



**EUR-OCEANS Network of Excellence
Institute Council meeting
Paris, France, November 29, 2005**

Participants:

Michèle Barbier, representative of the network of excellence Marine Genomics Europe (CNRS, France)

Caroline Gernez, Executive Director of EUR-OCEANS (CNRS, France)

Adrianna Ianora, representative of the network of excellence MarBEF (SZN, Italy)

Louis Legendre, Deputy Scientific Director of EUR-OCEANS (CNRS, France)

Tore Nepstad, representative of the Institute of Marine Research, Norway

Nicole Papineau, representative of CNRS, France

Angeles Rodriguez Peña, representative of CSIC, Spain

Nicole Schmidt, representative of IfM-GEOMAR, Germany

Paul Tréguer, Scientific Director of EUR-OCEANS (University of Western Brittany, France)

Invited member: Christos Fragakis, Scientific Officer, European Commission (DG Research, Directorate I)

1) Introduction (Paul Tréguer – see presentation)

P. Treguer welcomes the participants to the meeting, which is organised by EUR-OCEANS but deals more widely with the ways and methods to build a durable structure for the three Networks of Excellence in marine sciences, namely MarBEF, Marine Genomics Europe and EUR-OCEANS.

2) Information from the European Commission (Christos Fragakis - see presentation)

** General comments on Networks of Excellence (NoEs)*

C. Fragakis recalls that the main deliverable of an NoE should be the progressive and durable integration of the research capacities of its partners, rather than scientific achievements. NoEs should not be dependent on the funding provided by Framework Programme 6. The degree of integration reached by an NoE will be assessed by examining the mutual structure that the partners have established, which should include a common programming of the research priorities and of activities, a common use – and possibly re-allocation – of resources, and the development of common research proposals to various sources of funding, at the European, national and international levels. Special attention will be paid to the trends towards integration, as integration should be built on a continuous effort.

** Comments on EUR-OCEANS*

EUR-OCEANS has been conducting so far a “mapping” exercise of the various research capacities among its participants (who is doing what, how and where), and it is too early to really assess integration. C. Fragakis expresses some causes for concern related to (i) the very

large number of partners (66), which can be problematic for integration; (ii) the fact that many partners participate with only a few researchers involved in integration activities, which in some cases can be sufficient, but in some others might reveal a small commitment; and (iii) the rather short duration of the project (4 years). Altogether, these facts could lead to EUR-OCEANS acting as a Thematic Network rather than a real NoE.

According to C. Fragakis, it is time for the consortium to decide on potential changes, e.g. regarding the membership. The Jointly Executed Research activities should be carefully checked to make sure that it is really designed in support of long-term integration, rather than for scientific advances only. Another key aspect concerns the models: there is a need for a strong commitment by all partners that they will adhere to and use the EUR-OCEANS models. If needed, the membership could be reduced, by means of a transparent assessment of the commitment and contribution of all partners, and it should be checked that all remaining partners do benefit from full support from their authorities.

Any decision for changes should be reflected on the new Joint Programme of Activities for the next 18 months. The plans for, as well as the roadmap towards the future EUR-OCEANS Institute need to be clarified, in close cooperation with the ERA-Nets.

** Oceans ecosystems in Framework Programme 7*

In the context of a possible reduction of the FP7's budget, which would probably concerns environmental sciences in general, it is essential that NoEs fully play their role of convincing the decision-makers and the general public about the importance of marine sciences for Europe.

The first calls for proposals within FP7 are expected to be launched in late 2006 or early 2007.

The Work Programme of each thematic priority will soon be drafted, with the inputs from the Advisory Groups and the Programme Committees. Additional input or comments from external sources, such as NoEs, are welcome.

3) Round table (chair: Louis Legendre)

** Example of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL)*

P. Treguer presents EMBL as an example of an inter-governmental structure, similar to what could be the virtual institute in the future. The Council recognises that EMBL has an interesting functioning and structure, but that such achievement requires several years or even decades.

