



EMB ECOP NETWORK FORUM

Santiago de Compostela

8-9 October 2023



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By improving our training, our connections to the policy landscape, and ensuring our representativity in decision making, we can act today and we can act together for our future and the future of our Ocean.

EMB Young Ambassadors

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The first EMB ECOP Network Forum

It is key to involve and collaborate with Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) in the science-policy landscape from an early stage, as current and future Ocean citizens, scientists, and policy-makers are key actors of science and policy making. Such partnership across disciplines and generations is a two-way street: ECOPs can bring their expertise, their values, their energy and Network, and would benefit from the same inputs from senior Ocean Professionals.

In this spirit, the European Marine Board (EMB) launched the Young Ambassador programme in 2019 to engage with Early Career Ocean Professionals in merging science and policy. Since then, the Young Ambassadors have been partaking in EMB Working Groups, webinars, Board meetings, and conferences, among other things. Young Ambassadors created the ECOP Network in 2021 to connect ECOPs across EMB member organisations¹, a group of 38 organisations from 19 European countries, and empower them to engage in the marine science-policy landscape. In October 2023, the Young Ambassadors, with support from the EMB Secretariat, organised the first Network Forum of the EMB ECOP Network as a side event of the EuroOCEAN2023 conference in Spain. The ambition of this two-day forum was to provide training and opportunities to engage with policy-makers, as well as a networking opportunity. This Network Forum also helped to strengthen the Network in the view of EMB organisations and provide recommendations towards the European science-policy landscape, and the EMB, at the EuroOCEAN conference on how to better integrate the voice of ECOPs.

¹ <https://marineboard.eu/members>

ECOP Network Forum outcomes: helping our EMB ECOPs engage in the science-policy landscape

The first EMB ECOP Network Forum generated a vast number of outcomes. Among them, the main highlights were:

1. General Network Forum outcomes

- **The Network Forum turned the Network into reality.** In this context, a noteworthy effort was made to bring together 38 ECOPs from the majority of EMB members. This event provided ECOPs with the opportunity to spend time together in person, fostering engagement within the Network.
- Thanks to our invited speakers, practical exercises and open discussions, **ECOPs learnt about the EMB, the European marine science-policy landscape in general, and ways to improve their science and policy communication skills. ECOPs highlighted this as particularly useful.**

2. Getting involved in the EMB as an ECOP

One goal of the Network Forum was to gather ECOPs' experiences on their involvement in the EMB and in science-policy interfaces, to find ways to ensure and facilitate their involvement. A brainstorming session highlighted key ideas shared among those EMB ECOPs who were present:

- **It is crucial to invite and deploy efforts to reach out to ECOPs.** ECOPs can provide new perspectives to persistent problems, as they engage differently with society.
- **This is particularly relevant for EMB Member organisations.** EMB Member Organisations and their Delegates are not always as connected to ECOPs, and many ECOPs in Member organisations are neither aware of nor involved in the EMB and its activities. EMB Young Ambassadors and the organisation of the first Network Forum have been key in improving this connection.
- **ECOPs underscored the need for an ECOP representative in each organisation,** to work closely with EMB Delegates and better link with ECOPs on site.
- **ECOPs are willing to join in EMB activities.** They showed high interest in providing an opinion for the vote on the new Working Groups. The Network will work to connect ECOPs with EMB activities, notably by promoting future Working Groups to increase ECOP participation as co-authors. The help from EMB Delegates will be instrumental in doing so.

- **ECOPs expect the EMB and its Members to support them in their engagement at the science-policy interface**, notably by providing support to participate in conferences, training, and connecting with policy-makers. In particular, identifying Working Groups (e.g., initiatives summarising policy recommendations on topics ECOPs are working on), and supporting ECOPs' participation in these spaces.
- **The EMB ECOP Network is in the process of formalising its organisation and working towards official recognition.** Formalising the Network will improve communication across the board, facilitate knowledge sharing, improve and streamline cooperation, among other things.

