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An Overview of EurOcean

-European Centre for Information on Marine Science and Technology-

Sharing Information, Creating Synergies

Summary

EurOcean – European Centre for Information on Marine Science and Technology – was officially created on 28 February 2002 as a result of a joint French-Portuguese initiative. EurOcean is now composed of fourteen Member Organisations and three Cooperating Members. The main objectives of EurOcean are to: 1) facilitate the access to information; 2) promote the development of indicators on marine science and technology, environment, and socio-economics; 3) encourage cooperation between the existing European organisations; 4) contribute to the preparation of syntheses. The implementation of these objectives is designed in collaboration with all interested relevant partners in order to avoid any duplication and to maximize benefits. Special attention is given to the end-users in order to ensure the efficiency and the usefulness of the activities developed by EurOcean. The main activity of EurOcean is presently to develop electronic tools and information useful for all actors with interest in marine science and technology in Europe. Priority is being given to the inventory of the marine research infrastructures in Europe, to the inventory of European funded projects in marine RDT and activities of Public Outreach.

1. Creating EurOcean

The creation of a European Centre for Information on Marine Science and Technology (EurOcean) results from a joint French – Portuguese initiative, of which the purpose is to implement the recommendations of the report *“Towards a new marine dimension for Europe through research and technological development”* adopted on 4 May 2000 by a group of governmental experts from 15 European countries brought together at the invitation of the Portuguese Minister for Science and Technology. This report, which was presented to the European Council for Research on 15 June 2000, recognised **“the benefit of a focal point for information on marine science and technology**, which could:

- facilitate access to relevant information;
- provide access and develop quantitative indicators, including socio-economic data;
- compile and prepare information on trends on marine S&T;
- help prepare syntheses for decision-makers;
- contribute to enhance cooperation between scientific and technological institutions, industry and other stakeholders and,
- promote public awareness and educational programmes on marine issues.”

Portugal’s Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and Ifremer (French Research Institute for the Exploitation of the Sea) decided to implement the recommendations of the above-mentioned report and signed a cooperation agreement to set up a centre for information on marine science and technology - EurOcean, of which the creation was officialized on 28 February 2002.

2. Membership and Secretariat

EurOcean is established as a non-profit organisation of which the Members are bound by a Memorandum of Understanding. The *EurOcean Foundation* is the legal representation of EurOcean. It has been established under the Dutch Law figure of a Stichting Foundation and it has been incorporated on December 13, 2007. EurOcean Foundation has a Legal Representation in Portugal since January 2009.

Member Organisations of EurOcean

- Flanders Marine Institute (Belgium)
- Foundation for Science and Technology (Portugal)
- National Institute for Research and Development of Marine Geology and Geoecology (Romania)
- French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (France)
- Spanish Institute of Oceanography (Spain)
- Institute of Marine Research (Norway)
- Institute of Oceanology (Poland)
- Marine Institute (Ireland)
- Malta Council for Science and Technology (Malta)
- Azores Regional Fund of Science and Technology (Portugal)
- Nausicaä (France)
- Technopôle Brest-Iroise (France)
- National Research Council (Italy)
- International Ocean Institute (IOI), Headquarters

Cooperating Members

- Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO)
- Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)
- Fondation de Malte (Malte)

The Member Organisations shall be major national, regional and European organisations involved in marine science, technology and related activities such as coordination, decision-making, financing, information management and dissemination to a large variety of end-users.

A permanent Office, based in Lisbon, is presently staffed with an Executive-Director, four Science Officers. Technical support to the activities of EurOcean is also provided by the Member Organisations.

3. EurOcean Information Centre

Marine science and technology are key elements for marine competitiveness. The access to information on marine research is essential for the industry as well as for the decision-makers at local, national and European levels. More specifically, it is only in considering the European dimension that appropriate visibility and credibility will be obtained. Furthermore, it has to be recognised that the existing information related to marine/maritime affairs is often dispersed, fragmented and uneasy to access.

EurOcean intends to be a focal point of contact for a cross-sectorial approach to marine research issues. The four main objectives of the information centre are to:

- facilitate the access to valuable information related to research activities and technological development;
- stimulate the development of marine quantitative indicators in marine science and technology, environment and socio-economics;
- encourage communication between the European organisations involved in marine research activities and,
- contribute to the preparation of syntheses as requested by decision-makers.

It has to be noted that there is a clear difference and no duplication of activities at all between the functions of the National Oceanographic Data Centres (NODC) and the functions of EurOcean. The functions of EurOcean are only related to information management while the NODCs have the duty to manage oceanographic data. As an example, EurOcean may provide the information on where to access oceanographic data by identifying the links to the appropriate oceanographic centres but definitely will not produce or manage the data.

On-going activities of EurOcean

- Developing an Internet portal for marine science and technology in Europe and collecting relevant information with priority given to:
 - European marine research infrastructures;
 - European marine research funded projects and,
 - Public Outreach materials.
- Establishing working relationships with other European organisations in order to share information and to promote synergy.
- Participating in European Funded Projects, to enlarge its influence in Europe, to promote the marine sciences and technologies and have alternative sources of funding.
- Organising EurOcean: enlarging the membership and fostering cooperation among European organisations.

4. EurOcean Internet Portal (www.eurocean.org)

There is a large variety of websites in Europe in the maritime sectors but, most of the time, communication and exchange of information between these sites are limited. When developing its Internet portal, EurOcean is cautious to avoid any duplication and to give added value to the content of the existing repositories of marine information. Indeed EurOcean intends to promote synergy through its Internet portal between:

- the various science and technology sectors related to the oceans;
- the diverse actors and users of marine research including: academics and scholars, policy-makers, decision-makers, private sector, defence, NGOs, media, educators, and public at large and,
- the different institutions concerned with marine research and its applications, at the regional, national, European and international levels.

Implementing the objectives of the portal is a challenging and long-term commitment which needs to be supported by a well-thought strategy in order to be successful. Such a strategy is based on:

- a pragmatic, step by step, approach to develop the categories of the portal. For this reason, the efforts are presently focused on research infrastructures and on European marine research funded projects and,
- being proactive on cooperating with potential partners sharing common objectives with EurOcean.

5. Cooperation with other European Organisations

There is a rich diversity of European institutions and organisations with very specific thematic and geographic coverage. This is an asset for Europe which should be optimized since the communication between these various groups is rather limited. An information network is being established in order to facilitate the exchange of information between these European organisations and to give easy access to policy makers and the private sector to relevant expertise, in particular with regard to complex and highly integrated marine issues. This should enhance holistic, integrated and long-term approaches to marine policy development.

To conclude, bridging information gaps in marine science and technology in Europe is a challenging and ambitious initiative. Today, the information technology through the Internet provides a unique opportunity to tackle this challenge. In order for EurOcean to be successful, the information made available in its Internet portal has to correspond to the expectations of the end-users, which means that they need to be closely associated to the development of this project. This is the strategy put in place by EurOcean for the fulfilment of its objectives.

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