

The European Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres (EURASLIC): an outline history, 1988-2004

By Allen Varley

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

The idea for the formation of an association of European aquatic libraries was first discussed and developed in the UK by the United Kingdom Marine and Freshwater Librarians' Group, and as a result, when preparing for their annual meeting in 1988, invitations were extended to a wide range of aquatic librarians and organisations throughout Europe to send representatives to the meeting. The encouraging response was the participation at that meeting of 35 librarians from Belgium, Denmark, Eire, Finland, France, Monaco, Portugal and the United Kingdom, with an observer from the United States representing the International Association of Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSILIC). Apologies for absence and best wishes were received from colleagues in five other European countries. The two-day meeting was held on 20-21 April 1988 at the Marine Biological Association/Plymouth Marine Laboratory (MBA/PML), hosted by Allen Varley, Head of Library and Information Services, and his deputy David Moulder.



The Inaugural Meeting, Plymouth 1988

Much of the discussion at this meeting centred around means and methods of cooperation in the fields of libraries and aquatic sciences on a pan-European basis. The main outcome of the meeting was unanimous agreement that efforts should continue in building this network of cooperation, and this meeting has generally come to be regarded as the inaugural meeting of EURASLIC.

Many of the participants attending the meeting were already cooperating in networks within their own countries; national groups in France and the Scandinavian countries, as well as the UK had cooperated for many years, and other participants were involved in the international Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Information System (ASFIS) and the international Agricultural Information System (AGRIS) programmes. At this time there was encouragement for cross-border cooperation by the European Commission, and many existing regional groups in other parts of the world were receiving support and encouragement from international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of Unesco, as part of the ASFIS programme.

Participants felt that the aims of a European association could be realised by building on existing national networks, by encouraging countries without networks to establish them, and to integrate these groups into a European network. The main functions of this pan-European association would be to develop and strengthen links between individuals and institutions, to exchange ideas, to provide mutual support and to collaborate in joint projects. The first task was to identify networks, institutions and individuals throughout Europe who might participate, and members present agreed to compile lists, which could be merged together by staff in the Plymouth laboratory to create the basis of a European directory and mailing list. It was agreed that during the next year, members would act as "missionaries" in order to identify and contact

relevant organisations, institutions and individuals, and to generate and maintain interest in the idea of a European aquatic library and information network. Several participants offered to arrange and host the next "European meeting".

A report of the proceedings of this inaugural meeting was produced and distributed to over 150 organisations with a letter asking recipients to register their interest in the work of the group, and the concept of a European aquatic library and information network was publicised and promoted to institutions, funding agencies, and regional and international bodies.

During the next two years details of over 200 European marine and freshwater sciences libraries were collected, and plans went ahead for the second meeting which was to be hosted by the Institut Océanographique in Paris in April 1990.

The first issue of the *EURASLIC Newsletter* appeared in September 1989. It was edited by David Moulder and produced and distributed by the MBA/PML library in Plymouth. The main objective of the first issue was to announce the date and place of the second meeting. At this stage the name "EURASLIC" was unofficial, and the *Newsletter* asked for suggestions for a suitable name and acronym.

The meeting in Paris, organised by Nicole Momzikoff, Institut staff and Parisian aquatic sciences librarians in April 1990, was attended by 75 participants from 15 European countries. The significant aspects of this highly successful meeting were the endorsement of the name of the association as the European Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres, with the acronym "EURASLIC", and the resolution that the association should have a formal structure.

The possibilities of EURASLIC operating as a regional group within the framework of IAMSLIC, whilst retaining European autonomy, were debated at length at this meeting, and a working group was established to examine the feasibility and, if appropriate and agreed by members, to open up negotiations with IAMSLIC. The other main outcome of this meeting was the agreement that Nicole Momzikoff and David Moulder would develop the list of addresses and related material into a directory which would be published and distributed under the auspices of EURASLIC. Other topics discussed included inter-library loans, the costs of periodicals, and developments with ASFIS and its main product *Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts* (ASFA).

The *Proceedings* of the meeting were published as a special issue of *Océanis*, with papers translated into French and English. This was as a result of a grant from the French Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique.

This was a major developmental meeting for EURASLIC, and many issues that had been raised during the preceding two years continued to be debated in the twelve months leading up to the third meeting of EURASLIC, which was held in 1991 in Lelystad, The Netherlands.

