

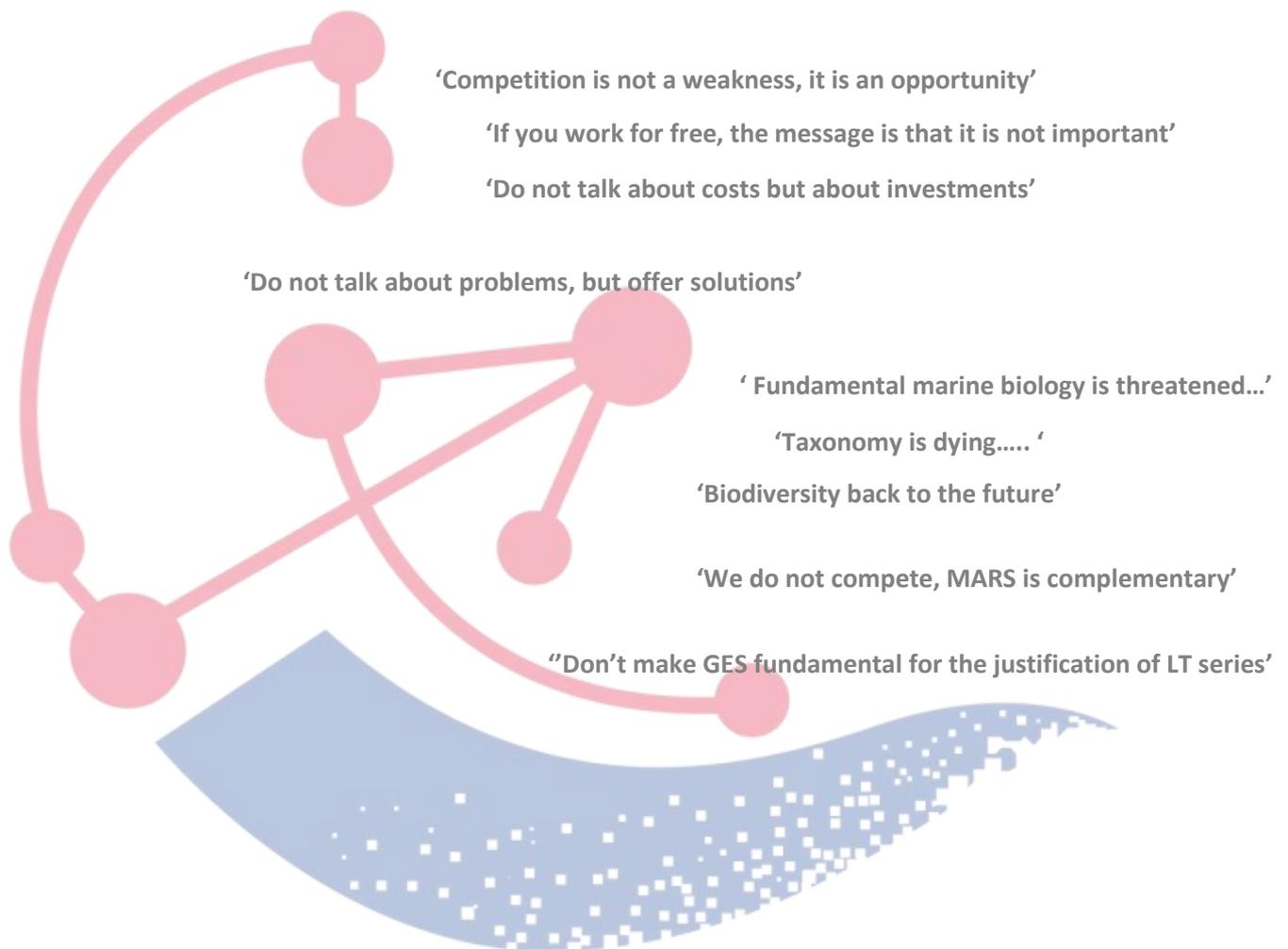
MARS Directors meeting

Challenges for the future of marine stations

- Executive summary

Santander, Spain

31 January – 2 February 2017



Local hosts:

- Instituto de Hidráulica Ambiental "IH Cantabria" (IHC), Universidad de Cantabria
- Centro Oceanográfico de Santander (COS-IEO)
- Museo Marítimo del Cantábrico (MMC)

Rapporteur:

- MARS secretariat

Preamble

The main aim of the MARS Directors Meeting was to discuss and shape the future of MARS as a network of marine stations and institutes: to reassess its niche and scope as the basis for the establishment of a science policy agenda for the near future. The discussion was based on a discussion document for a forum discussion on the Internet (see Box 1), prepared by Herman Hummel (NIOZ, MARS President) and the MARS secretariat.

