaison and logistic organisation (UNESCO Venice office): Anne Ajoux, Philippe Pypaert

1. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA, one point (12) was added. The final agenda consisted of 20 points.

2. REPORT AND ACTION LIST OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Paris March 1999)

E.C.

J.-P. Féral has scanned the 5th RTD and extracted items that can be profitable for MARS. The information has been transmitted to the MARS executive committee.

Teaching activity

(continuation of the TMR practical training course on biodiversity organized in Banyuls-sur-mer by J.-P. Féral in March 1998)

Two European courses were proposed for organisation by MARS:

*Molecular Ecology (person in charge D. Marino, Naples)

*Ecological modelling (person in charge: C. Heip, Yerseke)

Both actions are in preparation

A series of workshops organised by the Naples Zoological Station was held in Ischia in May 2000, including Selection in Eukaryotes and Microbial Diversity and Epidemics. Courses that are planned by MARS member institutes must be made known through the Newsletter and the Web Site.

List-server for MARS

J.-P. Féral had contacts with the CNRS.

MARS newsletter and Internet site

After some difficulties with the software enterprise that was contracted to build it, the MARS site is operational (<http://www.marsnetwork.org/>). Mainly due to the lack of texts, the MARS newsletter is still not published on a regular time basis. However, the committee thinks there is still need for a paper version.

Co-optation of Members of the Executive Committee

Four members were co-opted during the Paris meeting. A German scientist (F. Bucholz) should be approached.

Contribution of the marine laboratories

C. Heip and H. Hummel have send the invoice for the membership fees for 2000 to the present membership. The fee has remained at 500 €.

Opening of the network (full members, associated members)

A letter has been sent by C. Heip to potential new member institutes in order to

open the network to as many interested parties as possible. Membership has been updated (particularly from countries of ex-Yugoslavia). The problem of the membership fee for countries with currency export restrictions and for small laboratories was discussed. Opening of the network to Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean still requires an additional effort. Association with countries from the Middle East and the Magreb has to be discussed. A list of the new members will be published after the Conference of Directors.

Co-operation with US, Japanese and other networks

The co-operation with NAML is reinforced. This should also be possible with Asia, through DIVERSITAS. The workshop on Biodiversity in Yerseke has been organised and produced a second position paper on the implementation of marine biodiversity research. The US NAML was represented by K. Tenore.

Possibility of grants for short training stays in the marine labs

Such training fellowships to learn techniques in another MARS lab are announced on the MARS web page but should be stimulated more. An evaluation structure has still to be created.

General meeting of MARS

This meeting is organised and will be hosted by UNESCO, in Venice in October 2000. The total number of participants will be 60 to 70. US representatives will be invited.

Participation to IBOY (International Biodiversity Observation Year)

J.-P. Féral first proposed to IBOY an action concerning bioindicators: Biological diversity at sea, a set of sustainable indicators: a first step for a long-term monitoring, which was accepted. Then, this theme was integrated as the second work package of the MARS EU Concerted Action BIOMARE. This action, which includes 3 work packages, is now the contribution of MARS to IBOY.

About 75% of the proposed actions during the last meeting of the executive committee have been executed.

3. MARS STATUTORY BUSINESS

MARS is now a foundation with legal incorporation in the Netherlands, which creates a problem because the by-laws of the network are in Dutch. These should be translated before the Conference of Directors. The mandate of the executive committee as decided in Paris is two years which is now seen to be too short. It makes the system flexible but fragile. The executive itself is allowed to change the by-laws but changes are to be prepared carefully and need support from the network members. A few changes discussed were the duration of the mandate (four years instead of two), the possibility of two consecutive mandates (as in IABO) and the new mandates of Past President and President Elect that would allow for continuity. The size of the executive is large as its composition is on a regional representative basis. It consists of the President, two Vice Presidents, one for the Mediterranean and one for the Atlantic Region, the Secretary/Treasurer, and four members, two for the Med and two for the Atlantic. The Executive has also four co-opted members. A reduction of the size should be discussed with the members.