The EURASLIC Working Group examined IAMSLIC's constitution and prepared proposals for IAMSLIC to extend its scope to cover freshwater aspects, and to amend its procedures to allow a regional structure. These were agreed and submitted to IAMSLIC's conference in Seattle, Washington, in October 1990. Pauline Simpson (Institute of Oceanographic Sciences, UK) and Allen Varley were among the participants and, acting as EURASLIC emissaries succeeded, after detailed discussion and argument, in persuading IAMSLIC firstly to consider formally extending the scope to include freshwater aspects and changing the name of the association to include the word "Aquatic", i.e. the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (although it would retain the acronym "IAMSLIC"), and secondly to recognise that regional groups, networks and associations such as EURASLIC could operate and be recognised as regional sections of IAMSLIC. A ballot of IAMSLIC members in early 1991 accepted these changes.

The third EURASLIC meeting was held at the Rijksinstituut voor Integraal Zoetwaterbeheer en Afvalwaterbehandeling (RIZA), Lelystad, The Netherlands, 25-26 April 1991. Forty-three participants from 14 countries attended the meeting. At the meeting the Working Group on IAMS LIC/EURASLIC relations reported their findings and the results of negotiations with IAMS LIC. Members voted for EURASLIC to become a regional group of IAMS LIC, while retaining its European identity and structure, and a EURASLIC Interim Committee was appointed to formulate options and proposals for the formal structure of EURASLIC. Much of the discussion over the two days of this meeting was concerned with enhancing national and international cooperation. Two workshops were held, one on improving the inter-library loan network, and RIZA subsequently developed a EURASLIC interlibrary request form. In a parallel session a second workshop was held to discuss how EURASLIC could help to improve the coverage of ASFA.

These formative years in the development of EURASLIC coincided with largely unexpected changes in Europe. These included the removal of political and social barriers between East and West Europe, German reunification in 1990, and the advent of "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" in the USSR. During the same period the Commission of the European Communities was actively promoting cross-border cooperation within Europe in many areas of scientific research, information technology, and library development, providing both the infrastructure and financial opportunities for collaboration.

Since the second meeting in Paris an ever-increasing number of colleagues from Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, some assisted with travel costs by sponsors enlisted by EURASLIC, have attended meetings and made valuable contributions to the Association.

In November 1991 the first edition of the *Directory of European aquatic sciences libraries and information centres*, was distributed free of charge to all of the 335 organisations and institutions listed in the *Directory*, as well as to a range of additional recipients, and sold to others. Produced from the database maintained in Plymouth, and published by the Institut Océanographique, who funded the production, the *Directory* was a tangible and useful product, demonstrating the value of cooperation within Europe.

CONSOLIDATION AND DEVELOPMENT

EURASLIC bylaws were ratified in 1992 and the Association was officially registered in France as a legal entity and Europe-wide organisation, with its own bank account and various categories of membership. David Moulder, who had acted as secretary since the inaugural meeting, was elected the Association's first President, Candidates were elected to the vital offices of Secretary and Treasurer, and an Executive Board was appointed. Membership categories were: Personal, Institutional, and Associate, the latter complying with EURASLIC's ethos of being all-encompassing, and designed to enable the participation of appropriate individuals and institutions who were unable to pay a membership fee. A further category - Honorary Life Membership - was also created, with Allen Varley, who had continued to act informally as chairman since the inaugural meeting in 1988, becoming EURASLIC's first honorary member. By 2001 EURASLIC membership comprised 79 members from 22 countries: 66 full members, 11 Associate members, and two Honorary members.

Presidents:	David Moulder	(United Kingdom)	1992-1996
	Bent Gaardstrup	(Denmark)	1996-1997
	Ian Pettman	(United Kingdom)	1997-1998
	Sofia Goulala	(Greece)	1998-2000
	Joan Baron Varley	(United Kingdom)	2000-2004
	Jan Haspeslagh	(Belgium)	2004 –

During the ensuing years EURASLIC members met in Bremerhaven, Germany (October 1992); Gdynia, Poland (April 1994); Valletta, Malta (April 1996); Athens, Greece (May 1998); Aberdeen, Scotland (May 2000); Brest, France (October 2001); Kiel, Germany (May 2003); and Split, Croatia (May 2005). The Conferences in Bremerhaven and Brest were held jointly with IAMSLIC, Bremerhaven being IAMSLIC's first venture outside of North America. The meeting in Gdynia, Poland (April 1994), hosted by Henryk Ganowiak, a loyal and supportive member who was to become a Vice President, was EURASLIC's first meeting in the former Eastern Europe, whilst the Malta meeting (April 1996) was the first to be held in the Mediterranean. The meetings covered subjects as varied and progressive as electronic and human networking; EU/European funding and cooperation; preservation and conservation; library guides; databases and retrieval tools; career development; web pages; electronic publishing; knowledge management; digital library projects; copyright; document delivery; internet systems and tools; and open access.



