

Marine Science Information: an International Commodity  
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## A MEDITERRANEAN NETWORK AND CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

A project linking an environmental information center to an international regional network is in progress in the Mediterranean. Goals of the project, are to broaden the exchange of scientific and technical information in the region with an emphasis on environmental and marine research.

### INTRODUCTION

Environmental protection has become a world-wide concern; nowhere is that concern more justified than in Mediterranean lands, where fifty centuries of hard use, have reduced land and water resources to a bare minimum.

These problems have been recognized since the 1970's through the formulation under the United Nations Environment Programme, of the Mediterranean Action Plan, as we have already heard from our colleague from Monaco. However, nowhere in the many references to this coordinated effort is there explicit recognition of information transfer; that is, how scientific and technical information generated or required by the Plan will be stored, retrieved and disseminated. Presumably, the results of research would be available through normal channels, scattered among the agencies of a dozen countries. For practical purposes, though, those research results would be inaccessible; for, normal channels are no longer sufficient! The costs in time and energy, in lack of productivity, in sheer frustration are too high. Information can and must become more accessible.

With this in mind, we have laid the foundation and are moving toward establishing a multinational network and environmental information center.

### GOALS

Our goals are to provide a mechanism for improving the exchange of scientific and technical information among Mediterranean countries,

and to promote cooperation in environmental protection and marine research in the region.

To achieve these goals, we have set the following objectives:

**First:** Establish a reliable, comprehensive information service that will include:

- a. collecting and storing documents of the Mediterranean Action Plan and other pertinent publications;
- b. searching the Center's files and the world literature, to answer questions;
- c. delivering documents in the Center's collection or obtained from others promptly and at a reasonable cost to all requesters.

**Second:** Establish and operate a reliable information transfer and communications network that will include:

- a. maintaining of a computerized data base of bibliographic references pertaining to the Mediterranean environment and marine research;
- b. maintaining a file of experts and information sources to whom inquirers can be referred;
- c. publishing bibliographies and state-of-the-art summaries for students, researchers, and managers.

**Third:** Improve the exchange of scientific and technical information within the Mediterranean region by:

- a. helping to coordinate information services among government and international agencies;
- b. contributing to the creation of a larger network to handle all scientific and technical information exchange in the region.

This project is built around a particular hardware-software combination. The software, MINISIS, developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa, Canada, from a previous computer program, ISIS, itself a product of the International Labor Office and subsequently of UNESCO.

ISIS runs on a large IBM computer; MINISIS on the Hewlett-Packard 3000 minicomputer. The MINISIS program on the HP-3000 computer is a versatile and powerful combination. Its features include:

1. primary development for bibliographic information systems but flexible enough for other applications;
2. data base creation and management facilities and information retrieval in one package;

3. easily-learned instructions, even for people with little or no experience with computerized information systems;
4. compatibility with the widely-used ISIS computer program;
5. complete set of programs to support library management and information retrieval, within library or on network;
6. powerful search processor that will support use of on-line thesaurus, multi-lingual-recognition of thesaurus terms - English, Spanish, French, Arabic and Greek - and Boolean and arithmetic operations;
7. production of bibliographies, library catalogs, and indexes in varied formats;
8. full range of utilities to assist the data base administrator in creating and maintaining data bases;
9. exchange of data bases by accepting and producing magnetic tapes conforming to ISO standard 2709.

MINISIS is already being used in Morocco, the United Arab League, Tunisia, France, and other Mediterranean countries.

Because MINISIS accepts bibliographic data in the ISIS format, a significant portion of the Center's data base can be created by selecting and loading appropriate references from data bases already maintained by FAO, ILO, UNESCO, or UNEP. Those thousands of references represent an asset of enormous value, not only for the direct labor costs of entry saved thereby, but for the years of work they represent. Building on that work, the Center can put a data base and network into operation in a relatively short time.

The Center is located in Athens, housed in the library of the Ministry of Planning and the Environment, and is funded by the Greek Government. Its establishment was announced at the "Third Meeting of the Contracting Parties of the Mediterranean Action Plan" in Dubrovnik, February 28-March 4, 1983. It was adopted and member nations were invited to avail themselves of the Center's services, and to participate both as depositors and as users.

Following the 1983 announcement, a network of correspondents was gradually developed in cooperation with the National Med-Pol coordinators of the member nations. The test came when the joint research program was launched on the study of sudden blooms of jelly-fish in the Mediterranean, in June of 1983. Yugoslavia, Italy and Malta were the first to participate. The Center as such, served as the depository of all relevant research and provided the mechanism for scientific information transfer.

This effort, we believe, can and will help promote international cooperation in the field and will lay the groundwork for the broader

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exchange of scientific and technical information in the Mediterranean region.