Box 1. Introduction to the discussion on “Challenges for the future of marine stations”

Herman Hummel, Pim van Avesaath, Christiaan Hummel- MARS President and Secretariat -

During the last decade MARS has organised several scoping and networking activities to advance the research at marine stations and to make it future-proof.

In June 2008 at a joint MARS-MarBEF-MGE meeting in Brussels the future of MARS was discussed. The question was raised whether MARS, as residual body of the marine Networks of Excellence, should take up a role as umbrella for other networks, programmes and projects.

During the meeting several challenging goals for MARS and marine stations were formulated:

- Identify and promote research priorities in marine sciences
- Create critical mass of expertise in marine sciences, from genes to ecosystems
- Facilitate common strategic funding initiatives and joint acquisition
- Provide stronger collaboration and shared access to facilities
- Develop common approaches to data, and data structures that are fit for purpose
- Increase high quality training opportunities (for early career scientists)
- Link to relevant symposia series (EMBS, ECSA)
- Strengthen the communication, joint representation, and outreach
- Develop the stakeholder engagement and advisory role to policy and public

In the following years MARS achieved to strengthen its cooperation with the EMBS symposium series, to develop training opportunities through the Travel Awards, and stronger collaboration in marine biodiversity observation through the EMBOS action on a European Marine Biodiversity Observatory System.

Yet, with the arrival of other infrastructural EC initiatives the role of MARS as an umbrella moved to the background, and some of the other goals were addressed by initiatives as EuroMarine, regarding the critical mass of expertise, and LIFEWATCH and EMODNET regarding common approaches to data and data structures.

During the last years MARS developed also the international cooperation with similar networks from other continents, as from the USA (NAML), Japan (JAMBIO), Australia and Canada, through the creation of the World Association of Marine Stations.

A prime action was to establish the World Atlas of Marine Stations. Joining forces may better demonstrate the importance of marine stations.

In the meantime, as a consequence of the economic crisis and changes in funding policy, funds for curiosity driven and fundamental research and for sustained observation of e.g. marine biodiversity have decreased all over Europe, having an impact on the research at marine stations to such a level that some of the oldest marine stations of Europe are at risk. Due to a lack of resource the competition with not only other fields of research, but also among stations may be fierce.

Consequently the strategy of marine stations is nowadays more internally focused on the individual (short term) survival of the institute. Mainly the larger institutions are capable of keeping enough budget flow to carry out the full range from marine research, experiments and field work to education. Another consequence is that Investments in organizations like MARS is not obvious anymore.

MARS may therefore adapt its strategy to the new situation. As a member of MARS you have an important say in this. To this end, we are welcoming you to the discussions of the coming MARS Directors meeting in Santander (30 January – 2 February 2017).

In preparation of these discussions at the MARS Directors meeting we want to open a Forum Discussion through the MARS website.

As a MARS member you are cordially invited to add to the Forum discussion.

We are convinced that together we may come to better and advanced ideas on developing a new strategy for MARS and its marine station to consolidate or advance its niche and position in the scientific and political landscape in Europe and beyond.

The topics of the Forum discussion do follow largely the topics to be discussed too in Santander, being as follows:

Topic 1: A strong profile for marine stations: now and in the future

MARS has served for more than 20 years as a promoter of research at marine stations.

Which elements in its history do deliver sufficient ground to build our future on?

Elements that may contribute to this topic may be:

- History of MARS as a basis for the future?
- The unique aspects and added value of MARS and its marine stations
- Critical mass and representativeness of marine stations
- Distinction from other networks (as Marine Board, EuroMarine)

Topic 2: External pressures on research programmes of marine stations

Although marine stations may have adapted their research programming over the years, it may be that the present-day changes in science policy, with a stronger emphasis on strategic research, and less on curiosity-driven research, have been too fast to follow. Moreover, the downsizing of research budgets may have caused changes too. To what extent should, and can, marine stations follow these externally driven changes in research programming? To cope with the aforementioned budgetary and disciplinary changes in research, what are the measures to assure a prosperous future for the marine stations.

