



Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Alabama Center for
Marine Education and Research

Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium Executive Committee Annual Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 18, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Attendees:

Mr. Jo Bonner, University of South Alabama
Dr. Stuart Bell, University of Alabama
Dr. John Valentine, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
David England, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
Shelley Stephens, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium

Absent:

Dr. John Stewart, University of Montevallo
Dr. Chris Roberts, Auburn University

- Meeting called to order by Mr. Bonner, Chair of the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC) Executive Committee.
- Roll call of conference call attendees by Ms. Shelley Stephens.
- Dr. Valentine requested a motion to approve minutes from the 2022 MESC Executive Committee conference call. Motion made by Mr. Bonner to approve the minutes; motion seconded by Dr. Bell. Motion to approve minutes carried by unanimous vote.

- **Fiscal Year 2024 Budget (Document A) –**

- Anticipated revenues, based on historical patterns and in-hand grants, contracts, and tuition, come to \$28,477,645 for restricted, unrestricted, and auxiliaries, which is comparable to the current year.
- Other highlights of the FY24 budget include:
 - \$7.0M supplemental appropriation from the Alabama ETF FY23 budget for renovations to facilities and deferred maintenance.
 - State Appropriation for FY24 was increased to \$6,250,000, with \$125,000 earmarked for the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, and \$125,000 earmarked for the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium.
 - Budgeted a 3% COLA for DISL employees.
 - \$500k for contingencies.
 - \$365,000 for debt service; we are close to paying off a bond that provided for emergency infrastructure repairs.

Motion to accept the proposed FY2024 MESC budget made by Dr. Bell; seconded by Mr. Bonner, followed by a unanimous vote to accept.

- **Nomination to Executive Committee**

- As a result of Dr. Cynthia Warrick retiring from Stillman College, Dr. Valentine asked the Executive Committee to consider the nomination of University of West Alabama President Ken Tucker to fill the vacant position.

Motion to confirm the nomination of President Ken Tucker the Executive Committee was made by Dr. Roberts; and seconded by Mr. Bonner, followed by a unanimous vote. This nomination requires a further confirmation by two-thirds of the remaining board members. This request will be mailed out after the conclusion of this annual meeting.

- **Summer School Performance Metrics**

- ***Documents C – F*** document our efforts to comply with our articles of incorporation: namely providing marine related courses to member schools throughout the State.
 - ***Document C*** provides evidence showing the relative distribution of credit hours among the 22 schools. Largely they come from the University of Alabama, South Alabama, and Auburn. Still, Troy, UAB, JSU and UNA send a number of students as well. This year [Summer 2023] 15 of the 22 schools sent students.
 - ***Document D*** We have some graduate student enrollment in our summer programs as well and the majority of these hours come from USA and UAB.
 - ***Document E*** simply shows the total distribution across the 16 schools.
 - ***Document F*** shows the program’s popularity has grown since the mid 80’s. We are probably maxed out in terms of capacity. We simply do not have enough beds. The good news is though that the interest in the State’s remarkable coastal resources is high.
 - We have a good bit of activity during the academic year, specifically this comes from graduate students in residence on the campus. That said, graduate students from UA, AU, and USA all struggle to find long-term housing on Dauphin Island. VRBO, Airbnb, and Vacasa now drive the rental market.

- **Campus renovation status -**

- ***Slide 11*** In January of this year, we successfully completed what we call the Multi-Stressor Lab. This 32-tank facility has the capacity to manipulate four impactful stressors simultaneously. This configuration of each experimental replicate is entirely unique and was fabricated in-house.
- ***Slide 12*** Next on the list of infrastructure projects is completion of the new, 65-ft aluminum vessel that will provide us with the capacity to conduct research around the clock. The size was partially scoped to fit in a relatively empty niche that is more cost effective, and potentially could generate revenues from governmental and private sector entities. Bids should go out by May 2024.
- ***Slide 13*** We have completed the construction of a new 75-feet by 25-feet pool. This addition will allow us to improve our in-house AAUS certified scientific diving program, provide snorkel training for summer students and interns, and support the K-12 program’s ROV competitions. The facility was paid for by our relatively new development office and foundation.
 - Adjacent to the pool will be a screened outdoor classroom placed (placed just to the right of the drone photo to the left of the pool).
- ***Slide 14*** As early as this fall, we may be ready to begin renovations of the HVAC systems in

our two dormitories. This effort will be a response to student input on what we can do to improve their summer conditions. Southland, who completed our previous ESCO, estimates that each dorm could be completed in time for summer 2024 classes.