** Vision of MarBEF and Marine Genomics Europe*

MarBEF: the network has not hold any formal meeting regarding this issue so far, but three main options are being envisaged and discussed: (i) a strong structure such as EMBO, although it requires time and capitals; (ii) a loose consortium such as the MARS network, funded through the contributions of each participant on a yearly basis; and (iii) a virtual institute whose activities are coordinated by one centre. So far no preference is given to any of

these options, though the first one is seen as too expensive and too complex to build up in a few years time.

Marine Genomics Europe: the network wishes to maintain a certain continuity between its current functioning and that of the future institute, mainly through three aspects: (i) maintaining the coordination of the existing MGE activities (such as training, technological platforms, etc) at the current leaders' institutions; (ii) creating an international PhD programme to strengthen the current PhD fellowships; and (iii) setting up a proposal for support to infrastructures in FP7. The envisaged financial support to the virtual institute would be a joint funding from the national agencies involved.

** Vision of the represented institutions*

CNRS: NoEs are essential to CNRS' European and international strategy, and there is a strong will to support the continuation of their work beyond the period of funding by the European Commission. CNRS is not in favour of creating additional structures, as this would only make the European research landscape more complex. The privileged approach is rather to first define the needs and the ambitions of each NoE, and then to think of an adapted structure. Lighter structures such as forums, or coordination activities, could be sufficient and as – if not more – efficient than new legal entities.

IfM-GEOMAR: N. Schmidt expresses the same concern as N. Papineau regarding the creation of new structures. The privileged approach should rather be to restrain the missions of the future institute to the essential ones, and start with a pragmatic selection of feasible activities, implemented by a core group of partners which could then be enlarged.

IMR: The IMR participates in two other projects in the same field as EUR-OCEANS: EFARO (European Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Organisations), a network of research institutions existing since 1989, and EurOCEAN, an inter-governmental web portal on ocean sciences. The experience of these projects shows that it is hardly possible to build a permanent structure in only four years of time, especially with a sudden cut in the funding at the time when mutual trust starts to really exist. Therefore, the IMR rather favours a cooperative network that would be based on scientific collaborations and personal acquaintances of the scientists.

CSIC: A. Rodriguez-Peña stresses the importance of scientists defining what their needs are in a first step, then followed by a reflexion about the most appropriate structure (for instance, an Article 169 project). She also insists on the importance of the cooperation between NoEs and ERA-Nets.

** Interactions with ERA-Nets*

The Council recognises unanimously the need for a strong interaction between the three NoEs in marine science and the related ERA-Nets, especially MarinERA. According to C. Fragakis, the three NoEs are an ideal forum to discuss a common strategy which could then be exposed to MarinERA.

4) Plans for the implementation of the future institute

The Council agrees unanimously on four key aspects for the definition of the future institute:

- terms of reference: the leaders of the three NoEs on marine science should define together the scientific domains to be covered by the future institute;
- sharing of facilities: a Working Group including representatives from the three NoEs (appointed by the leaders) should identify potential activities and barriers on this topic;
- exchanges of personnel: a Working Group including representatives from the three NoEs (appointed by the leaders) should identify potential activities – including short visits, technicians visits, and facilitation of attendance to workshops - and barriers on this topic;
- training: a Working Group including representatives from the three NoEs (appointed by the leaders) should define what could be a European PhD programme on marine sciences, and identify the potential barriers to its implementation.

The three Working Groups should receive a clear mandate before starting their work, and report on a regular basis to the leaders of the three NoEs and the EIC. The Working Groups should also maintain an interaction with the leaders and members of the three NoEs.

The issues related to Intellectual Property Rights should also be considered in a further step.

A further financial support by the European Commission to the future institute is possible, but it can only be within the context of a competitive call. No preference will be given to existing networks submitting a proposal in the future FP7 calls.

At the national level, C. Fragakis recalls that it is essential for EUR-OCEANS to convince the national authorities of its member organisations that it is useful to fund a virtual institute.

5) Timeline (see presentation)

The Council agrees on the following timeline:

(# CG :cf presentation – je n'ai pas le fichier)