3. Be an ECOP, challenges and solutions: outcomes of brainstorming

- **ECOPs need training** to counter their reported lack of knowledge about the political landscape. The Network Forum was appreciated for initiating and facilitating involvement in that space, by providing concrete training in writing policy briefs, reading policy texts and providing feedback to policies. One solution to ensure this training is received is to provide more opportunities similar to those offered by the Network Forum.
- Another concern was related to the lack of events promoting **connections between scientists and policy-makers. Organising joint events**, inviting ECOPs, including policy-makers and scientists, would help to build long-lasting future relationships and promote collaboration towards relevant marine strategy planning.
- **The need for inclusion and representativity** was also a feeling shared unanimously among the participants. In addition to the discrimination felt in other areas of society, like those based on race, gender or sexual orientation, ECOPs believe that their age and their career stage prevent them from being included in the decision-making processes. As **experts at the forefront of their discipline**, ECOPs bring their own insights and innovative solutions to persisting challenges. To do that, **ECOPs need to gain visibility** and secure opportunities to share their work.
- Finally, **the lack of funding** dedicated specifically to ECOPs is a barrier to their promotion and prosperity. Job insecurity for ECOPs has been a serious problem for years and contributes to the degradation of their mental health. As one of the solutions, participants wished to highlight the necessity to **include ECOPs specifically in project proposals both at the national and European levels, from the requirements in funding calls to the project execution.**

4. EuroOCEAN2023 related outcomes

ECOPs seized the opportunity to gain visibility, communicate their needs and ask critical questions at the EuroOCEAN 2023 conference in Vigo.

- In their **keynote speech**², the EMB Young Ambassadors addressed the **challenges and solutions for ECOPs to engage in the science-policy interface** that were identified during the ECOP Network Forum brainstorming. The importance of the call for ECOPs' voices to be heard was illustrated by the front-row politicians leaving during the address. The keynote was positively received and praised by other ECOPs, senior scientists, and policy-makers.
- ECOPs that attended the EuroOCEAN conference **appreciated that both events were organised back-to-back**, giving them opportunities to continue networking and interact with the marine policy world. Throughout the conference, **ECOPs engaged with the panellists** by asking numerous questions on stage and contributing to the lively discussions.
- Even though the EuroOCEAN conference provided a platform for ECOPs, the **Vigo Declaration** signed at the end of the event did not mention the importance of supporting ECOPs to achieve the *One Ocean we want*.

Our ECOPs

In total, 38 ECOPs from 25 EMB Member organisations were able to join the Network Forum. Participants were at various stages of their careers, including Master and PhD students, postdoctoral candidates and technicians. The ECOPs' expertise covered a broad spectrum of ocean sciences from ecology and taxonomy to conservation and spatial planning, bringing natural and social science perspectives.

Map displaying the working place of the 38 ECOPs who joined the Network Forum.



² [EuroOCEAN 2023 - Young Ambassadors as keynote speakers](#)
[Transcript of EuroOCEAN 2023 keynote](#)

Network Forum activities

<p>Sunday 8 October 2023 - Building the network</p> <p><u>Morning 9:00-13:00</u></p> <p>09:00 - 09:30 Breakfast</p> <p>09:30 - 10:00 Presentation: What is the European Marine Board?</p> <p>10:00 - 10:30 Presentation: What is the ECOP network?</p> <p>10:30 - 11:00 Coffee break</p> <p>11:00 - 13:00 Presentation: Current science-policy landscape in Europe</p> <p><u>Lunch 13:00-14:30</u></p> <p><u>Afternoon 14:30-17:00</u></p> <p>14:30 - 16:00 Discussion: how to engage ECOPs in the policy landscape.</p> <p>16:00 - 17:00 Discussion: The ECOP network future.</p> <p><u>Evening 17:30- 19:30</u></p> <p>Team building and Informal get-together: traditional music, dance and drinks</p>	<p>Monday 9 October 2023 - Training</p> <p><u>Morning 9:00-13:00</u></p> <p>09:00 - 09:30 Breakfast</p> <p>09:30 - 10:30 Presentation: Communication: how to make your science more policy friendly and impactful</p> <p>10:30 - 11:00 Coffee break</p> <p>11:00 - 12:30 Exercise session 1: create a policy brief from a selected paper</p> <p>12:30 - 13:00 Exercise 1 feedback</p> <p><u>Lunch 13:00-14:30</u></p> <p><u>Afternoon 14:30-17:00</u></p> <p>14:30 - 15:30 Exercise session 2: provide a consultation feedback on a policy document</p> <p>15:30 - 16:00 Exercise 2 feedback</p> <p>16:00 -16:15 Coffee break</p> <p>16:15 - 17:00 Network action: discussion session about EMB working groups and voting</p> <p>17:00 - 17:30 Meeting close : next steps for the EMB ECOP network</p>
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Agenda of the Network Forum.

