

EMODnet Secretariat Activity Report Year 1 (September 2013-August 2014)

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1 Background

In the first phase of the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) from 2009 onwards, six internet portals were established. Each one provides access to marine data, metadata and data products of a specific type. In May 2012 a call for tender (MARE/2012/10) launched Phase II of the project with an aim to increase the resolution and extend coverage to all EU waters. A number of entirely new EMODnet activities were launched at the same time, including the creation of a new portal on human activities and two sea-basin checkpoints (MARE/2012/11) to assess the observation capacity in the North Sea and the Mediterranean. Tenders for several other sea-basin checkpoints are expected in late 2014. Since September 2013 the Flanders Government is supporting the development of a central entry portal www.emodnet.eu providing access to the thematic EMODnet portals and which should, over time, allow to retrieval data from multiple portals at the same time.

To support the widening scope and growing number of partners and activities in EMODnet Phase II, DG MARE launched a tender in 2012 (MARE/2012/15) for a service contract to administer and monitor EMODnet, and the Flanders Government made office space available at the InnovOcean site in Ostend (Belgium) to host its core staff. The EMODnet Secretariat contract was awarded to Seascope Consultants Ltd in September 2013 for an initial period of two years, to provide high-level coordination and technical skills to support (i) the monitoring of EMODnet projects; (ii) the dissemination of their results, and (iii) the analysis of user feedback and statistics. The overarching aim is to develop a more effective, efficient and fit for purpose EMODnet.

2 Purpose of this document

The aim of this document is to (i) provide a summary of the work done by the Secretariat in the first year of the contract; (ii) highlight important achievements and remaining challenges, and (iii) make suggestions to strengthen existing and future EMODnet projects and activities.

This report does not correspond to a contractual requirement. Nevertheless, the Secretariat wishes to submit an annual activity report to transmit clear and transparent information about the running of the Secretariat and potential issues that may need attention in relation to ongoing and future EMODnet components. In view of the heavy reporting obligations imposed on the thematic and regional lots, it is appropriate that the Secretariat follows the same philosophy and practice.

3 Summary of activities of the Secretariat

3.1 Highlights in first year of operation

- September-October 2013: **Smooth and swift installation of the Secretariat office** and staff at the InnovOcean site of Ostend with speedy start of the Secretariat operation.
- September to November 2013: **Secretariat successfully establishes itself in the EMODnet community** by engaging intensively with the main EMODnet actors from the thematic and regional lots to get acquainted, clarify the role of Secretariat and gain support to ensure open communication and pave the way for productive collaboration.



- October 2013: EMODnet **central portal landing page (www.emodnet.eu) online** after several meetings between the Secretariat and portal development team at VLIZ.
- October 2013: Secretariat's **first attendance** and presentation of work plan at **20th MODEG Meeting**.
- October 2013: Secretariat establishes profile for the Maritime Forum (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/maritimeforum/>) and publishes **first post online** (Meeting minutes of the 20th MODEG Meeting).
- December 2013: Establishment of Terms of Reference as **foundation of the EMODnet Steering Committee**.
- December 2013: Organisation of **1st EMODnet Steering Committee Meeting** with all EMODnet phase II coordinators, reaching agreement on indicators to track progress and core elements of the central portal and case studies.
- December 2013: Upon request from MODEG, establishment of a high level **EMODnet Communication Plan and Strategy** as basis for coordinated and targeted activities to strengthen the visibility and dissemination of EMODnet outputs.
- February 2014: Production of the first **EMODnet leaflet**, which was prepared voluntarily by the Secretariat beyond the charge of the service contract.
- February 2014: EMODnet **social media** (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook) were launched on the central portal.
- February 2014: **Inauguration of the EMODnet Secretariat Office** at the InnovOcean site with back-to-back meetings of MODEG and the Steering Committee.
- April 2013: First public presentation of EMODnet Secretariat at a high-level external event (SEAS-ERA final Conference of Member State funding agencies).
- May 2014: Successful contribution and representation of **EMODnet at the European Maritime Day 2014** through (i) co-organisation of a workshop on ocean observation and marine data with a presentation from the EMODnet Secretariat, and (ii) presentation of EMODnet activities at a dedicated EMODnet information booth.
- June 2014: 2nd Steering Committee with (for the first time) representatives of all thematic and regional lots.

3.2 Activities in relation to the main tasks and contractual obligations

The EMODnet Secretariat provides a number of services to DG MARE and the EMODnet community, some of which are clearly defined in the service contract, others to a lesser extent and some not at all as they relate to new activities or needs that have arisen at later date. In what follows we provide an overview of the activities in view of the initial Secretariat brief.

