

Terms of Reference

Associated Partnership Scheme

European Marine Observation and Data Network

Last updated: 11 August 2016

1 Purpose of this document

In response to the increasing number of requests from organisations to contribute and join the EMODnet partnership, in June 2016 the EMODnet Steering Committee agreed to establish a new membership category - Associated Partners - to allow more organisations to join the network in a straightforward and transparent way. This document aims to inform interested organisations about the general structure and operation of EMODnet as well as the benefits, conditions and application procedure for EMODnet Associated Partners. Associated organisations can be both data providers, data users or any other kind of stakeholder with vested interests to learn from experts involved in leading European marine data management initiatives and exchange best practices.

2 Background

The **European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet)** is a long term initiative from the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. It consists of a network of organisations working together to assemble marine data, data products and metadata from diverse sources within Europe in a uniform way and make these available via the internet.

EMODnet was initiated in response to the EU Green Paper in preparation of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy launched in June 2006. The **main purpose** of EMODnet is to unlock fragmented and hidden marine data resources and to make these available to individuals and organisations without restriction, except in special cases. The **primary motivation** for EMODnet is to stimulate investment in sustainable coastal and offshore activities through improved access to quality-assured, standardised and harmonised marine data. More broadly, the ultimate aim has always been to increase productivity in all tasks involving marine data gathering and management, to promote innovation and to reduce uncertainty about the behaviour of the sea. EMODnet has since been promoted as a key tool to lessen the risks associated with private and public investments in the blue economy, and facilitate more effective protection of the marine environment.

The **development of EMODnet is a dynamic process** so new data, products and functionality are added regularly while portals are continuously improved to make the service more fit for purpose and user friendly with the help of users and stakeholders. EMODnet development has been organised in three major phases.

- Phase I (2009-2013) developed a prototype (so called ur-EMODnet) with coverage of a limited selection of sea-basins, parameters and data products at low resolution;
- Phase II (2013-2016) works towards an operational service with full coverage of all European sea-basins, a wider selection of parameters and medium resolution data products;
- Phase III (2015-2020) will work towards providing a seamless multi-resolution digital map of the entire seabed of European waters providing highest resolution possible in areas that have been surveyed, including topography, geology, habitats and ecosystems; accompanied by timely information on physical, chemical and biological state of the overlying water column as well as oceanographic forecasts.



At the start of the final development phase, the EMODnet Central Portal (www.emodnet.eu) acts as the main access point to generic information and provides a gateway to seven sub-portals each of which pertains to a specific thematic group. Presently, there are seven sub-portals under construction: the Hydrography Portal, the Geology Portal, the Physical Parameters Portal, the Chemical Portal, the Biological Data Portal, the Physical Habitats Portal, and the Human Activities Portal. The thematic groups allow the appropriate experts to define a common structure for the data within each theme, thus ensuring interoperability. The Central Portal also develops specific data services to search, visualise and retrieve data layers from the different thematic data portals. The result will be a portfolio of seamless data layers across European and adjacent sea basins. To make this happen, EMODnet has been developed based on a set of core principles:

- Collect data once and use them many times;
- Develop data standards across disciplines as well as within them;
- Process and validate data at different scales: regional, basin and pan-European;
- Build on existing efforts where data communities have already organised themselves;
- Put the user first when developing priorities and taking decisions;
- Provide statements on data ownership, accuracy and precision;
- Sustainable funding at a European level to maximise benefit from the efforts of individual Member States;
- Free and unrestricted access to data and data products.

Since its inception, EMODnet has been developed by different consortia of contractual partner organisations through a series of projects. The EMODnet partnership has expanded drastically over the last few years as it has evolved from a set of proof of concept projects to a fully operational service. In the first development phase (2009-2013), EMODnet consisted of 59 partner organisations building on data resources from many more. During the second EMODnet development Phase (2013-2016), the partners grew from 120 at the onset (2013), to more than 160 partner organisations by 2016.

Individuals and organisations are encouraged to contribute data on a voluntary basis to ensure that the system remains current and expands continuously. Data providers are acknowledged and clearly associated with the datasets, e.g. via metadata, but are not necessarily EMODnet partners. Data or portal users have also contributed significantly in the development process, often on a voluntary basis, providing feedback and testing the tools and systems allowing these to be improved over time. However, again they are often not 'partners' *sensu strictu*. To satisfy the growing interest from organisations to contribute and join the EMODnet partnership, in June 2016 the EMODnet Steering Committee agreed to establish a new membership category for mutual benefit, the so called "Associated Partners", to allow more organisations to join the network in a straightforward and transparent way.

