

The International Ocean Stewardship Forum held at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton 17 to 18 June 2008 provided an ideal opportunity for stakeholders from across the marine sector to exchange opinion and ideas on how science, industry and government can work together to develop and implement marine policy on national and international levels. More than seventy experts from Australia, Africa, America and Europe congregated over two full days to examine issues such as marine spatial planning, resource exploration and exploitation within and beyond national jurisdiction, and the resolution of disputes of sovereignty over maritime space.

The meeting identified the urgent need to coordinate the tremendous work which already exists in the UK and international communities in maritime law, policy and science. In particular, there was a lot of scientific knowledge that could guide marine policy, but the mechanisms of knowledge exchange were very poor. The common sectoral approach to delivery of advice to governments from individual institutes and organisations was criticised by many as missing the opportunity to provide joined-up input at strategic stages in policy development. Delegates across the board repeatedly welcomed efforts to harmonise and collaborate, while recognising the need to satisfy individual commercial needs and research requirements. Other headlines included the sobering recognition that for major deep sea mining processes, which owing to rising prices and demands for raw metals and mineral resources, will surely arrive sooner than forecast. There is an unique opportunity to prepare, design and mitigate against unregulated damage to the marine environment ; in a way we can only deal in retrospect with so many mature industries, such as fishing.

Three main approaches to stimulate interaction between specialists in law, policy and science were provided during the Forum: a series of keynote lectures set the scene by reviewing current practices, emerging issues and the latest science. There were then four parallel themed focus groups each debating critical issues of marine policy or its implementation with a view to answering the searching questions of the time. This was followed by a showcase of many different perspectives of interaction with the marine environment given by stakeholders from the whole user community. All of the presentations, contact details of speakers, and the results from the focus group discussions have been compiled here on the web-site. You are invited to view materials, download summaries and approach individuals and/or organisations that may have useful links and the potential for collaborative work programmes.

This event was very timely in occurring in the same month that consultation process on the UK Marine Bill closed and following several important United Nations meetings on the Law of the Sea and Ocean Governance. At all meetings of the UN the importance of science guiding the development of policy was highlighted as well as the need for greater knowledge of the deep oceans. Apart from stimulating new research, it was clear that there was a need for better coordination of research in order to address large-scale issues of global significance in ocean governance. Current funding of science at the national scale was too small in scale and was not up to the task. New methods for funding innovative multi-national research and for knowledge exchange were needed. Many of these issues were also identified at the Executive Council of the IOC meeting in the week following the Forum.

In order to provide a forum for key policy, law and science coordination planning has started for the 2009 International Ocean Stewardship Forum at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton. We aim to build on the success of the

International ocean Stewardship Forum and the network established to provide an effective interface between marine science and ocean policy and law.