3.2.1 Organisation of the EMODnet Central Portal Steering Committee

Task: Organisation of Steering Committee, preparation of Steering Committee meetings and publishing findings of the Steering Committee (meeting reports)

As one of its first activities, the EMODnet Secretariat engaged with the coordinators of the thematic and regional lots to establish the EMODnet Steering Committee as the coordination body

to guide the development of the central portal and exchange information to address common challenges and opportunities. From the onset, the Secretariat has taken the initiative to (i) develop clear and transparent guidelines for its operation; (ii) convene and Chair the meetings; (iii) publish its outputs on the Maritime Forum, and (iv) follow up on the actions agreed. Based on the inputs of the various parties, the Secretariat drafted the Terms of Reference (ToR) that outline the composition, main roles and functioning of the Steering Committee. These terms were agreed at the first meeting (available on the Maritime Forum).

Initially, it was not foreseen to involve the sea-basin checkpoint coordinators in the Steering Committee, but it was considered useful to include them as observers to be able to efficiently coordinate the activities and communicate with all the major parties involved.

During the first year, two Steering Committee meetings took place: one in Brussels (16-17 December 2013) and one in Rome (4-5 June 2014). Important achievements of the Steering Committee include: (i) reaching agreement on the progress indicators, reporting process and core elements of the central portal and case studies; (ii) establishment of two ad hoc working groups to support the user-focus and operational developments (User Group and Technical Working Group), and (iii) gradual improvements to coherent presentation of the various portals (e.g. all the thematic portals have implemented the decision to change the URLs to the agreed standard format www.emodnet-XXXXXXX.eu).

The next Steering Committee meeting will take place in Brussels on 9-10 December 2014.

3.2.2 Support to the Marine Observation and Data Expert Group (MODEG)

Task: Provide meetings summaries of MODEG meetings and publish them on the Maritime Forum

The Secretariat not only supports MODEG by providing meeting summaries, but *de facto* acts as the facilitator of this advisory body by supporting DG MARE and the Chair in compiling the agenda, inviting speakers, convening the meetings and maintaining proper communication with MODEG members by email.

Since the installation of the Secretariat, two meetings have taken place: 20th MODEG meeting in Brussels on 21-22 October 2013; and 21st MODEG meeting in Ostend on 19-20 February 2014. Each time, minutes were posted on the Maritime Forum

The next MODEG Meeting will take place on 1-2 October 2014 in Brussels.

3.2.3 Monitoring of EMODnet Portals and overall progress

Tasks:

- **Verify bi-monthly reports from portals**
- **Test the portals to identify weaknesses, user-friendliness, coverage of parameters, signing-In procedures, speed of delivery, etc.**
- **Develop indicators to show progress for each portal – number of databases connected, amount of data downloaded etc.**
- **Preparing every two months a short report to be published on the EU's maritime forum summarising progress in EMODnet**

To be able to cope with the progress monitoring of the seven thematic portals, as a priority the Secretariat reached agreement with the EMODnet lots on a common standard report format and synchronised delivery of the reports (with a transition period) as well as establishing a process to evaluate the portals' progress based on these reports. Although this took considerable effort, a new reporting format and schedule was agreed and implemented from January 2014 onwards. At the core of the new reporting scheme is the need to provide information using progress indicators developed by the Secretariat with input from MODEG. The Secretariat worked closely with the portals to select appropriate metrics for each indicator to measure progress relevant for each portal. While the application of progress metrics/indicators will be a continuous process of refinement and adjustment, the new reporting practices and monitoring approach represents a major step forward.

The Secretariat has duly reported on current and future prospects of EMODnet activities on the Maritime Forum with major progress updates in November 2013, February 2014, March 2014, May 2014 and July 2014.

The testing of the portals as mentioned in the service contract (i.e. to identify weaknesses, user-friendliness, coverage of parameters, signing-In procedures, speed of delivery, data quality) has many aspects and cannot be considered as one activity under 'progress monitoring'. The Secretariat has performed the following activities to test the portals:

- Baseline assessment of all portals at the onset of the project: to have a baseline against which to evaluate at the start of Phase II (for those already participating in Phase I with a pilot portal);
- Technical testing: the Secretariat evaluated each of the portals in close collaboration with the operational managers to obtain information about technical specifications;
- Following the baseline assessment and technical testing, several recommendations were made, particularly in terms of presentation of the information, harmonization between the portals and relationship with the central portal to improve the user experience;
- User feedback was reported to the lot coordinators or Steering Committee for follow up if relevant, and the Secretariat also actively pursued user feedback in a dedicated user-survey (see details below under 3.2.5).