In order to stimulate the funding agencies, MARS must increase visibility by its activity in training and education and in research. Perhaps an NGO status should be considered. The principle of a proper program of PhD's by the marine stations was discussed. The secretarial activity of MARS is now supported by the

Netherlands Institute of Ecology through the appointment of an Executive Secretary (Dr. Herman Hummel) assisting the President and the Secretary/Treasurer. This situation depends on the place of residence of the President. In order to improve continuity it is proposed to consider a permanent secretariat housed by the Venice Office of UNESCO. This secretariat would take care of communications, including the Newsletter and the Web Site, but the decision power would remain with the Executive. The executive committee is grateful to UNESCO for the proposition and supported the idea to try this for a period for 1 or 2 years.

4. NEW MEMBERS OF MARS: ACTIONS BY THE PRESIDENT

A list of potential members should be established among the true marine labs and their associates in Europe. This is the role of the secretariat. Meanwhile a series of letters have gone out to those potential members that were known at the meeting.

5. MEMBERSHIP DUES 2000

It was decided to keep the membership dues at 500 €. The membership fee for institutes of Eastern Europe that want to become full members may perhaps be paid by UNESCO. There is still no decision on Associate Members.

6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR THE EXECUTIVE

A new executive should be formed. The nomination committee consists of Pierre Lasserre (chair person), Richard Warwick (secretary) and Bruno Battaglia (member). Candidatures are expected until mid September 2000. This will be made know in the invitation letter for the Conference of Directors.

7. EU: BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCES ORGANISED BY EU COMMISSION AND PRESIDENCY

A high-level EU meeting on biodiversity was organised in the Azores but the agenda contained almost nothing concerning the marine realm. The next of these high-level EU meetings will be organized by the Commission as the Presidency (France) is not interested. After France, the EU presidency goes to Belgium. P. Lasserre will contact R. Barbault and P. Vernet and C. Heip will contact colleagues in Belgium to try to put more emphasis on marine biodiversity in these meetings in the future. The apparent lack of interest in marine biodiversity, which is in contrast with the situation for terrestrial biodiversity, requires some effort from marine ecologists. A short text for a folder (based on the two summaries of the ESF workshop on biodiversity [C. Heip + R. Warwick]) will be proposed with an illustration [J.-P. Féral]. This folder will be edited by UNESCO.

8. EU: CONCERTED ACTION BIOMARE

This concerted action on the Implementation of Marine Biodiversity Research was successfully proposed after the Yerseke workshop and is coordinated by the Netherlands Institute of Ecology. It consists of 3 work packages, one of which is coordinated by Mark Costelloe who has accepted a new position outside Europe. The President will ask him how he sees the continuation of his activities in the future. J.-P. Féral will contact UNEP Mediterranean program to inform them about the progress of the action on bioindicators. Concertation should also be done with SBSSTA, IOC, MAB, and ICES. J.P. Feral will draft a letter for this purpose.

9. EU: 6TH FRAMEWORK PROGRAM

Thasso Eleftheriou will give an overview of the discussions taking place at the advisory level in Autumn and. K-G. Barthel will be invited to the Conference of Directors to give an overview of the activities from the point of view of the Commission. A think tank of high level is the Europolis group that is developing

new scenario's for science, technology and innovation policies in the European area. The link between research and industry is expected to be strengthened again in the sixth framework programme.

10. ESF: RELATIONSHIP WITH MARINE BOARD

A formal association between the Marine Board of ESF and MARS is proposed. UNESCO is already joining the board as an observer and MARS will ask for the same status, allowing the Marine Board as a co-opted member in the MARS Executive Board. This will help to disseminate information. ESF will give its expertise advising on workshop programs, priorities, scientific diving,... An European meeting for determining the standards for European Scientific Diving (ESD) and Advanced Scientific Diving (AESD) will be held in Banyuls-sur-mer on 24th October 2000 (J.-P. Féral). Information will be given through the MARS Web Page.