EURASLIC 10 years on - Athens

EURASLIC meetings are normally held at two-yearly intervals, hosted at marine or freshwater research institutes in various European countries. From the very first meeting, participants have been encouraged to present country and institutional reports, and these reports, subsequently published in *Proceedings* of meetings, serve as a unique ongoing record of developments in the provision of aquatic science information in Europe. The main elements of meetings, in addition to the reports, include papers and poster-papers, presentations, group discussions, training workshops, commercial

presentations, and Executive Board and business meetings. Workshops have included topics as varied as Archives organisation and preservation; Website development; and Inter-library cooperation. Special Interest Group sessions have brought together members with particular interests in Freshwater science; Environment; Countries bordering the Mediterranean; and European Countries in Economic Transition (ECET). The varied contents of the meetings, as well as the splendid social arrangements have enabled participants to establish professional and personal links, leading to benefits for their institutes and themselves from the development of this human network.

Regular support for meetings has come in the form of grants from the IOC and from IAMSLIC, which together with EURASLIC funds, sponsor or contribute towards the costs of participants from Eastern Europe who would otherwise be unable to attend. In 2003 for example, funding from these sources totalled US\$8500. The contribution of the host institute, not only in accommodation and staff effort, is invariably considerable, while other sources are local contacts and government agencies, with commercial sponsorship from scientific publishers, library supply and software companies, and exhibitors. The *Proceedings* of meetings (also referred to as Conferences) form a vital record, and are normally produced by the institute hosting the meeting. Copies are distributed free to all members, and are sold.

Throughout this period many other inter-sessional and ongoing activities were also taking place, including collaboration and close contact with IAMSLIC, its various committees, and members of its Executive Board. Regular issues of the *EURASLIC Newsletter* continued to be produced and

distributed to all members with various changes in editorship. First published in 1989, the aim is to produce two issues a year, and since April 2001 the *Newsletter* has been available in electronic form.

The second edition of the *EURASLIC Directory of European Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres*, edited by David Moulder, and produced from the Plymouth database was published by the Instituto Español de Oceanografía (Madrid) in 1994. Listing 515 organisations, this directory has served not only as a valuable information source, but also to enhance the profile of EURASLIC, its aims and its members. A digital version of the *Directory* was prepared during 1998 by Sofia Goulala at the National Centre for Marine Research (NCOM) later Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR) (Greece) and uploaded to the IOC website by Peter Pissierssens. More recently a new '*Directory*' project was initiated by Jan Haspeslagh, Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) (Belgium) to move the Directory to the VLIZ IMIS - Integrated Management Information System, to enable it to be directly queried from the EURASLIC website.

Several editions of the *EURASLIC Leaflet*, in a number of languages, including Russian, have been produced, updated and distributed widely. Versions of the *EURASLIC Membership Directory* have periodically been updated and distributed by Sofia Goulala, NCOM/HCMR (Greece), and from 2003 the list has been available on the EURASLIC website. From time to time mailing lists are produced from this database and sold to appropriate publishers.

A *EURASLIC Bulletin Board* was established on Omnet's SCIENCEnet electronic mail system in September 1990. At this time Omnet was used for communication between marine scientists, ASFIS members, IAMSLIC, and international agencies; however with the increasing availability of the Internet the Bulletin Board was closed in November 1992. The online *EURASLIC Discussion List* was established by Barbara Schmidt, Institut für Meereswissenschaften an der Universität Kiel (IFM-GEOMAR) (Germany) in 2001, initially utilising Yahoo Groups, and now an integral facility of the EURASLIC website.

EURASLIC's first website was created by David Moulder, MBA/PML (UK) in 1996, then hosted in Greece from 1999 by Sofia Goulala. The domain name *euraslic.org* was registered in 2001 and the website is now hosted at the VLIZ Flanders Marine Institute. A separate section for members only is maintained.

Inter-library loans between EURASLIC members, initially utilising forms and procedures developed at the Lelystad (1991) meeting, now use the EURASLIC Discussion List, latterly enhanced by members' involvement with the IAMSLIC Z39.50 Inter-Library Loan Project. Surplus and duplicate books and journals are distributed through listing in *EURASLIC Newsletter*, or the Discussion List, or by direct contacts. Various study visits and attachments have taken place, especially by members from former Eastern European countries to Members' institutes in other parts of Europe. EURASLIC interests have, and continue to be represented and progressed, by respective Presidents and other members of EURASLIC at international meetings such as ASFA, the IOC Joint Group of Experts on Marine Information Management (GEMIM), IAMSLIC and IOC International Data and Information Exchange (IODE), through meetings with regional groups such as EurOcean, and through presentations at national and regional meetings, and papers in various European and International publications, and of course every Conference produces its own *Proceedings*. Members in European ASFA centres in France, Germany, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom have seen the establishment of new ASFA centres in Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, and Ukraine.