3.2.4 Improving visibility and dissemination of EMODnet results

Tasks:

- **Prepare a half-hour online demonstration of EMODnet and demonstrate it on 20 occasions - 5 times in Brussels and 15 times in other locations in the EU;**
- **Prepare two 10-minute videos of EMODnet;**
- **Prepare an EMODnet brochure;**
- **Prepare an annual 10-page summary report on EMODnet progress;**
- **Prepare a 10-page summary report summarising and comparing findings from the two sea-basin checkpoints;**
- **Prepare a 10-page summary report that summarises work done by the secretariat, highlights challenges and makes suggestions for the future running of a permanent secretariat.**

The main Secretariat activities in first year of operation include:

- Establishment of a high-level EMODnet Communication Plan and Strategy as basis for coordinated and targeted activities to strengthen the visibility and dissemination of EMODnet outputs;
- Presentations of EMODnet to a wide audience at a range of events (see Annex I). Participation in a range of upcoming high profile events later in 2014 is planned, including EurOCEAN2014, 7th EuroGOOS Conference and Seatech week;
- Production of an EMODnet leaflet to inform stakeholders and interested public, while preparations for the more comprehensive EMODnet brochure are advancing steadily. The script for the first videos is nearly complete with filming scheduled to start in September 2014.

An annual summary report on EMODnet progress will be published in August 2014 on the Maritime Forum.

3.2.5 Collecting feedback from EMODnet users

Task: monitor feedback from EMODnet users, ensure that any questions are answered by the thematic assembly groups and include summaries of feedback received in the bi-monthly and annual reports.

With assistance from the various EMODnet lots, the Secretariat monitors feedback from EMODnet users as reported by mail and in bi-monthly reports and intervenes when necessary to activate thematic assembly groups to respond to request or suggestions. In addition, the Secretariat has performed a user survey including in-depth interviews with a set of users for the Biology, Physics and Bathymetry portals. The responsible assembly groups are implementing suggestions where possible and relevant while evaluations of other portals are in preparation.

3.3 Activities beyond the service contract

The following additional activities were performed by the Secretariat because they were deemed important but were not envisaged in the initial remit of the Secretariat:

- **User survey with in-depth interviews:** during the first 6 months of operation, the number of spontaneous feedback items from users on the EMODnet services was considered to be too limited to obtain a realistic understanding of the usefulness and use-friendliness of the portals. The Secretariat therefore decided to collect feedback from a targeted group of users in a survey with follow-up interviews to complement this information.
- **Launch EMODnet User Group:** for the same reason as above, the Secretariat created an Ad Hoc User Group under the EMODnet Steering Committee to provide high-level guidance to the development of the projects, in particular the central portal. The Terms of Reference of this Group have been agreed. Invited Members will be asked to attend a workshop in November 2014.
- **Publication of leaflet:** the Secretariat produced an EMODnet leaflet to advertise EMODnet and its central portal to increase its visibility.
- **Guidance to the EMODnet sea-basin Checkpoints:** initially the work of the Secretariat was not envisaged to entail much interaction with the sea-basin checkpoints, except for analysis of their yearly reports and summary of their findings. However, it soon became apparent that these new EMODnet projects could not be considered separate from the other activities and in fact required more guidance at least at their onset.
- **Managing EMODnet Social media:** with the new central portal came a set of new communication tools such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook as well as the opportunity to use the website for dissemination of EMODnet activities and products. Upon request from the website developers and the Steering Committee the Secretariat has taken responsibility to manage these accounts as part of the external communication efforts. This also includes content management and editing of central portal main pages, with dedicated support from the VLIZ EMODnet team.

3.4 Reporting and internal communication

The EMODnet Secretariat reports to MODEG and the European Commission and maintains a practice of open exchange of information with all partners involved, including posting of bi-monthly progress reports and other relevant updates on the Maritime Forum. It also provides regular updates and information to the EMODnet Steering Committee, i.e. the coordinators of the EMODnet projects, to ensure efficient internal communication and stimulate a collaborative network approach.

3.5 Human resources committed to the Secretariat

The EMODnet Secretariat, hosted by the Flemish Government at the InnovOcean site in Oostende (Belgium), is provided by Seascope Consultants Ltd (www.seascopeconsultants.co.uk). In the first year of operation, the EMODnet Secretariat team has comprised four people: two people providing full time dedicated support to DG MARE and the EMODnet community: Jan-Bart Calewaert (Head of the EMODnet Secretariat) and Liesbeth Renders (Marine Data Analyst at the EMODnet Secretariat). Two further members of the Secretariat team provide support for specific activities: Vikki Gunn (dissemination materials) and Phil Weaver (management support and Chair of the Steering Committee).

