

EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC DIVING PANEL

Terms of Reference

1. Background

The European Scientific Diving Panel (**ESDP**) was first constituted as the European Scientific Diving Committee in 2007 and endorsed as a European Marine Board (EMB) Panel in 2008, and this until April 2017. In October 2017, becoming a panel of the MARS network, the ESDP still acted as an operational platform to advance underwater scientific excellence and to promote and implement a practical support framework for **occupational scientific diving** related activities.

2. Mission and objectives

2.1. Mission Statement

To advance the use of scientific diving as a key research tool in Europe

2.2. Definition and rationale for Occupational Scientific Diving (OSD)

OSD is science-led diving and is needed to support professional research and education and to protect, conserve, and monitor the natural and cultural heritage environment. It is not recreational or commercial diving. OSD exists in a health and safety framework that involves certified occupational scientific divers, diving officers, hyperbaric physicians, scientific project leaders, heads of laboratories, administrators, and legislators.

OSD is a highly productive, cost-effective *in situ* research tool that supports and advances marine research through providing efficient, innovative, and targeted techniques and methodologies for selective and efficient sampling and complex [experimental] work underwater. This is particularly effective for undertaking science in coastal or restricted/remote environments, *e.g.*, polar regions and under ice where OSD can offer an accurate and reliable method for deploying, maintaining, and retrieving equipment in remote locations. OSD can be used to research global scientific questions including climate change, ocean acidification, seafloor ecosystem functioning, paleoclimate reconstruction.

OSD is becoming increasingly important as a relevant monitoring tool in support of policy needs, more particularly to address the monitoring requirements and other programmes of measures set out by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) for the EU Member States.

Scientific diving is also consistent with the international demand for a responsible, resource-conserving, and sustainable research methodology in Europe.

2.3. ESDP Objectives

The ESDP is a focused and technical panel which acts as an operational platform for OSD in Europe in order:

To promote safety in scientific diving across Europe through:

- Facilitating the existing pan-European framework to **promote the secure practice of OSD** through best practice in science diving operational and safety issues.
- Promoting and supporting the establishment of **national scientific diving committees (NSDCs)** where they don't exist.
- Developing and maintaining a **European database of scientific diving activities**.

To advance underwater science excellence in Europe through:

- Promoting OSD as a highly productive, cost-effective *in situ* research **tool for interdisciplinary efficient research in the marine environment**.
- Facilitating a pan-European framework for networking and exchange of knowledge to encourage best practice in **observation and monitoring of the littoral and coastal environment¹ and of the underwater cultural heritage** fostering advances in dive technologies and procedures.
- Promoting the calibration and standardization of the necessary methods and the management of the collected data.
- **Advancing the scope of science delivery** through the adoption of common methodologies / protocols across pan-European gradients and/or the development of new techniques.
- **Facilitating conferences, workshops, courses, and publications where OSD** is promoted as a tool for scientific research and management.
- **Encouraging quality controlled ESD/AESD compatible training²** on specific scientific and technological issues. ESDP is controlling initially, and when needed, the training provided by national agreed training centers. The NSDC will facilitate such a control.
- **Encouraging and supporting European funded research networks** that employ OSD.
- **Initiating and developing synergies and interactions with other relevant** marine networks
- **Promoting links with industry** (e.g., sensors, real time communication for field data transfer, underwater positioning, etc.).
- Promoting OSD as a **relevant monitoring tool in support of policy needs**.

To encourage international mobility in the European occupational scientific diving community through the implementation of a practical support framework by:

- **Becoming established as the recognized European Body** with responsibility to provide advice and guidance on the acceptance of existing standards within national and international legislative processes for occupational scientific diving.
- Promoting the widespread recognition of the current **European Scientific Diver and Advanced European Scientific Diver (ESD and AESD) standards** as the minimum standards for scientific diving by ensuring their acceptance as the primary qualifications for OSD in Europe.
- Facilitating, promoting, and maintaining **communication with and between present national scientific diving organisations and the National Scientific Diving Committees**.
- **Fostering links with the international relevant Occupational Scientific Diving initiatives**.