3 Aims and objectives

The aim of the EMODnet Associated Partnership is to reduce potential barriers for new members to join the network so that EMODnet becomes more open, inclusive and representative of the full spectrum of marine data users, providers and other stakeholders. It allows any organisation with clear interest and willingness to contribute to EMODnet to become more closely associated with the network as a recognised partner of the network without heavy contractual arrangements and obligations. The ultimate aim is to strengthen the network and allow interested organisations to benefit fully from the network and its activities.

4 EMODnet structure and governance

4.1 General structure and main functions

At the end of EMODnet Phase II (2016), the EMOD-network is composed of the following main groups (see also Figure 1):

- European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)
- EMODnet Secretariat
- Executive Agency for Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (EASME)
- EMODnet Contractual Partners (project coordinators, project partners, project subcontractors)
- EMODnet Associated Partners

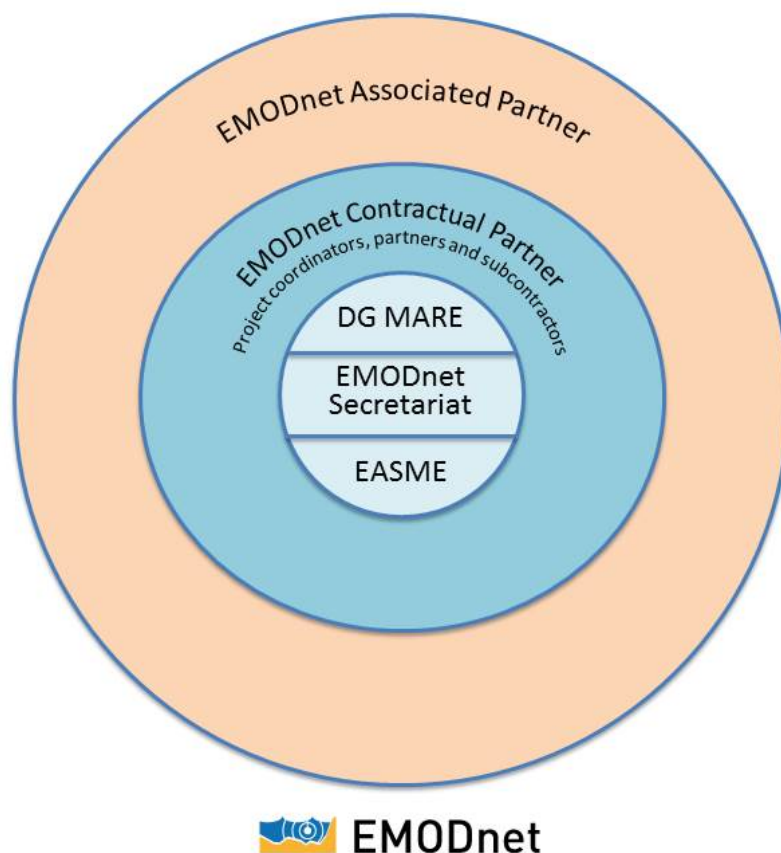


Figure 1. Composition of the EMODnet partnership

DG MARE is the initiator, funder and overall manager of the EMODnet initiative. The EMODnet Secretariat is assisting DG MARE with the coordination and communication of EMODnet activities. The Secretariat is responsible for the day to day management of the network, coordinating joint activities, monitoring progress and dissemination of results to wider community of interested stakeholders. Since 2015, EASME is the administrative and contractual manager of all new EMODnet contracts on behalf of DG MARE. Contractual partners perform tasks to develop and maintain EMODnet according to a service contract with DGMARE/EASME.

An EMODnet Steering Committee consisting of EMODnet Coordinators, Secretariat and DG MARE meets at least twice a year to discuss progress, identify issues of common concern and guide the development of the EMODnet Central Portal. An external Expert Group (MODEG) is being replaced by an external User Group to evaluate progress, provide feedback and guide the overall developments. The EMODnet User Group will be an advisory body composed of external users from representative organisations belonging to the main EMODnet user communities (private sector, public authorities, scientific community, civil society).

4.2 Contractual partners

What does contractual partnership mean?