4 Preliminary observations and recommendations

4.1 General operation

4.1.1 EMODnet Steering Committee

The set-up of the EMODnet Steering Committee was smooth and the first two meetings were constructive and productive. Including representatives from the sea-basin checkpoints proved worthwhile as it improved the flow of internal information and strengthened the Steering Committee's impact, even if it entailed more work for the Steering Committee and Secretariat to keep these additional projects fully engaged. To avoid fatigue and overburdening the thematic and regional lot coordinators, the frequency of meetings should be kept to a minimum: ideally 2 meetings per year with a third meeting only if required. The meetings should remain clearly separate from MODEG Meetings but could be organised back to back on one occasion so that the EMODnet coordinators can report to MODEG.

In the initial meetings, a significant amount of time was dedicated to informing each other about the workplan and Phase II deliverables of each lot. Subsequent meetings should dedicate more time to discussing the main challenges and agreeing on actions to address them. To this end, the Secretariat will select a number of key issues well in advance of the meetings and initiate preparatory work and discussions with the relevant partners prior to the meeting. This will further increase the efficiency of the Steering Committee.

4.1.2 MODEG

With a total of 21 meetings to date, MODEG has been running since 2008 with about two meetings per year to discuss general European marine observation and data matters and EMODnet in particular. Two MODEG meetings have been organised since the Secretariat became operational and two more are expected to take place before MODEG is replaced by a new advisory body in early 2015. During this period, several MODEG members suggested that the Secretariat considered developing a new Terms of Reference (ToR) for MODEG to supplement the *modus operandi* established in 2008, outlining the remit, responsibilities and *modus operandi*. However, in view of the fact that MODEG will be disbanded early 2015, it was decided in consultation with DG MARE to develop a ToR and *modus operandi* for this new Expert Group upon its launch. To avoid conflict of interest, it is highly recommended that the EMODnet Steering Committee members are not eligible for membership of the 'new MODEG' to avoid conflict of interest.

MODEG meets about twice a year and this seems to be appropriate also for a new advisory body. On one occasion per year the new advisory body could be organised back-to-back with the EMODnet Steering Committee meeting so that SC members can provide progress updates directly to this group and receive feedback.

4.1.3 Thematic lots

All EMODnet thematic lots kicked off in 2013 and are well underway, completing their first deliverables in 2014. All lot coordinators participated constructively in the development process of the progress indicators and new reporting scheme. Nevertheless, large differences in reporting approaches still exist, so the challenge for the second year will be to ensure that reported metrics/indicators provide meaningful information that allows progress tracking and integrated assessment over time. Much work remains to ensure that the appearance and presentation of the

portals is fully harmonised, with proper cross-linking with the central portal to provide more intuitive and efficient navigation for users.

The following preliminary recommendations are suggested:

- Service Level Agreements: while certain requirements are stipulated in the current contracts for thematic data portals, only limited specifications are provided in terms of minimum standards of operation, e.g. the number of concurrent users, maximum downtime, messages to display when portals are under maintenance or being upgraded, bandwidth, etc. It is therefore recommended that these minimum requirements are defined and included in Service Level Agreements as part of the contracts for thematic lots in EMODnet Phase III.
- Partner logos: to strengthen the visibility of EMODnet, it is recommended that the next phase requires partner organisations to include a clearly-visible EMODnet logo on their websites.
- Building in flexibility: In order to respond to recommendations from core users and stakeholders, be it to provide additional data products or to improve the user-friendliness of the portal set-up, it is advisable to include a level of 'accountability' for the thematic assembly groups to incorporate recommendations from evaluators and users (MODEG, the ad hoc User Working Group etc.). This may require them to allocate budget in their proposals to allow for this level of flexibility.

For a more complete assessment of the thematic lots we refer to the EMODnet progress updates posted on the Maritime Forum as well as to other reports from the Secretariat on user feedback and technical aspects.

4.1.4 Sea-basin checkpoints

It is too early to evaluate the existing checkpoints as both started only recently. However, the following aspects are worth highlighting:

- Both checkpoints are tasked to create a website/portal and with new checkpoints on the horizon there is a risk of ending up with a jungle of EMODnet websites and portals that may be confusing for users. It is therefore recommended that current and future checkpoints make maximum use of the existing portals and EMODnet presence on the web, and where possible use the EMODnet central portal as an information hub to disseminate generic project information.
- Currently, sea-basin checkpoint representatives participate in the Steering Committee and MODEG meetings on a voluntary basis. It would be better if coordinators of future checkpoints were obliged to attend at least two Steering Committee meetings and one MODEG meeting per year (making three meetings in total per year). Likewise, it would be good if this were included as an obligation in future contracts for thematic lots (phase III).
- The first two sea-basin checkpoints are not obliged to provide bi-monthly reports in the same manner as the thematic lots. However, to make progress reporting easier and more complete, it would be desirable to invite future checkpoints to submit bi-monthly progress reports.