3. Membership

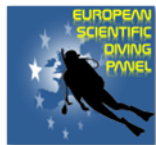
3.1. Membership categories (approved on 2019, May 19th)³

- **Candidate member:** Creating a **NSDC**; on the way to implement ESDP's ESD and AESD as minimum initial training standards
[Initial requirement: Updated list of members and involved institutions, quality control of the initial training and of competence certificate issuing]
- **Member:** Having in place a **NSDC** in contact with a national authority that has responsibility for **OSD** and having already implemented the ESD and AESD qualifications as the primary standards
[Supplementary requirement: Published statutes, minutes of meetings and/or newsletter, name of the national certification, authority issuing certification, annually updated statistics of the national OSD activity (number of divers, dives, eventual incidents or accidents, given §2.3 - recommended)]

¹ Note that blue water diving begins to be open to OSD

² There needs to be credible and independent oversight by the government (or by an independent body mandated by the government) of training organisations, with a single point of contact for certification. In some cases, this could be the independent national health and safety regulator if they have the necessary competencies [The International Diving Regulators and Certifiers Forum (IDRCF)]

³ cf. the annexed updated list



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- **Statutory member:** OSD and NSDC recognized by law, as well as ESD and AESD standards
[**Supplementary requirement:** *Legal texts, official list of the agreed formation centres, annually updated statistics of the OSD national activity (number of divers, dives, eventual incidents or accidents, given §2.3 - compulsory)*]

3.2. Membership of the ESDP should be:

the official national/deputy delegate (or appointed by the NSDC) for OSD in a European country.

Members must comply with the national legal regulations, like but not limitative, for Health and Safety at Work (if these exist). Where possible that person should be able to prove that he/she has support for representing their country or National Scientific Diving Committee (if they exist). The basis of his/her representation needs to be documented in the minutes of the ESDP meeting where it is first accepted.

The representative should:

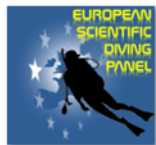
- Be involved with a NSDC or establishing a NSDC that is representing relevant research institutes, universities, museums, etc. that have an occupational scientific diving program,
- Demonstrate a link with a national regulatory body that has legal influence over occupational scientific diving,
- Be aware of the ESDP minimum standards for scientific diving [known as (A)ESD recognition system] and to be effectively working toward full reciprocal recognition of their **national certificate** in this system (annual update during ESDP meetings),
- Be actively involved with the ESDP (*e.g.* sending details of their national meetings),
- Inform the ESDP of any change in the number or composition of their NSDC. He/she should produce at least an annual update,
- Statutory members must ensure that a representative attends each meeting and report on certification issued in their country.

Experts on specialized fields and additional EU Member State representatives may be invited to the meetings/workshops on an *ad hoc* basis.

Where possible, only one person (official delegate or nominated representative) per country is eligible for statutory membership (with voting rights) of the ESDP. Communication should be fixed with the official delegate; but that delegate can nominate an alternate or other colleagues to attend meetings as appropriate. However, cases where more than one delegate per country could add value should be presented for consideration by the ESDP; additional delegates would not have voting rights (*see § 4*).

3.3. Role of ESDP members:

- **Prepare for and attend** ESDP meetings,
- Submit intellectual inputs (*e.g.* ideas for new activities) and contribute to activities as appropriate including concrete outputs in the form of European scientific diving standards and **consultation documents**,
- Provide updates on OSD developments and regulatory changes at the National level, at the latest one month after the decision has been taken and before the end of November of the year concerned, and
- Channel relevant information from the organizations they represent and their respective national occupational scientific communities to the ESDP, and *vice versa*.



