

# EMODnet Portals

## Discussion document on user evaluation feedback of the thematic portals

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One of the first activities after its installation, from September to November 2013 the EMODnet Secretariat completed an initial baseline survey of the thematic portals. The conclusions of this assessment with recommendations to improve the coherence and presentation of the various portals were outlined in an EMODnet Portal Harmonization document which was presented to the EMODnet Steering Committee at its first Meeting in December 2013 (see 1<sup>st</sup> Steering Committee Meeting Document 11 - Portal guidelines and standardization). This document also provided guidelines and templates for the new EMODnet portals and websites from the Human activities lot and the sea-basin checkpoints.

Next, the Secretariat conducted a user-evaluation with experts and representatives of marine sectors. Currently (May 2014), assessments have been completed for the biology, physics and bathymetry portals and chemistry is in progress. The survey consisted of, per thematic portal, about 5-6 users representing research, policy, industry (renewables, marine environmental consultancy), conservation NGOs who were asked to 'explore' the portal (entry via [www.EMODnet.eu](http://www.EMODnet.eu)) and provide feedback on the service via an online questionnaire. Additional information and clarification was gathered with a follow up phone-call using a semi-structured approach. Feedback focussed on EMODnet as a data discovery service along the following themes: tools/navigation/search/products. This approach was taken to ensure an in depth review with as much detailed comments as possible which is often not achievable with a lengthy questionnaire with limited response rates.

The overall feedback on EMODnet was positive with regards to the objective of providing a marine gateway to European marine data. However, all the users mentioned that there needs to be (i) a refinement of the user guidance and (ii) refocussing of the information on the thematic and central portals to target more the users rather than the funders in terms of the nature of the information and how it is presented. The overall achievement of providing access would be re-enforced with a refining of the service and outlining the current state of the deliverables. This would make users realise that it is an ongoing initiative to which they can contribute by improving the service, make it more user-friendliness and fit for purpose taking full account of user requirements. If this is not clear, users may be disappointed and never re-visit.

### 1 User flow between central and thematic portal

The users were directed to the central portal ([www.EMODnet.eu](http://www.EMODnet.eu)), and requested to navigate to a specific thematic lot to conduct the evaluation. No further instructions or guidance was provided in term of userflow. Below is an outline of how users reached the thematic lots portal/websites.

#### Userflow 1:

EMODnet central portal → EMODnet central portal thematic lot page → Access the thematic lot portal link (top) → thematic lot portal

#### Userflow 2:

EMODnet central portal → EMODnet central portal thematic lot page → Access the thematic lot portal through map (top right) → thematic lot portal

#### Userflow 3:

EMODnet central portal → EMODnet central portal thematic portal page → Access the thematic portal link (sidebar right) → thematic lot portal

Userflow 4 (no user took this option in this survey):

EMODnet central portal → EMODnet central thematic portal page → Access the thematic portal website link (sidebar right) → thematic lot website

Feedback:

The users requested that the access point to data discovery services would be simplified, i.e. one should be able to access the portal directly from the main page on the central portal. All stated that if the aim is a data discovery service, any additional information (the summary page) could be of interest but should be optional, they did not want to have to navigate past it to get to the data.

From the central portal's summary page, the users found it not apparent where to go next. It was not clear but confusing to see option of website/portal/documentation links; what is the difference? One of the user expected to be able to link directly through to the parameters listed on the summary page, or at least have an indication of what data for each of these parameters are currently available.

To Discuss

Recommendations:

- Add an additional link under the images, 'access data' on the central portal which takes the user directly to the portal. If they want they can get to the summary page through the existing more info link.
- For all thematic portals, should there be a single link ? Or how can it be simplified ?

## 2 Review of core information services of the thematic portal

A specific set of core information and links need to be present on each of the thematic portals to ensure that users can navigate and obtain relevant information, independent of their point of access.

A generic overview of feedback relevant for all portals is presented in the sections below. Specific comments which focus on a particular thematic lots website/portal will be addressed separately through direct contact between the Secretariat and the respective thematic coordinator.

### 2.1 Search & visualization functionality

Feedback:

Users commented that there is much pre-assumed knowledge of acronyms of organizations and/or databases, i.e. CDI, ROOS, OBIS etc.

With regards to the search functionality or looking on how to use a functionality, users expect some level of guidance to be integrated into the visualization.

The majority of the users wanted the functionality to be able to select their own region of interest through geographical (co-ordinate) selection process.

To Discuss

Recommendations:

- How to ensure that acronyms of organizations & databases are made clear;
- Agreement on geographic search options ? How to ensure that users have options to self- define their area of interest;

- It is important to note that there are different levels of users, currently some of the functionality displayed at the start page can be overwhelming. Use tooltips, documentation (see below).

## 2.2 Documentation

### Feedback:

In most cases the users did not locate the documentation, as often it is only accessible from a different part of the portal/website. For those that did, it was not always reflective of the current functionality of the service. Users requested a 'How to' user-document including at least one example illustrating the whole process from conducting a data search to publication.

### To discuss

### Recommendations:

- The portal should be as intuitive as possible and supplemented with user guidance tailored to the lowest common denominator in terms of expertise.
- Can we standardise user documentation, by creating a user guidance document that illustrates the user flow from data search until publication?

## 2.3 Sign in/login

### Feedback:

Users visiting several portals were often confused as a result of the differences in terms of sign-in or registration. In most cases, users did not realise there was a login until a later stage (near download) and questioned the necessity of a login, or if it offered additional services otherwise not available?

### To discuss:

### Recommendations:

- Should the central portal emphasise much more that EMODnet is a network of existing infrastructures for which some services entails different verification mechanisms?
- Should there be a note or tooltip in the legend next to data that indicates, at the very start, whether registration or approval will be required at some stage?
- Ensure the login component (if any) is outlined in the user documentation.
- If there an EMODnet login across all sites were to be implemented, what would be the added value to the users?

## 2.4 QA/QC

### Feedback:

The users were unsure of the QA/QC procedure that certain datasets/products had been through. More transparency would be advisable.

### To discuss:

### Recommendations:

- There needs to be a clearer indication of the QA/QC of datasets or a link to where users can find out more information. Not all users are familiar with the databases /originators that support the EMODnet services. What are the options ?
- QA/QC information is often not cross-linked to the portal. What can be done about it?

## 2.5 Accreditation & licensing

### Feedback:

The users were not sure how to accredit the data and what the citation to EMODnet would need to be when publishing. It may be useful to decide a common approach and outlined this in the user-documentation for data download.

### To discuss:

### Recommendations:

- Should there be a standard accreditation/reference which is made easily visible across all thematic lots?
- Include guidelines for accreditation in the user-documentation
- How to clarify to users the difference between EMODnet raw data, deliverables and consortium driven services in view of necessary accreditation?

## 2.6 Email

### Feedback:

Users indicated that they would only have used the email-info service with regards to data download issues. As users' time is often limited they wanted to be able to find enough guidance on the website/portal to be able to complete their tasks. Nevertheless, obtaining feedback or help via email is considered an essential emergency option – also to provide feedback on elements that do not function properly.