



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

Thursday, August 29, 2019 at 9:30 a.m.

Attendees:

Dr. John Stewart, University of Montevallo
Dr. Jack Hawkins, Troy University
Dr. Jay Gogue, Auburn University
Dr. Stuart Bell, University of Alabama
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:

- Roll call of conference call attendees.
- Meeting called to order by Dr. Waldrop, Chair of the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC) Executive Committee.
- Dr. Waldrop called to approve minutes from the 2016 MESC Executive Committee conference call on August 22, 2018. Motion made by Dr. Stuart Bell to approve the minutes; motion seconded by Dr. Jay Gogue. Motion to approve minutes carried by unanimous vote of committee members present.
- **Fiscal Year 2020 Budget (Document A) –**
 - The budget numbers were broken down categorically to facilitate the discussion on the budget.
 - The upper two components of the document present our anticipated expenses while the lower three components represent our anticipated revenues. You can see when comparing the numbers from 2019 with those proposed for the coming year, we are conservatively planning for increases in both expenses and revenues.
 - Summing educational and general revenues, our anticipated budget is set at \$21.7 million for the coming year.
 - Research grants and contracts are estimated to contribute some 55% of all revenues. General and auxiliaries should contribute \$9.7M. Please also note that our state appropriation increased again this year, although not by as much as last year's increase.
 - Our employment numbers remain steady with 55 full time employees and 51 soft money employees.

- On the back of Document A, are the summary highlights of what is included in the proposed budget.
 - Beyond the repairs to our two larger vessels, and the 50-ton HVAC unit used to cool the aquarium and needed cafeteria upgrades, there is nothing extraordinary.
 - The contingency fund is set at just under 500K for the coming year. This is a 2% increase over last year's allocation.
 - Finally, I am asking that you give me approval to provide modest salary increases this coming year should our budget allow. This decision would not be made until we close the books on 2019 which will be towards the end of the year. We made the same request last year and the committee approved this option. As an aside, we finished 2018 in the black by some \$130K.
 - ***Motion to accept the FY2020 MESC budget made by Dr. Jack Hawkins; seconded by Dr. Jay Gogue***
- Before moving to the next agenda item, I also wanted to provide you with a little information on the performance of the newly established development office. So far, they have raised some **\$403,423K in donations (cash and in kind) this year**. There are an additional \$132K in requests outstanding. They have done so from several sources, primarily foundation awards. Funds raised this year have been used to support some scholarships, internships, a new pool, and the ROV competition. At this point I also want to provide a shout out to Chancellor Hawkins who supported our request for funds to build a portion of a new multipurpose pool and outdoor classroom. This addition will play an important role in training new scientific divers, student snorkeling in our summer classes, and the ROV competition. We are about 65% percent of the way along on this fundraising effort and would welcome any help/suggestions we can get on moving forward.
- **Summer School Performance Metrics**
 - Documents B, C, and D included in your package illustrates the success of the MESC in promoting marine education at the college and K-12 levels in Alabama. As you may know our summer program currently offers 25 courses. Document B shows this year's total credit enrollment in these courses reached 1386 hours. We could have done more but we are now at capacity in terms of housing. Looking at the pie chart you can see that undergraduate students came from 17 of our 23 member schools so we are continuing to meet the statewide mandate for the consortium. Document C shows the allocation of graduate hours taken on the campus during the summer which was 125 hours with the students coming from USA and UAB. Document D shows the total hours, that is undergraduate and graduate hours which totaled 1511 college hours.
 - Document E shows the historical trends for the summer college hours provided to the consortium schools beginning in 1972 on the left and ending in 2019 on the right. Focusing on the time period from 2008 until now what you see a substantial increase in enrollment ending in our record year.
 - Document F presents the hours offered during the academic year. 545 hours of graduate credit were offered during the past fall and spring. All total 670 graduate credit hours were offered for the 2018-2019 full academic year.

- **Discovery Hall Programs (K-12) Metrics**
 - **Document G**, the last performance document for our education programs, illustrates the performance of the K-12 summer program, also known as Discovery Hall. As you can see by comparing the blue and red bars which represent both the programs' enrollments and capacity, they too had a pretty good year. Day camp numbers were a little below capacity but otherwise those programs were completely full. I would also mention in passing that reservations for their academic year programs are now being placed as far as 2 years out. And, their on-campus academic year programs exceeded 10,000 children again. All these academic efforts now contribute close to \$1.3 to our revenue streams.
- **State Audit Report**
 - Document H is our annual state audit. As with past years, there were no findings reported. This is our 21st consecutive year with a clean audit.
- **Campus renovation status -**
 - Next on the agenda is the status of the initial campus renovation plans that were supported by the \$2M bond. We are very close to completion. By that I mean we will be down to one house renovation by the end of the year. There is a lot of new signage on the campus, the buildings have been painted and roads paved. Our challenge now will be modernizing/creating the new research space, which I want to talk about towards the end of this call.
- **Legal Resolution to Connect DISL/MESC Names**
 - We have identified a matter that we need to address. It's a small matter and its an easy fix. Specifically, the MESC at times has been doing business as the Dauphin Island Sea Lab for at least some 20 years. We are have sent resolution drawn up for your review and signature that our legal counsel tells us will clear up this problem.
- **Facilities Master Plan**
 - Next on the agenda is the development of a facilities master plan which we feel is critical to the continued growth and modernization of the campus. If you had a chance to look at the new strategic/five-year plan that was sent out earlier this summer, you may have spotted one of the goals which was to build research and housing capacity if we are to evolve into a transformative ocean science and education center. This plan will also allow us to better prioritize our fundraising and lobbying efforts. Last week I was able to convince the Sea Lab foundation that this master plan was the last piece we needed before moving all out on strategic plan implementation. The firm to conduct the planning is Barganier, Davis and Williams out of Montgomery.
- **USCG Property**
 - As an update, last year we began the conversation about the acquisition of the USCG recreational property which they had handed over to GSA for public auction. We continued to monitor the progress on the auction and by early summer they were announcing that there would be a national public auction. In anticipation that the winning bid would be much greater than we could afford, we formed an initial partnership with the Dauphin Island Park and Beach board in hopes of increasing the size of a future bid. Later Auburn

expressed interest in acquiring a portion of that property to expand their aquaculture facilities. So, as a member of the consortium we have added them to the partnership.

