



# Orienting Young Scientists of Euromarine Activity Plan and its benefits for Early Career Researchers across Europe

EuroMarine (EM) is a European marine science network launched in 2014. The network's primary goals are to support the identification and initial development of important emerging scientific topics or issues and associated methodologies in marine sciences, as well as to foster new services relevant to the marine scientific community. EuroMarine also advocates for marine science and contributes to improving the science-governance interface, providing expertise and transfer of knowledge.

The Orienting Young Scientists of Euromarine (OYSTER) group was created in 2018 as an independent working group within the EM network to support a bottom-up approach and to further the marine landscape of early career researchers (ECRs). OYSTER is made up of a forum of 22 PhD and postdoctoral researchers representing EM member institutions from 12 countries.

The OYSTER group represents the views and needs of ECRs within the EuroMarine network and acts as a link to other ECRs within the network's member organisations. The general aims of the OYSTER group are to:

- **ENGAGE** and represent ECRs within the EM network
- **CONTRIBUTE** towards the cohesive outreach and capacity building of ECRs across EM member organisations
- **DEVELOP** initiatives to support and integrate ECRs within the European marine landscape



Over the last two years, with a small budget funded entirely by EM, the OYSTER group has carried out a large number of activities, including:

- Organization of **two successful workshops**, each with more than 20 participants, which aimed to empower ECRs by supporting their personal and professional development through expert-led skill-sharing sessions;
- A **pilot survey** in 2018 which aimed to understand needs and concerns of ECRs working on marine topics. The survey results were presented at the 2019 EM General Assembly and disseminated to the wider scientific community through international conferences and social media;
- An **individual fellowship program** for ECRs from EM member organizations to participate in advanced training courses;
- An ECR **Conference Program** which awards the best oral presentation and poster by ECRs in international conferences.

The OYSTER group has steadily become an established working group strongly supported by the EM network. OYSTER group members have coordinated their activities through monthly virtual meetings. Members meet in-person annually, coinciding with the EM General Assembly. These meetings provide the OYSTER group with the opportunity to present their work to the wider EM consortium.

In 2020, the OYSTER network officially joined the Ocean Decade Alliance, a global coalition of ocean actors working together to support, enhance, and leverage commitments towards the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

External financial support would allow the OYSTER network to expand, while increasing the number of activities offered and enhancing the quality of services. Future activities will serve the ECR community across Europe, and simultaneously support the objectives of the UN Ocean Decade.



*The following is a list of activities in development which could be implemented with further support from external funding.*

## **1. A dedicated OYSTER website**

OYSTER activities are currently published solely on the EM website due to lack of funding for the professional development of a dedicated OYSTER website. An interactive and visually appealing website and standalone online interactive tools (see below the example of a mentorship platform) placed under the control of the OYSTER group will grow the visibility of the network, and improve the dissemination of OYSTER activities and calls. Attention will be paid to the interoperability of the OYSTER website and the main EuroMarine website to make sure OYSTER contents can easily be shared and found on both sides.

## **2. An online mentorship platform**

A key finding of the OYSTER pilot survey was that ECRs often feel a lack of support, as frequent interactions with supervisors are difficult. The mentorship platform will allow ECRs to receive different perspectives from experienced researchers on professional and/or personal issues. Without dedicated funding, the mentorship program will be hosted on the EM website as a static list of mentors, with a brief description of their research and personal interests alongside their contact details. External funding would help create a dynamic platform capable of directly matching mentees with an appropriate mentor.

The OYSTER mentorship platform will uniquely provide for all students and researchers working on marine-related topics. Mentors will include not only professors and instructors, but also postdoctoral and PhD researchers for mentoring bachelor and master-level students. Initially, mentors will be from EM institutions, while mentees may be from non-EM institutions. This will help to recruit new EM members by promoting the network's activities.



### **3. Increased number of outreach activities**

External funding will allow group members to publish OYSTER research outputs in open access journals and periodicals, which is particularly costly. Additionally, it will facilitate the attendance of more conferences and policy meetings, allowing OYSTER to reach a broader European community. OYSTER will give a voice to the needs of ECRs in both academic institutions and professional sectors involved in marine-related topics. These expanded outreach activities will strengthen the recognition of OYSTER's role as a representative of ECRs in the Ocean Decade Alliance.

### **4. Increased support for ECR capacity development**

It is essential for master students, PhD and postdoctoral researchers to develop soft skills alongside their academic expertise. With a limited budget, OYSTER organised a dedicated conference session at ESOF2020, as well as an annual workshop. External funding would allow OYSTER to provide dedicated soft-skill sessions in more events on a regular basis, such as conferences, thematic courses, workshops and webinars. This expanded ECR capacity development would directly support OYSTER's planned participation in the UN Ocean Decade.

### **5. ECR access to laboratory infrastructures**

Through its partnership with the European Marine Biological Resource Centre (EMBRC), EuroMarine provides ten €5,000 grants to ECRs willing to conduct experimental work. Such grants give them access to a pan-European network of state-of-the-art research platforms, biological resources, analytical services, expert advice and data. However, these grants do not include travel and living costs. OYSTER would therefore like to help cover these costs and, if possible, to also increase the yearly number of available grants.



## **6. Increase the activities covered by the individual fellowship grant program supported by EM**

This EM-funded program currently provides up to €500 for ECRs to participate in training courses and workshops. OYSTER would like to extend these grants to also cover conferences or second-level Masters which ECRs often cannot attend due to budget restrictions. The number of fellowships awarded each year to promising ECRs could also be increased.

## **7. An annual “small-grant” program**

This grant would allow ECRs to conduct a short or pilot individual research project. While similar grants are common in the US, this financial support is lacking in Europe. A competitive call for a small research grant scheme of around €5,000 would develop innovative ideas and projects from ECRs across Europe.

## **8. Joint projects with external organizations and networks, including other ECR groups and NGOs**

Since its foundation, OYSTER has continually connected with similarly oriented groups and institutions, searching for common goals and actions. Developing projects and organising joint events and collaborative activities would help to strengthen these connections

## **Relevant links**

**EuroMarine website**     [euromarinenetwork.eu](http://euromarinenetwork.eu)

**OYSTER presentation**     [euromarinenetwork.eu/OYSTER](http://euromarinenetwork.eu/OYSTER)

**EMBRAC website**     [embrac.eu](http://embrac.eu)