11. ESF/EU: EURESCO CONFERENCES 2001 AND 2003

Two scientific meetings on Coastal Marine Biodiversity will be organized in 2001 (Corinth) and 2003. The first one is also sponsored by the EU as a Euroconference. See the programs in annex.

12. GLOBAL MARINE BIODIVERSITY FORUM 2002

A forum will be organized in Naples. An international committee will be proposed by the end of October by G. Bernardi and P. Lasserre. The meeting aims at 90-100 participants.

13. ESF: EUROCORES: THE EUROPEAN MARINE BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE

The EUROCORES initiative was launched by Eric Banda. It concerns topics with a clear European dimension that should be funded through the national science foundations. To succeed, it needs to be supported by 4 countries. There are large subsets of money (millions of €). It must also attract people, which are not in the field. It was decided to discuss the European Marine Biodiversity Initiative as a EUROCORES project to the Marine Board and to discuss its implementation at the MARS Conference of Directors. A letter of information and a first outline of the EMBI have been sent to all the MARS members. Information on the Eurocores initiative can be obtained from the web-site of the ESF <http://www.esf.org/>

14. THE CENSUS OF MARINE LIFE

This US initiative is now expanding worldwide and a first meeting between US scientists and scientists from other countries worldwide is planned at a workshop to be held in Crete. C. Heip is co-organising this meeting and together with T. Eleftheriou will represent MARS.

15. NAML

The progress of NAML is discussed. Apparently similar difficulties exist in the start-up and the growth of the network as exist for MARS and it is very useful to compare the approach to the networking mechanism. NAML has started a pilot project for its action Labnet: Monitoring of harmful algal blooms, an activity that is also well developed in Europe with at least two networks known by the Executive. Monitoring on line is a very important development in the US and is starting in Europe as well. MARS and NAML should continue to strive at becoming the backbone of a worldwide network of marine stations.

16. IBOY AND DIVERSITAS

The SSC of DIVERSITAS is dominated by US scientists but funding has for a (large) part come from Europe. With the departure of the executive director its

activities have been weak over the last year or so. Funding is now solved and the programme may have a fresh start. Attraction of a good new director is essential. The question is raised whether a Euro-Diversitas is an option to increase Europe's influence in the steering of this programme.

17. MARS NEWSLETTER

UNESCO proposes to fund a position in Venice for a secretary (around 40 000 US \$ per year), fluent in English. One of the tasks of this secretary will be to prepare 2 issues each year of the newsletter at least. It will also be the organisation of the 3 next meetings.

18. MARS WEB PAGE

The Web Page is operational and maintained by the Netherlands Institute of Ecology. This can remain as it is provided a good working relationship with the secretariat is established. Information for the Web Page has to come from the Executive and from the membership at large and this is the main bottleneck for the moment.

19. THE MARS CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS IN VENICE, 13-15 OCTOBER 2000

This item was discussed at length and resulted in the programme given in annex

20. NEW MARS INITIATIVES

J.-P. Féral proposed 2 new actions:

a series of TV-films on the marine stations in Europe (history, fundamental discoveries, Nobel Price Winners working at the stations, specificity and originality, future developments,...). The principle is the association of national TV in co-production. Funding will partly be asked to E.U. A questionnaire will be sent to the marine stations to prepare a synopsis which will be submitted to the executive. A small committee will be formed to deal with this action.

a self updating data basis of marine biodiversity references. It will be the scientific community itself that will build the data base. People send, through a standardized form, references which, in their opinion should be in such a bibliographic data basis. "Robots" will analyze the proposed title, send it automatically to specialist referees. As soon as 2 referees answer "yes", the new reference enters the basis and is accessible by Internet. The research by Internet is made using authors, journals, words of the title, key-words. The final list is printable. Both projects received agreement of the executive.

Jean-Pierre Féral, Secretary-treasurer Banyuls-sur-mer, September 2000.