

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-COST
Conference Title:	ESF-COST High-Level Research Conference on 'Marine Biotechnology: Future Challenges'
Dates:	20-25 June 2010
Chair:	Prof. Jan Olafsen
Rapporteur:	Dr. Ilaria Nardello

General Comments

The conference was successful under many profiles, such as scientific quality of the presentation, interactions between chairs, speakers and audience at the formal and informal level, venue and administration of the event.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

The Scientific Programme of the conference was broad and balanced, adequately covering the diverse fields of application for Marine Biotechnology. In accordance with the societal needs and current transnational policy objectives, a particular emphasis was given to research in the "Human Health and Well-Being" area.

The scope of the scientific programme was set on "innovation and vision for the future of marine biotechnology in Europe, moving from exploitation to sustainability".

The presentations thus introduced the audience to the so called societal "Grand Challenges", as defined in the draft position paper "Marine Biotechnology - A European Strategy for Marine Biotechnology" by the ESF-MB WG on Marine Biotechnology, chaired by Joel Querellou:

- sustainable supply of high quality and healthy food
- alternative sources of energy
- solving environmental issues
- human health
- innovative biomaterials

The whole scientific programme was then articulated around those themes, with excellent representatives from various institutions worldwide, who contributed to the on-going discussion with powerful presentations.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

The programme was covered in four days of activity. This is an extensive period of time for a conference with a relatively small number of participants (c.a 100), and allowed for a naturally paced schedule between formal presentations and less formal exchanges. Though the conference activities linked to the presentation and formal discussion panels occupied the majority of the day, time was built in the schedule to allow informal exchanges, including an initial icebreaker event, pleasant afterhours, a trip to visit the local folklore, and a final gala dinner. Important networking activities were carried out during those moments. Young and senior researchers appeared fully integrated.

Balance of Participants

The balance between young and senior participants might have been slightly skewed towards the latter group, though this perception might have been driven by the scientific quality of the younger researchers, or by the older age of the early career scientists. The conference certainly offered visibility to a geographically distributed group of scientists, representing a variety of marine biotechnology sub-fields.

Outlook and Future Developments

The conference has given the participants a great opportunity to develop new networks, from which collaboration can stem. Many participants had the occasion to raise their profile, or find the right person to discuss a particular issue with. This is often conducive to further collaborations. Furthermore, the conference Chairs were actively looking for feedback on the position paper "Marine Biotechnology - A European Strategy for Marine Biotechnology" by the ESF-MB WG on Marine Biotechnology. It is very likely that the interesting elements that emerged from those discussions, as well as the final Conference Scientific Report, will be utilized during the finalization of the paper (summer 2010) – and thus integrated in this important ESF-MB output.

Follow-up

Conference proceedings, possibly accompanied by a substantial scientific report, can be an important future reference to this event, in the short as well as in the long term.

It would be positive to support a range of dedicated bottom-up Research Conferences on specific Marine Biotechnology focal areas as identified during the Conference. These focal topics could be identified and developed by the research leaders in the respective domain (Marine biotechnology Toolkits, Human health, Environmental health, Energy, Food (including aquaculture)). Many of these leaders were speakers at the Conference. Every two years an overarching 'Marine Biotechnology Research Conference' (Such as this one in Maratea) should be organised to evaluate the progress, revitalise the effort where needed and reinforce the identify and attractiveness of the research area.

More important would be to organise short focussed workshops, thematic conference and brokerage events on specific research areas within the Marine Biotechnology domain which bring together various stakeholders, in particular marine biotechnology researchers and industry experts and representatives.

Organisation and Infrastructure

The venue, the catering and the accommodation were largely appreciated by the participants and have contributed to a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere of exchanges. On-site support and administration were impeccable.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Overall, the conference was largely successful in its main objective of promoting innovative thinking to move beyond exploitation and towards the sustainable use of our marine resources. Solutions to the societal "grand challenges" may not be around the corner, but the conference has achieved the important goal of increasing the momentum that marine biotechnology is experiencing worldwide, and to produce a moment-in-time snapshot of the state of the art of this multidisciplinary science.