- While we received a \$4M supplement to do this work, the budget is expected to be just under \$7M. Given that we feel this work is critical, we have decided to use part of this year's supplement, in addition to the original \$4M to get this critical effort done.
- **Slide 15** If you have visited the Aquarium in the past, you probably noticed that it was quite outdated. One of the tasks in the strategic plan was to modernize exhibits and associated educational material. It took us some three years to plan this effort and 66 days to the original facility gutted, then add the new exhibits installed. The emphasis is on the Alabama Watershed and research conducted by resident DISL scientists. During the first week being reopened, we had some 22,000 visitors pass through. There is a good chance we will reach our historical attendance by the end of the year, despite being closed during the beginning of summer.
- **Slide 16** The last project on this year's agenda is to begin planning to address housing on the campus. We have architects scoping a traditional dormitory arrangement but at best we are guessing the best we will be able to do is one-floor. Given the diverse priorities that we are being asked to address, this will likely not be enough. Along with initial scoping efforts, we are looking at other options.

- **Alabama Center of Excellence**
 - The RESTORE Act was one of a number of pots of penalty money that came to Alabama in the aftermath of DwH. In section 1605 of the Act, the five states were provided with opportunities to direct research focused on state coastal issues. In 4 of the 5 states, priorities were set by the Governor's Office. In Alabama, decisions are more complicated, and made by the Alabama Gulf Recovery Council, which consists of six mayors, two County Commissioners, and two state representatives. We, the MESC, competed and later designated to serve as the Center of Excellence. The state allowed us to design the mission, which is the multistressor theme I described earlier in relation to the new research facility. We awarded \$4.4M in the first consortium-wide RFP. Each proposal had an MESC lead PI and had to include scientists from at least two member schools. This slide shows the distribution of funds among the schools. Also, because of the emphasis on mayors, we made sure Mobile and Baldwin county were included as research sites. All PI's will provide the State with data on the impacts of current stressors on projected future risks.
- **MESC Programmatic Outreach Highlights**
 - Dr. Valentine gave a brief overview of outreach activities that included public presentations, meetings with public officials, and MESC member Presidents over the course of 2023.
 - In addition to these highlights, Dr. Valentine discussed efforts planned for early 2024 to reintroduce DISL to the regional and private institutions and members of the executive committee to gain background information that will serve as a foundation for an anticipated campus-wide program evaluation by outside individuals.
- **USCG Property**
 - We are now in the seventh year of our effort to acquire the former USCG recreational property. In one of Senator Shelby's last acts, he secured the transfer of ownership

through legislation from the USCG to FDA and the MESC. GSA anticipates the transfer to be complete by end of Q1 2024.

- **IMTA Demonstration Project**

- Dr. Valentine reviewed the current status of the IMTA project, and the design of the cages expected to be used.

- **Upcoming Events**

- The 11th annual Marine Environmental Awards Luncheon will be on October 25, 2023.
- This year's speaker is Dr. Charlie Rolsky of the Shaw Institute in Blue Hill, Maine, Director of Science for Plastics Oceans International.
- The Organizational award will go to the Downtown Alliance and Mobile Baykeeper for their initiative "Peace Out Plastics"; the individual award will go to BSA Eagle Scout John Shell for his Eagle Scout Project "The Reef Project."

OLD BUSINESS

- There was no old business to discuss.

- Dr. Valentine called for any additional comments or questions.
- Dr. Valentine called for a motion to adjourn the call; a motion was made by Mr. Bonner and seconded by Dr. Bell.
- The call was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.