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3.4. ESDP Deliverables/Instruments

- ESDP meeting reports,
- Concrete outputs in the form of European occupational scientific diving standards and consultation documents, focusing on:
 - Operational, safety and training issues related to scientific diving,
 - Diving as a tool for vocational scientific research,
- Advice for organizing scientific projects involving citizen science diving (CSD).

4. Governance

4.1. ESDP Chair

The ESDP Chair is appointed or elected at absolute majority (50% + 1) amongst the ESDP statutory members for a duration of four years.

The ESDP Chair's role is to:

- Chair the ESDP meetings,
- Oversee the progress of ESDP activities, and initiate new ones,
- Review reports of the meetings before spreading,
- Act in the best interest of the ESDP and its objectives.

4.2. Voting procedure

- Each appointed national representative ESDP member has the right to vote in all matter concerning ESDP including election of the chairperson but excluding ToR's modification only open to statutory members.
- One vote per member is accepted (completed by official delegate/deputy representative).
- Votes in writing (including e-mail) will be accepted where 28 days' notice has been provided.

5. Meetings

- Nowadays, the majority of ESDP meetings are held *via* videoconference, focusing on specific topics and lasting no longer than half a day (1 to 2 hours). This replaces the original system of biannual plenary meetings lasting a full day. The sitting chair proposes meetings. A meeting can also be convened if at least three statutory members/members propose a clearly defined topic.
Face to face meeting are recommended at least one every two years.
- Candidate members must be present at least at one ESDP meeting by year to update the national OSD situation. Failing to do that will result on being dropped out the candidate member list.
- A draft meeting report will be provided to the chair within ten days after the meeting maximum.



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Appendix to the ESDP's Terms of References

Membership (*The list is updated as and when changes of situation are declared*)

Date: 2025, June 5th

Candidate members: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Netherlands⁴

Members: Finland, Italy, Poland

Statutory members: Belgium, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom

Contacts: Austria, Monaco, Spain⁵

National Scientific Diving Committee - NSDC

To join the ESDP, each country must establish a **National** Scientific Diving Committee (NSDC) that comprehensively represents its national **occupational** scientific diving (OSD) activities across all disciplines. This committee should be legally constituted according to national law, under the oversight of a relevant legal authority (typically a ministry such as labour, research, or culture, or even the Navy). A compelling alternative is to establish an NSDC whose members are appointed by national universities, museums, and scientific institutions, **thereby ensuring thorough representation** encompassing the legal and technical aspects, but also occupational health and safety, alongside all relevant scientific disciplines. Each NSDC appoints a representative to the ESDP and makes its meeting reports available to the ESDP, preferably by publishing them on its website with regular updates.

The NSDC is responsible for promulgating, applying, and enforcing the European Scientific Diving at Work (A)ESD recognition system. It publishes an updated list of its members and involved institutions, its statutes, meeting reports, and details of the national certification (name and issuing authority). A country becomes a statutory ESDP member upon legal recognition of occupational scientific diving and the ESD/AESD competency levels. Publication of the relevant legal texts and the official list of recognized training centers is also mandatory. The NSDC ensures documented quality control over OSD training and certification within the member state.

Only national certificates can be issued by the competent national authority due to the absence of a European legal framework for certification. However, the ESDP recognition system, based on the minimum (A)ESD competency level, facilitates the mobility of the OSD community. This principle of mutual recognition is further governed by the European Parliament and Council Directive 2005/36/EC (7 September 2005) on the recognition of professional qualifications.

Acronyms list

AESD	Advanced European Scientific Diver standard
CSD	Citizen Science Diving
EMB	European Marine Board
ESD	European Scientific Diver standard
ESDP	European Scientific Diving Panel
MARS	European Network of Marine Research Institutes and Stations
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NSDC	National Scientific Diving Committee
OSD	Occupational Scientific Diving

⁴ Faced with difficulties in getting OSD legally recognized at a national level, Croatia unilaterally requested to no longer appear among the ESDP's candidates.

⁵ Spain has published a Royal Decree 550/2020 of 2 June, determining the safety conditions for diving activities.