It was suggested in 1996 that efforts should be made to preserve and organise a collection of archival material relating to EURASLIC, and members were encouraged to retain appropriate material. In 2000 Sofia Goulala offered to coordinate and maintain an archives collection, and this material is now held in Greece in the library of the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research.

A further step in the development of EURASLIC was the formalisation of the system of National Representatives acting as links with other EURASLIC members and potential members in their countries, and generally fulfilling the roles of EURASLIC national focal points. Their responsibilities were debated and tabulated in 2000, when there were 13 named representatives, a number which increased to 22 by 2004. In 2001 and 2002 the proposal to create the post of Executive Secretary was discussed and agreed, and in January 2003 Snezhina Bacheva, Institute of Oceanology, Varna, (Bulgaria) took up this position.

The *Annual EURASLIC Grant for the Purchase of Library Equipment* was introduced in 2002, with 1500 Euros initially being made available. Six applications were received and the amounts awarded totalled 1820 Euros. Calls are made by the EURASLIC Board each January for appropriate grant applications to be submitted.

The proposed compilation and production of a *European Directory of Marine and Freshwater Institutions, Scientists and Research Engineers*, patterned on the directory produced for the UK and Ireland by the British group, was discussed in 1994, and support for a survey of potential users undertaken by David Moulder (MBA/PML) was provided by the EU Marine Science and Technology (MAST) Programme. The survey indicated that there was strong support for the proposed project, and the IOC and European Science Foundation became formally involved. The MAST Programme could only support marine-related projects, so in 1996 after considerable effort, a draft project proposal was prepared for a *European Directory of Marine Research Resources (Eudir)*, involving 21 institutions in 21 countries, with the hope that the freshwater element of a directory could also be provided by EURASLIC members. The total budget was 520,000 Euros, and discussions with MAST in 1997 indicated that their contribution could be limited to 50% of this total. However, questions over funding, David Moulder's departure from Plymouth to take up a new post in Sweden, and other factors showed that the project might prove unviable, and it was reluctantly postponed. However, a directory of this nature still remains a worthwhile product and potential project for EURASLIC.

Seven EURASLIC libraries, with Ian Pettman, Freshwater Biological Association (FBA) (United Kingdom) as project leader, participated in the *UNiverse Project* as an Environment Special Interest Group during the years 1996 to 1999. Funded by the European Commission through the Telematics for Libraries Programme, the *Project* was based on the development of a virtual union catalogue, linking catalogues of major holdings of environmental sciences literature in over 50 libraries across Europe.

Initiated in 2002, the BLICOP Black Sea Regional Library Co-Operation Project aims to create an online knowledge management system for literature on the Black Sea. Libraries in Bulgaria, Georgia, Rumania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine are cooperating in the project, with Olga Akimova, Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas (Ukraine) as project leader. The proposed system will create (where necessary) and unite the electronic catalogues and databases of the Black Sea marine libraries into an online information exchange system, providing access to the distributed resources, and supporting a document delivery service.

Several members of the EURASLIC ECET Group are cooperating to create an online searchable Union List of serials available at the EURASLIC ECET Group aquatic libraries in Central and Eastern Europe. The project was initiated with Maria Kalenchits, Estonian Marine Institute (Estonia) as project leader.

IN CONCLUSION

From the start, efforts have been directed at developing an inclusive European network, with activities and services aimed at all members of the aquatic information community. Although the regular conferences were regarded as a vital component of the range of activities, Board members were always anxious to ensure that the Association did not become a group whose

main function and main efforts were to organise the next conference.

EURASLIC is the only pan-European association representing the interests and views of individuals and organisations involved in the field of aquatic library and information provision. Since its inauguration, EURASLIC has received support and funding for its activities from a range of organisations, including national, regional and international bodies. This funding has taken the form of providing venues for meetings, sponsorship for participants, support for the preparation, publication and distribution of the *EURASLIC Directory* and *Newsletter*, and the commissioning of reports and papers. The most important support however has come not only from officers and members of the Board, but also from individual members in many countries who have devoted substantial amounts of time, effort and resources to ensure the continued progress of the association and network.

SOURCES

EURASLIC Proceedings; *EURASLIC Newsletters*; Reports of EURASLIC Executive Board and Business meetings; Papers, articles and press releases on EURASLIC and its activities and history.