Issues to be discussed may include:

- Fundamental versus applied marine research: a battle or opportunities?
- Are national and EC programmes, with e.g. an emphasis on “blue growth” too much dictating the research agenda?
- Are the national and EC programmes in the coming years still sufficient relevant to marine stations?
- Which interactions with policy and politics have to be furthered?
- Are links with (national and EC) directives (e.g. MSFD including measuring Biodiversity and Good Environmental Status) a key to follow?

Topic 3: A new Action Plan for marine stations

To be prepared for the future we may need to compose a plan with joint actions.

- Is such a plan felt to be needed for the future functioning of marine stations?
- Can the next questions be answered positively, and if yes what concrete issues should be included?
- Is a Business Plan for MARS and the marine stations needed?
- What are elements for an Action Plan for advancing activities and research at marine stations?
- Should we focus more on joint overarching programmes of activities, as e.g. long-term coastal observation series (EMBOS, ARMS, ...)?
- Is globalization of joint activities a key-issue?

Topic 4: Increasing the visibility of marine stations

The future of marine stations depends also on their visibility towards stakeholders and the public at large.

How can we promote the visibility? Actions might encompass the following

- The new MARS website and Newsletter
- The World Atlas of Marine Stations (WAMS)
- Travel awards and Transnational Access
- Joint actions to the public

Executive Summary

Challenges for the future of marine stations

There is a clear niche for MARS, linked to the specific characteristics and activities of marine biological stations. It should be considered whether MARS should focus on these specific characteristics more strongly and 'go back to its roots' again with respect to its profile and membership. Thereby, MARS can strengthen its own identity and give an added value to other initiatives through participation as the MARS foundation or by its members.

MARS has lost contact with overarching funding agencies, as the EC, and should consider to start a stronger lobby. Funds will be needed for this, and a clear strategy. Therefore a mission document and a business plan will be produced. The strategy for this will be further discussed and developed in the Executive Board.

To strengthen the identity and role of MARS a new overarching research programme involving all marine stations will be composed. Long-term observation of biodiversity was adopted as a main theme for the overarching programme. In the programme several projects can be developed, as e.g. "The estimation of the historical biodiversity index" (see box 2).

The programme will be developed first within MARS and then, if sufficient resources are available, up-scaled to the global level. The way forward is to prepare a proposal and publish a position paper. A taskforce for the further development of this overarching programme will be established by the Executive Board, and co-authors will be contacted.

The projects in the programme may have a strong link with GES and the MSFD and can be linked with EMODNET and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The overarching programme may also help to give the further development of WAMS an impetus.

A World Congress of Directors of Marine Stations is planned to be organized under the auspice of IOC.

Business section

A new website has been installed for better outreach of MARS. Several activities will be added to the website to further increase the visibility. MARS will also become active on social media (Twitter, Face-book).

MARS fees are low and a raise could be considered. It should be accompanied with additional services for its members.

The reserves could be used to invest more funding in training, MARS awards (for travel and courses), the scoping exercise, including EMBOS actions, and the overarching programme.

MARS medal of Honor

During the conference dinner, Prof. Anastasios (Tasso) Eleftheriou was awarded the MARS Medal of Honor by Herman Hummel, President of MARS, for his work as one of the founding fathers of the MARS network, his outstanding and long-lasting contribution to marine sciences in general, and his continuous support to MARS ever since.

Main action points

The original full name of the MARS network might be adopted again to focus more on the identity of marine stations (task: Executive Board).

A position paper on the costs of biodiversity monitoring (and sustained observations) will be written (task: Christos Arvanitidis & Executive Board)

A taskforce will be installed for the further development of a new overarching programme, a position paper, and business plan (task: Executive Board)

EMBOS can be adopted as one of the projects in the overarching programme of MARS. The feasibility (and financial support) will be assessed (task: Executive Board).

The additional support of courses by marine stations will be evaluated (task: Executive Board).