ECOPs engagement in the EMB and in the science-policy landscape

Through presentations by the EMB Executive Director, Sheila Heymans, and Young Ambassadors, ECOPs gained insights into EMB's background, activities, Members, the ECOP Network, and how they could participate in EMB activities. During the first afternoon, ECOPs brainstormed on two big topics in breakout groups. Outcomes were then discussed and summarised. First, they discussed ways to improve ECOPs' engagement, and how the ECOP Network could better link ECOPs with Delegates, as well as EMB activities and decision-making. ECOPs were also consulted regarding the next EMB Working Group topics, and Ambassadors reported their preferred topic to the EMB Delegates at the Autumn Plenary meeting.



ECOPs discussing in breakout groups.

The Network Forum provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions among participants. Two time slots were exclusively dedicated to brainstorming within small groups (4 to 6 people), focusing on two main themes: 1) How to engage ECOPs in the policy landscape and 2) The future of the ECOP Network, focusing on making recommendations that could help their involvement at the European level, within the EMB, and among EMB Members. Discussions around the first theme led to defining the challenges of being a young scientist when it comes to getting involved in policies. ECOPs specified the challenges they encountered in their careers and proposed solutions to facilitate the communication between science and policy. The second theme was to think of different actions they could take to sustain and develop the EMB ECOP Network. Participants were requested to define what activities would benefit them, as well as what EMB process or organisation should be created to favour ECOPs career development and visibility. After the one-hour discussions, participants were asked to gather back at the conference room for a 30-minute debrief to share ideas. The main outcomes from these discussions described in the first section should be taken into account by EMB Delegates as well as policy-makers to help ECOPs to get involved in European policy-making.

Training

First, EMB Executive Director Sheila Heymans introduced the participants to the marine science-policy landscape, in an interactive format enabling ECOPs to ask questions and discuss openly. ECOPs highlighted that it was very useful for them (70% indicated that they knew only a bit of the information presented during this talk, 20% knew most of it), and could share additional information and their own experience. Laura Secorun, creator of the ocean literacy agency called Ona³, gave a talk on how to make our science communication more policy-friendly and impactful.

³ <http://www.onaocean.com>



EMB Executive Director Sheila Heymans presenting the European science-policy landscape.

On the same topic, ECOPs participated in two exercises. The first one challenged them to create a Policy Brief digesting the results of a review about blue carbon⁴. In the second exercise, ECOPs discussed what they knew of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive from the European Union and brainstormed on potential feedback to give if there was a consultation organised by the European Commission.

Networking & getting to know each other

The establishment of any network involves an engagement process, and personal contact facilitates this crucial aspect. Until the realisation of the ECOP Network Forum, connections between ECOPs had to be made online due to two primary challenges. Firstly, the Network was initiated in the midst of a pandemic, with numerous restrictions on travel and personal contact at the European level. Secondly, the nature of the ECOP Network itself, with members geographically spread across European countries and the limited economic resources of ocean professionals in the early stages of their careers, made it genuinely challenging to establish initial personal contacts.



The Network Forum was therefore organised for ECOPs to get to know each other, with sufficient breaks throughout the day and an informal evening offering a Galician traditional dancing workshop around a buffet.

