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Towards coordinated monitoring in the European Regional Seas

Joint conference of the pilot projects BALSAM, IRIS-SES and JMP NS/CS

Brussels, 24 April 2015

Statements from sessions on project results and concluding panel discussion

Session 1 - Metadatabases and data management

- Metadatabases must be searchable to support joint monitoring; Metadatabases should include the costs of monitoring programmes;
- Metadatabases visualization via GIS maps is a good way to effectively tell the story of monitoring programmes;
- Integration of fisheries and environmental monitoring programmes currently is a significant challenge; we need top-down steer and a coordination platform;
- Metadatabases developed under the projects need to find a home to stay alive and be updated;
- A common language is needed, also between projects (DIKE reporting format as a basis).

Session 2 - Tools for joint planning

- Joint ecosystem based stratification is the first step to increase the (cost) effectiveness of monitoring programmes;
- For monitoring there is currently very little cooperation between institutes, in contrast to research surveys, besides for the Baltic Sea;
- Online platform of research vessels¹, containing planned and current surveys, greatly enhances transparency and promotes multi use of vessels;
- Permits system (for using vessels or other infrastructure in foreign waters) currently hampers joint planning and joint surveys;
- Ecosystem status monitoring and assessment is facilitated by GIS intelligent tools based on matrices and thresholds of indicators and

¹ Such a 'platform' already exists as a searchable database, but is under-utilised by managers of the vessels and cruise-planners:

http://seadatanet.maris2.nl/v_edios/search.asp.

BALSAM developed a new database: <http://helcom.fi/action-areas/monitoring-and-assessment/research-vessels/>

parameters. Tools are designed to directly visualize GES levels for selected MSFD descriptors.

Session 3 - Proposals for joint monitoring

- Benthic habitats:
 - Large areas can only be covered by a combination of relatively simple sampling methods, eg. drop-video and van Veen grabs;
 - Use joint strata and harmonise sampling methods where possible. This will increase confidence of the assessment.
- Birds:
 - For marine birds, monitoring and indicators should cover all seasons. Current core indicators in the Baltic Sea focus on wintering and breeding birds but there is no indicator for moulting birds. It is highly necessary to define one. International coordination of wintering and moulting bird monitoring is a high priority;
 - A platform and (meta)database for coordinated bird monitoring has been established in the Baltic;
 - Guidelines for synchronized surveys have been prepared in the Baltic.
- Chlorophyll:
 - Explore use of remote sensing as a basis for regional assessment;
 - Supplemented/calibrated by (limited) ship-based sampling, using harmonized analytical protocols and a joint sampling design.
- Multi use of fish surveys:
 - Better use of ship time for monitoring of almost all MSFD Descriptors is possible and saves costs;
 - Take into account operational limitations.
- MPA's:
 - MPA monitoring needs across- and within-country coordination and long term planning.
- Coordinate the coordinators!

Panel discussion - How to achieve joint monitoring?²

- Danube and Finnish/Swedish examples: joint monitoring does work in practice. It is cheaper and delivers more coherent outcomes;
- Properly define the objectives of an integrated survey – including priorities! – before you go out at sea. Make sure that everyone is involved;
- Make smart use of modelling to complement sea going surveys and save money;
- Cooperate with other networks, eg. oceanographic and JPI Oceans' Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda to fill gaps in knowledge and expand the potential for effective monitoring;
- Joint monitoring involves joint data management and joint survey design. Joint QA/QC procedures connect these activities;
- Consistent joint preparedness of monitoring planners and operators, superseding institutional interests, is additionally required to obtain a successful outcome.

² Including general advice from JPI Oceans received after the conference.

- Accessibility of monitoring data for scientists and policy makers is crucial, RSCs should lead by example;
- Enhance transparency of what is being monitored and for which purposes. This process has started with the metadatabases in the 3 pilot projects and should be further developed, especially to include the costs of monitoring programmes. Transparency may increase friction between what is needed for EU or national legislation and what is wishful and may (in some cases) compromise monitoring programs in a necessary process to increase cost-efficiency;
- Exchange of project results across RSCs helps to develop common language and shared approaches;
- Sustainability of products and approaches: MSFD is the common driver and RSCs are the coordinating bodies that are requested to use the outcomes of the 3 pilot projects to proceed towards joint monitoring;
- Political support at national and international level to resolve coordination issues is very important to improve monitoring efficiency.

Advice from DG ENV

- Top down steer needed to move towards joint monitoring: the 3 pilot projects to develop a joint strategic paper containing the conclusions from this meeting and proposals on the way forward, which should be discussed in MSCG and Marine Directors in autumn 2015.