4.1.5 Single sign in

The Secretariat strongly believes that it is critical to move towards a single EMODnet sign-on procedure if EMODnet is ever to become accepted by a wide group of users. This view is largely shared by the EMODnet community. For this reason, this topic has been brought to the EMODnet Steering Committee and Technical Working Group for consideration, whilst several projects are working closely with the underlying data suppliers and networks to come to a satisfactory solution. It seems to be unlikely that it is a technical bottleneck; rather it appears that the underlying networks and data providers who currently implement restrictions on use of data and require some sort of login or licencing procedure are unenthusiastic about relinquishing their own system, either because it is too much work to implement changes or they fear losing some level of control. Significant pressure should be exerted on those groups who are in position to develop and implement appropriate solutions.

4.1.6 Secretariat

It is too early to provide advice or recommendations on the long-term operation of the EMODnet Secretariat; this will be done as part of the Secretariat's formal reporting requirements towards the end of Year 2 (August 2015). However, at this stage it is already clear that the Secretariat has allocated more resources to the operation of the Secretariat than those called for in the tender/service contract. This was necessary to provide appropriate level of guidance to the new EMODnet projects and respond to new and unanticipated challenges (see also Section 3.3). Taking on these additional tasks was deemed essential to support the long term development of EMODnet and ensure the Secretariat would live up to the expectations of both the network itself and the wider stakeholder community. It is anticipated that the workload will only increase as new projects are added in the current and next phase of EMODnet.

ANNEX I - Meetings attended

Meeting	Date	Attended by	Organised by
Mediterranean Sea Checkpoint kick-off meeting	18/10/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders (Remotely by webex)	Mediterranean Sea Checkpoint
20st MODEG Meeting	21-22/10/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders	DG MARE and EMODnet Secretariat
EMODnet central portal meeting with VLIZ	05/11/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders	EMODnet Secretariat
Meeting between the Regional Operational Oceanography Systems (ROOS) and EMODnet	18/11/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert	DG MARE
North Sea Checkpoint kick-off meeting	02/12/2013	Vikki Gunn	North Sea Checkpoint
EMODnet Steering Committee and JPI Oceans information meeting	17/12/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Vikki Gunn, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat
EMODnet Secretariat and IODE Project Office Meeting	18/12/2013	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Phil Weaver	IODE Project Office
1 st VLIZ seminar of 2014	10/01/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert (Speaker)	VLIZ
Visit of DG MARE to InnovOcean site	29/01/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat and Flemish Ministry for Science and Innovation (EWI)
EMODnet central portal meeting with VLIZ	07/02/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders	EMODnet Secretariat
EMODnet Secretariat Office inauguration	19/02/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Vikki Gunn, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver (Speaker)	EMODnet Secretariat
21 st MODEG Meeting	19-20/02/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat and DG MARE
EMODnet Steering Committee on data ingestion	20/02/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Vikki Gunn, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat

SEAS-ERA final Conference	25/02/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert (Speaker)	SEAS-ERA project coordinator (CSIC)
EMODnet Secretariat and EMODnet central portal on serving CISE Community	14/03/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert	EMODnet Secretariat
Meeting with Solent University on EMODnet videos	15/04/2014	Vikki Gunn	EMODnet Secretariat
Meeting between EMODnet and BONUS Secretariats on data ingestion from BONUS research	09/05/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders	EMODnet Secretariat
European Maritime Day 2014	19-20/05/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert (workshop speaker) and Liesbeth Renders	DG MARE & local organisers
2 nd Steering Committee Meeting	4-5/06/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat
Jerico Summer School	17/06/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert (Speaker)	Deltares, NL
Meeting on data ingestion	26/06/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert	DG MARE
Meeting on central portal development with VLIZ	29/06/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert	EMODnet Secretariat
Meeting with Rijkswaterstaat on Member States perspectives related to MSFD reporting	24/07/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert	EMODnet Secretariat
EMODnet and IODE Project office on IODE training activities	24/10/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert and Liesbeth Renders	EMODnet Secretariat
1 st EMODnet Steering Committee Meeting	16-17/12/2014	Jan-Bart Calewaert, Vikki Gunn, Liesbeth Renders and Phil Weaver	EMODnet Secretariat