



**Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
Executive Committee Annual Meeting
MINUTES**

Monday, August 8, 2016 at 3:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Dr. Stuart Bell, University of Alabama
Dr. Jack Hawkins, Troy University
Dr. John Stewart, University of Montevallo
Dr. Tony Waldrop, University of South Alabama
Dr. John Valentine, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
David England, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
Shelley Stephens, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium

Absent:

Dr. Jay Gogue, Auburn University

- Meeting called to order and roll call by Dr. Waldrop, Chair of the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC) Executive Committee.
- Dr. Waldrop called to approve minutes from the 2015 MESC Executive Committee conference call on August 11, 2015. Motion made to approve the minutes by Dr. Stuart Bell; motion seconded by Dr. John Stewart. Motion to approve minutes carried by unanimous vote of committee members.
- There were no open items to be discussed as old business.
- FISCAL YEAR 2017 BUDGET –
 - Dr. Valentine informed the executive committee that Mr. David England, the MESC Finance Director, was present on the call to assist with any technical questions regarding the proposed budget.
 - Currently, DISL financial conditions are in line with the budget projections approved by the Executive Committee for FY2016
 - Based on the most recent budget review meeting prior to call, the worst DISL will do for FY2016 is break even.
 - Highlights for the proposed FY2017 budget can be found in Document A of the materials sent prior to today's call.
 - In terms of revenues, MESC, will be in a positive position due to:
 - An approximate 7% increase in next year's state budget appropriations
 - An approximate \$21 million in committed extramural funds for basic research and restoration projects, we anticipate this increasing.
 - A possibility there will be a balance at the end of the year
 - If so, this balance will be added to the proposed contingency fund which has been set at 5% (a 2% increase over FY2016)

- In regards to projected increases in expenses, we have included the mandated legislative changes to BCBS and RSA, along with expected increases in power and liability insurance associated with the scientific diving program.
- Staff at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL), administrative home for the MESC, continue to look for more efficiencies and have identified two areas that require adjustments. We are evaluating competing approaches to solving these issues:
 - Private Institution Tuition – tuition from private institutions are charged on a flat fee basis and costs associated with supporting their students have risen substantially since the last adjustment in 2003
 - Summer Session Fieldtrips – DISL has been absorbing an average of \$55,000 in costs for field trips associated with summer UP courses from DISL revenues. The curriculum emphasizes classroom learning with a “hands-on” project-based training. This is a cost DISL needs to recover from a source other than from appropriations.
 - A formative plan has yet to be developed to address these issues. Dr. John Valentine requested authority from the Executive Committee to redress these issues or arrange for a follow-up call with the Executive Committee at the end of 2016 to discuss suggested course of actions.
- BOND –
 - Phase I renovations are on budget and schedule, remaining renovations are planned for completion in Fall 2017.
 - *A list of completed projects is listed on page 2 of Document A.*
 - A new, hi-tech addition to the Estuarium is coming along and expected to open later this fall.
 - The Estuarium saw over 80,000 visitors in 2016, this addition will certainly increase that number.
- Cost of Living Adjustment –
 - Dr. Valentine requested approval from the Executive Committee to provide DISL faculty and staff with salary adjustments in the event the FY2016 budget is closed with a positive balance. This request is to offset the increases in BCBS.
- Upon completion of his overview of the FY2017 budget, Dr. Valentine opened the floor for questions.
 - Dr. Jack Hawkins suggested private school tuition be reviewed on a periodic basis to ensure public and private are in line with one another.
 - Dr. Tony Waldrop asked what private MESC institutions participate in summer sessions and what are their typical enrollments.
 - Mr. David England answered that in summer 2016 session, 106 credit hours were earned by private institutions and majority of those were earned by University of Mobile and Spring Hill College, others included Huntington and Montevallo.
 - Dr. Jack Hawkins asked if private institutions pay a membership to join MESC.
 - Dr. Valentine answered that there is a one-time membership fee but the only private institution to join MESC recently was Alabama A&M in 2010 after the BP oil spill.
 - Dr. Tony Waldrop asked Dr. Valentine if he knew what level of COLA he would like to extend if the budget allows.

- These expectations are detailed by the Association of American Underwater Scientists (AAUS) of which we are a member.
 - This is rigorously managed program in terms of diver training and institutional accountability.
 - Support for MESC divers has led to increased insurance expenses but DISL feel it's a valid investment for our state-wide program.
- Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act) funded CENTER OF EXCELLENCE -
 - The vote by the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council (AGCRC) to enter into contractual negotiations with the MESC was held in December, 2015.
 - As of the day of this call we have not received the revised contract from the State of Alabama despite our requests for updates.
 - Once agreement is reached with the state on the contract, the AGCRC will meet to vote on approval of the contract with the MESC to administer the Center of Excellence.
 - Once approval has been received from the AGCRC, we still have a number of U.S. Treasury hurdles to clear, meaning it will most likely be next year before we can get this competitive program off the ground.
 - All of Executive Committee Vice Presidents for Research have had the chance to review a copy of this proposal.
- DISL FOUNDATION –
 - The foundation balance recently crossed its \$1 million threshold through a court settlement. The foundation is now in a better position to help DISL with projects that can't be covered through state appropriations.
 - Spring fundraiser (Cocktails with the Critters) sold 460 tickets and raised \$70,000.
 - The date for the Fall fundraiser (Marine Education Awards Luncheon) is set for November 1. The location for this event will be the Battle House in downtown Mobile. The Key Note Speaker will be Dr. Sylvia Earle. Her bio was sent to each of you in a separate email. At this luncheon an award will be given to an individual and corporate entity for being good stewards of our state's resources. Please let us know if you are interested in attending.
- Dr. Tony Waldrop called for any additional comments or questions.
 - Dr. John Stewart asked about the 14 vessels of the DISL fleet.
 - Dr. Valentine addressed the age and condition of the existing vessels.
 - Dr. Jack Hawkins asked for thoughts on to convening an MESC Board Meeting of all of the consortium Presidents at DISL and also perhaps participate in a snapper tagging trip, especially since there are so many new Presidents.
 - Dr. Valentine agreed and we will begin looking at dates shortly after the fall semester.
- Dr. Valentine added that Dr. Ken Heck, one of our DISL faculty, is a Past-President of the international Coastal Estuary Research Federation (CERF), and has successfully persuaded them to hold their 2019 conference here in Mobile.
 - It is expected that as many as 2,000 scientists will participate in this conference.
- Dr. Valentine also gave an overview of the two whitepapers he is authoring describing the importance of maintaining upstream freshwater inflow for coastal resources process.

- He also commented that most of what we know about the importance of this input is based on data collected in other states where watershed conditions are very different from those in Alabama.
- There were no additional questions or comments
- Dr. Tony Waldrop called for the call to adjourn. There were no dissenting votes and the meeting was adjourned.