

Ocean Biodiversity Informatics

Report from International Conference on "Marine Biodiversity Data Management"

Hamburg, Germany
29th November to 1st December 2004



This conference was an initiative of the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange programme (IODE), The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), Census of Marine Life (CoML) and Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS)



By Edward Vanden Berghe & Mark Costello

MARINE BIOLOGICAL DATA, AS MANY OTHER TYPES OF DATA, are often collected on a relatively narrow geographical scope, and over a short time-span. Data gathering is often part of short-term projects or PhD or MSc theses. Yet, in order to answer questions related to global change, we need massive databases on long-term, large-scale patterns. How do we integrate individual databases into datasets that allow large-scale, long-term analyses? What is the role of international organisations such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and US Food and Agricultural Administration (FAO) in this? What is the role of the Census of Marine Life (CoML), the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), and of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)? Which others have a role to play? These were some of the questions that were discussed during the "Ocean Biodiversity Informatics" (OBI) conference, held from 29 November to 1 December 2004 in Hamburg, Germany.

Co-organisers were ICES, International Association for Biological Oceanography (IABO) and the Taxonomic Database Working Group (TDWG)



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Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) acted as conference secretariat, and the German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency (BSH) was the local organiser. Funding was provided by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, by the EU through the MarBEF

Local organisers were the German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency (BSH) and the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ)



Conference opening ceremony.

Funding by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, by the EU (MarBEF NoE), the support of participants, and the World Data Centre for Oceanography in Silver Spring, Maryland, US





Participants at the OBI conference.

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OBI offered a forum in which marine biological data managers could discuss the state of the field and exchange ideas on how to further develop marine biological data systems. There were 169 participants in total, coming from 36 different countries and all continents. It was a true international gathering with an interesting mix of managers and users of data. There were 42 oral and 56 poster presentations. A 'Book of Abstracts' was distributed during the conference; papers in preparation are proceedings and will be published in a theme section of *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

Apart from the scientific sessions with oral presentations, there were two discussion sessions. The first was organised on the evening of the second day, specifically to discuss data management issues for the MarBEF network. Input for the discussion was generated during the MarBEF Data Management e-meeting from 25 October to 5 November 2004. Suggestions were made on how to further develop ERMS and EUROBIS. The closing session was again a discussion session, with 'sharing of information' as the main topic. This resulted in the adoption of a conference statement (see box) on the need to share data and to make the data freely available over the internet. ●

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OBI Conference Statement

We note that increased availability and sharing of data:

- is good scientific practice and necessary for advancement of science;
- enables greater understanding through more data being available from different places and times;
- improves quality control due to better data organisation and discovery of errors during analysis;
- secures data from loss.

The advantages of free and open data-sharing have been determining factors while developing the data exchange policy of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO.

We call on scientists, politicians, funding agencies and the Community to be proactive in recognising data's:

- overall cost/benefit;
- importance to science;
- long-term benefits to society and the environment;
- increased value by being publicly available.

We also call upon employers of scientists, academic institutions, funding agencies and editors of scientific journals to:

- promote online availability of data used in published papers;
- promote comprehensive documentation of data, including metadata and information on the quality of the data;
- reward online publication of peer-reviewed electronic publications and online databases in the same way conventional paper publications are rewarded in the hiring and promotion of scientists;
- encourage and support scientists to share currently unavailable data by placing them in the public domain in accordance with publicly available standards, or in formats compatible with other users.



Marine-B listserver

To facilitate communication of the project aims to as broad an audience as possible, and to disseminate the results of the project, the **Marine-B** (Marine Biodiversity) electronic mailing list is being utilised by MarBEF.

To join the list

This process will generate a piece of mail inviting you, as the owner, to add yourself to the list. Send an email to: listserv@listserv.heanet.ie and leave the subject line blank. In the main part of the mail, type in the command:-
subscribe MARINE-B <firstname surname>
Make sure that you do not add a signature at the end of the mail. You will then receive a message saying you are subscribed to the list.

To send mail to the list

When you want to send mail to the list, just enter MARINE-B@listserv.heanet.ie in the 'To' field and your mail message will be distributed to the people who have signed on to the list.

If you wish to check the list archives, go to:
<http://listserv.heanet.ie/marine-b.html>.

The website <http://www.lsoft.com/> may be useful if you wish to get further information about listservers and the running of the list.

If you have any problems, please email Olive Heffernan (olive@ecoserve.ie).

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