EMODnet is developed through calls for tender, launched by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), primarily for 7 projects (lots) each developing and maintaining a data portal which provides access to thematic data and products. In addition there are a number of supporting projects funded through the same mechanism (calls for tender) via service contracts, e.g. for regional data adequacy assessments, to set up a facility to ingest more data into the system or to collect specific kinds of missing data. A contractual partner is a member of a consortium responding to such an EMODnet call for tender and granted a contract (or subcontract) to execute the work. Contractual partners sign a contract with the EC, perform tasks according to a proposal and receive financial compensation in return; they attend annual meetings, deliver on specific tasks, provide regular reports, etc.

4.3 EMODnet Associated Partners

What does associated partnership entail?

- An associated partner is formally recognised as a partner of the EMOD-network without receiving funding, without the need to be a contractual partner in one of the projects and without the need to adhere to associated contractual obligations;
- Light and flexible status without complicated application or exit procedure;
- Engagement to promote EMODnet, including some level of support of, and full identification with, the EMODnet goals, objectives and principles; some indication that the organisation is contributing to EMODnet (or is willing to do so) is necessary;
- Inclusion in first line communication in order to be more closely informed about EMODnet, with opportunities to collaborate and participate in EMODnet activities and events from an early stage.

Benefits of associated membership

For associated partners:

- **Gain access to a unique forum** for collaboration, networking and exploring new opportunities with regular invitations to interact with other partner during EMODnet activities (workshops, conferences, etc.)
- For SME's and larger private companies, it may contribute to **establishing corporate responsibility** and improve the image of the company, as it indicates subscription to the core principles of EMODnet, including adherence to good data management practices and open sharing of data;
- Being part of a growing network of key public and private organisations, learning from others and enjoying the huge **benefits of working together** to address some of the common marine data and sharing challenges which are linked to the management of the growing number and intensity of activities (and data collection) taking place at sea;
- **Have a say in the development of future EMODnet products and services** and the refinement of existing ones towards actual user needs;
- **Strengthen visibility of the organisation** via new channels (e.g. via the organisation's logo and links on EMODnet central portal, promotional materials, etc.);



- **Explore options to share infrastructures or processes** to save costs and share benefits;
- **Be kept informed** with first-hand information about global and pan-European marine data landscape, policy developments and funding opportunities.

For EMODnet

Associated Partnership allows more organisations and associations to join the network and actively participate without the cumbersome step of becoming a funded/contractual partner. Expansion with associated partners is expected to improve the exchange of best practices, stimulate the sharing of data resources and expertise as well increase the usage of EMODnet data services. Finally, more associated partners will help raise the profile and visibility of both EMODnet (e.g. via hyperlinks and logos on the central portal etc.) and the associated partner.

Associated Partnership Criteria

EMODnet associated partnership would be open to both public and private organizations collecting, providing or using marine data and observations, or related services/research, from any country bordering the European seas, and supporting the aims and objectives of EMODnet. Associated members do not have to pay a fee, but need to (i) actively support and implement the core principles of EMODnet; and (ii) provide some level of contribution to EMODnet. Contributions could for example consist of providing expert advice to address data sharing challenges, making available datasets, actively promoting EMODnet principles and/or the network itself (e.g. EMODnet logo on the organisation website), organising EMODnet related events or demonstration activities, providing feedback on new tools/services/datasets, making available relevant services or data tools and/or by contributing expertise to the EMODnet developers.

Associated organisations can be both data providers, data users and/or any other kind of stakeholder with vested interests to learn from / work with other members and support the initiative. Associated partners do not have to be based in Europe, but must have some link with Europe (e.g. activities in Europe, collaborations with European organisations, collecting/holding data from European seas, ...). Both individual organizations, associations and/or networks can apply.

Application procedure

Any organization wishing to become an associated partner can do so by sending an expression of interest describing the organization, explaining why the organization wishes to become a member and indicating how it has/will contribute(d). An application can also be made by an existing partner for another organisation with their agreement.

The letter with expression of interest should be brief and sent by email to janbart.calewaert@emodnet.eu. The EMODnet Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the expression of interest, and if the organization is deemed eligible it will make a recommendation to DG MARE and the Steering Committee who have an opportunity to object. The organisation will be informed about the outcome at the latest two weeks after the first Steering Committee meeting following receipt of the application. If the application is accepted, new associated partners will be added to the list of partners with logo on the EMODnet Central Portal. The organisation will also be able to display the EMODnet logo on their website indicating that they are a partner. Associated partnership is always granted for a period of one year and automatically renewed until one of the parties (the Secretariat/DG MARE and/or the partner organisation) decides to end the membership.

There is no partnership fee, but voluntary in kind contributions are always very welcome.