- Beginning last year, we began working with Senator Shelby's staff to see if we could find a way to reverse the Coast Guard's decision. We don't know yet if that has been successful, but we do know that the USCG has postponed what was an eminent release of the property to auction. We also know that the CG has told the senators staff they are not opposed to limiting the auction to public entities. If that happens, I believe we are in a good position. It is consensus among the partners that if this goes to public auction then we will have a tough time being successful.
- Following up on last year's inquiry from President Stewart, we can now report that we have no evidence of toxic materials in the soils on this property. This was a point president Stewart brought up last year.
- Because Park and Beach wants a disproportionately sized piece of the property, we, the Sea Lab, have entered discussions with them about doing some horse trading. Specifically, we would take less in return for acquiring a 1.3-acre piece of wooded property directly adjacent to our campus. It has some gorgeous old oaks and old pines on it and its directly to the coast guard property we want which is also heavily wooded. The P and B is held in a perpetual conservation easement, but the easement allows modifications for education and conservation. This would all total provide the MESC with an almost 6 acres of additional space for growth. I will let you know how this proceeds but the verbal agreements we have now make this at least possible. We are working with legal counsel now to firm all this up. I will warn everyone on this latter matter that we have discovered in the last week that our original lease of land from Park and Beach, it was an 80 year lease, was never probated. Park and Beach has raised this issue but we are not sure what they are thinking so I will have to get back to you on the implications of this discovery.

- **MESC Outreach**

- **Document J** of your package provides highlights from my activities conducted on behalf of the consortium. I touched based with several officials on 5 of the 23 campuses this past year and hosted one President on the DISL campus. We have been busy, via visits and calls, with folks in Washington discussing issues ranging from the Mobile Ship Channel widening to issues related to coal ash waste disposal. There were a few science board meetings, scientific meetings, public speaking moments and political office visits locally. I have also sought to maintain my science cachet via publications and presentations. I have also just been elected Vice Chair for the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Board.
 - One highlight of the outreach effort was my hosting the assistant secretary for commerce, retired Rear Admiral Tim Gallaudet. As an aside, he was the deck watch officer on the USS Kitty Hawk when America was launching its first airstrikes into Afghanistan. To give you a sense of how his visit went Shelley has included an article written by David Rainer who was present during the Public Meeting segment of his visit. Also attached were two articles about admiral's national ocean science priorities.

- **Support of Infrastructure Needs**

- In the past you have asked two important questions of me. The first was "where are we going" and I have addressed that via the new strategic plan which you received earlier this summer. Second two of you have asked "how can we help"? I was not ready to answer that

question until now. Thinking back to the budget conversations, some 55% of our revenues come from grants and contracts. Additionally, we are at capacity and our research space has aged significantly and we are in danger of not being able to successfully compete for future opportunities. There is also the issue of my being able to support scientists-in-residence from your campus' should they choose to work on the coast. Lastly, there is the issue of us not having co-located federal scientists on our campus and that this lack of a daily interaction is hindering our ability to compete with coastal scientists in Mississippi and Louisiana where federal cities exist.

- With that preamble, for the final item on the agenda, I would like to hear your thoughts on how we can gain state support to modernize, and really increase, the research space on the DISL campus. Most in the field agree that the future of biological oceanography will be in the “omics” field. Put simply, our current facilities cannot support this, and we need help addressing this priority. I have talked to everyone that will listen to me on this topic and feel that it will take buy in from the Governor’s office to make this happen. Secondly, after multiple calls and meetings with our federal delegations in Washington, the only way remaining to acquire bricks and mortar are via long term leases with federal agencies. To do this we have to have the space first. I am not sure if any of you have noticed but Southern Miss, who has gotten strong buy in for infrastructure from their governor, is recruiting students to study marine biology throughout our state. They also have a federal city with co-located employees that allow interactions with their scientists daily. It is through this form of engagement that many federal agencies finance research. This too, is addressed in the strategic plan. Put simply put- we will be left behind before long without some change. What I am asking from you, the members of the Executive Committee, is to sign a letter, after review, that would encourage the Governor to recognize the value of the state’s coastal resources and the need to invest in science infrastructure on the DISL campus. I am told by the staffer from CJS that one we have this that there is the possibility of co-locating a NOAA office via a long-term lease.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Center for Excellence**
 - The Center of Excellence application is still in Treasury’s hands, but we are hoping to hear something on September 1. If so, we will likely begin taking steps to roll out the program soon after the first of the year. That is depending on how fast the state and treasury complete all the legal documentation.
- Dr. Tony Waldrop call for any additional comments or questions.
- Dr. Tony Waldrop called for a motion to adjourn the call; a motion was made by Dr. Jack Hawkins, and seconded by Dr. John Stewart.
- The call was adjourned.