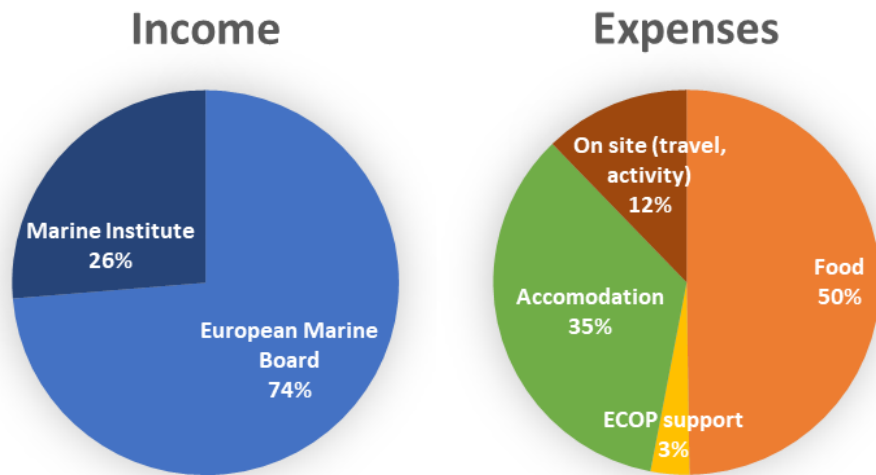
EMB ECOPs participating in a Galician traditional dance.

⁴ Howard, J., Sutton-Grier, A. E., Smart, L. S., Lopes, C. C., Hamilton, J., Kleypas, J., ... & Landis, E. (2023). Blue carbon pathways for climate mitigation: Known, emerging and unlikely. *Marine Policy*, 156, 105788.

Network Forum organisation and budget

The Network Forum was organised by the EMB Young Ambassadors with support from the EMB Secretariat. Monetary support was provided by the EMB and Marine Institute (Ireland). The budget covered food and accommodation for the participants, as well as on-site transportation and Network Forum activities. The Scientific Committee for Oceanic Research (SCOR) fully funded the attendance of two ECOPs affiliated with the Turkish EMB Member TÜBITAK. There were no venue costs due to a cooperation with the Fundación Cidade da Cultura de Galicia who graciously provided a venue on their premises. While the official Network Forum budget did not include the travel to and from the event, most ECOPs were supported by their relevant EMB Member organisation.

The organisation of the Network Forum was particularly efficient, thanks to the financial and in-kind support of the Spanish research council CSIC and local EMB Member organisation CETMAR, as well as the EMB Member organisations' support to their ECOPs, and the Ambassadors' commitment. It could be organised with a total budget of 8,024 €, welcoming almost 40 people for two days.



Distribution of the Network Forum income (8,024 € in total) from the support of the Marine Institute (EMB member organisation in Ireland) and the EMB annual budget approved by the Delegates, and of the expenses.

Future activities

One of the main goals of the ECOP Network is to empower and highlight ECOPs within EMB Member organisations. For that reason, the “Meet our ECOPs” format was created shortly after the Network Forum. This format - featuring a short biography - gives ECOPs the opportunity to be presented on the Network’s social media, gain visibility and seek collaborations. ECOPs are also invited to present their work related to ocean policy in the monthly webinar series ‘ECOP Wednesdays’ hosted by the Network. In addition, to maintain Network cohesion, the Young Ambassadors are organising periodic follow-up meetings with the ECOPs that participated in the Network Forum. There is also interest in hosting regular in-person events for the Network, allowing a wide range of ECOPs to participate and benefit from it, while avoiding a too heavy organisation and financial burden on Young Ambassadors and the EMB.

Finally, efforts will be made to enhance ECOPs' involvement by officialising the Network, providing greater representativity to ECOPs in EMB, keeping them aware of ongoing EMB activities they could join, and providing them the opportunity to include their expertise and opinion in future EMB publications and Working Groups to be voted for.

Conclusion

The ECOP Network Forum proved to be very beneficial for ECOPs to learn about the EMB and the European science-policy landscape. It was also an opportunity to connect with colleagues at similar career stages and to voice ECOPs needs. The close connection with the EuroOCEAN2023 conference was an advantage, as many ECOPs could combine both events, and the insights from brainstorming sessions could directly be communicated to the conference audience via the EMB Young Ambassadors keynote speech.

EMB ECOPs showed at the Network Forum and EuroOCEAN how eager and capable they are to be involved in decision-making processes, including in the EMB, and in the science-policy landscape. They are still facing numerous challenges that could be easily addressed in cross-generational collaborations. Organising in-person meetings for ECOPs affiliated with EMB Member organisations is key to promoting their training, their engagement in the marine science-policy sphere, and to give them a voice in the science-policy landscape, starting with their engagement in EMB activities.

Let's get to work!

Contributions

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