

European Research Vessel Operators (ERVO) group -

Terms of Reference

1. Objectives

The objectives of the ERVO group are to create and to maintain a forum for European research vessel operators, with special focus on research vessels and associated equipment and/or instruments, and which will give the members the following opportunities:

- Attend ERVO meetings where common technical, operational, safety, environmental and legal issues/problems are identified and discussed, and possible solutions presented.
- Contribute to the development within Europe of best practice in the operation of research vessels and associated equipment.
- Learn about developments and plans for procurement of new research vessels, equipment and instruments, and upgrades of existing research vessels, equipment and/or instruments.
- Be member of a pan-European network of research vessel operators which represents opportunities for:
 - Exchange of information and best practices.
 - Exchange of ship time, personnel, instruments and equipment (barter arrangements).
 - Co-funding and co-ownership of vessel, instruments and/or equipment.
 - Participation in benchmarking exercises to look for the most cost efficient ways to man and operate research vessels and equipment.
- Identify methods and ways to minimize the impact of the operations of research vessels, instruments and equipment on the environment and marine life.
- Develop and maintain a strategy for the future growth of ERVO in terms of membership, and the development in topics and activities that ERVO will take an interest in to stay relevant and useful for European research vessel operators in particular and the European Marine Science community and its stakeholders in general.

ERVO, with its broad membership of research vessel operators representing the majority of European nations who has their own fleet of research vessels, is the ideal focal point for any organization in Europe looking for ways to communicate directly with the experts on research vessels and associated instruments and equipment, and should therefore as a group and as individual members take every opportunity to promote the collective expertise and knowledge that ERVO represents.

2. Background

In 1999, the European Science Foundation Marine Board (ESF/MB) decided to initiate and promote the co-ordination of operators of small to medium sized European research vessels as a complement to the Ocean Fleets Exchange Group (OFEG) (see www.ofeg.org) and International Ship operators Meeting (ISOM) (see www.irso.info), both established a few years earlier.

This led to the first ERVO meeting being held in Roscoff, France, in December 1999 and since then an annual ERVO meeting has been held in different European countries. Today the ERVO group is concerned with all sizes of research vessels, from coastal to global, owned and operated by European nations.

Since its birth ERVO has grown and developed in a positive manner, and a relative large group of research vessel managers uses the forum and attends the meetings annually. The success of ERVO can be measured from the fact that the number of European participating countries in its meetings has risen from 7 to 19, proving to be a useful platform for approx. 30 regular attendees (up to 50 in 2015).

3. Membership

ERVO membership is open to all European research vessel owners/operators from governmental organizations. New members will be formally accepted at the annual ERVO meetings.

EurOcean (see www.eurocean.org) and the EUROFLEETS project(s) (see www.eurofleets.eu) are considered as ERVO partners.

Private research vessel operators/companies, insurance companies, naval architects, policy makers, classification societies, scientists and other interested parties are welcome to attend, as guests, the annual ERVO meetings.

Each country member pays an annual membership fee (300€) to cover the running cost of ERVO, such as maintaining a web site, producing leaflets and other promotional materials, courtesy, gifts, mail expenses etc. In addition each participant pays a conference fee when attending annual ERVO meetings. Adjustments of the membership fee and conference fee is agreed on at every annual ERVO ExCom meeting and presented to the annual ERVO General Assembly held during the annual ERVO meeting for formal approval by the members.

A members-, partners- and regular guests list will be maintained by EurOcean and will be available on the ERVO web site (see www.ervo-group.eu).

3,000 € will be used to cover the EurOcean service provided to ERVO (maintenance of the web site etc.). Any surplus will be used to cover annual ERVO ExCom expenses, such as renting meeting rooms, consumables etc.

4. ERVO organization

4.1 ERVO governance

ERVO is an open, member driven, non-profit group of European research vessel operators, and therefore does not report to any other group, organization or authority.

The ERVO general assembly (GA) is the governing body of ERVO and consists of all ERVO members present at the annual ERVO meeting.

4.1.1 ERVO General Assembly (ERVO GA)

The GA session will take place just before the annual ERVO meeting and is open to members only. At least one representative from each ERVO member country should attend the annual ERVO GA.

All members present at the GA have one vote each in every voting taking place during the GA. All formal decisions are done by simple majority (more than 50% of the votes). The vote can be either written or by raise of hands.

At the ERVO GA, the ERVO ExCom reports on its work since the last annual ERVO meeting and presents its plans for the coming year to be approved by the GA. Then a report will be done to the ERVO group during the annual ERVO meeting.

4.1.2 ERVO chair and vice-chair

The ERVO GA elects a **chairperson** and a **vice-chair** every two years at the GA held as part of the annual ERVO meetings. All members present at the GA have the right to vote for the acceptance or rejection of the proposed candidates. The election is done by simple majority (more than 50% of the votes). The vote can be either written or by raise of hands.

The chair is elected for two years and his/her primary tasks are to:

- Work out the agenda for the annual meeting in cooperation with the vice-chair and the host of the meeting.
- Conduct the annual ERVO meetings.
- Establish working groups and/or workshops as deemed necessary and beneficial.
- Act as the formal ERVO representative to other groups and organizations.
- Promote ERVO and recruiting of new members.

The chair period starts at the beginning of the annual meeting where the election took place, and formally ends at the beginning of the second annual meeting after the election when hand over to the new chair takes place.

The vice-chair's main responsibility is the production of minutes of meetings and to support the chair as necessary. Draft minutes of meeting shall be circulated among the meeting participants no later than two calendar months after the meeting, and final minutes shall be circulated among the participants and be validated at the beginning of the following annual meeting by members present, and then posted on the ERVO web site.

Minutes of meetings shall also be distributed to the following groups:

- European Science Foundation/Marine Board
- International Research Ship Operators (IRSO)
- Ocean Fleet Exchange Group (OFEG)

In addition, the vice-chair, in cooperation with EurOcean, shall produce a press release, which sums up the results of the annual meeting and distribute it to all registered ERVO members, post it on the ERVO web site and include it in the next EurOcean newsletter. Normally the vice-chair will be the primary candidate to be the next chairperson of ERVO, if he/she is willing and able to take on the task.

4.1.3 ERVO Executive committee (ERVO ExCom)

At the 2014 ERVO meeting it was decided to set up an ERVO “ad hoc” working group (WG) to initiate a strategic discussion about the future/way ahead (aspirations, goals, opportunities and evolutions etc.) of ERVO. One of the conclusions/recommendations was the creation of an ERVO Executive Committee (ERVO ExCom):

- The ERVO ExCom consists of no more than 8 members, including the ERVO chair and ERVO vice-chair as ex-officio ERVO ExCom members.
- The initial ERVO ExCom is composed of members of the 2014/2015 “ERVO way ahead” WG.
- At least, an annual work meeting will be organized in the autumn (ideally just before the annual IRSO meeting), and more often if necessary.
- Three members of the ExCom are replaced by new members every other year by election at the annual ERVO meeting, starting from ERVO 2017, such that the “normal” time as ERVO ExCom member is four years.
- If a member of the ExCom is elected as vice-chair, and eventually chair, he/she then starts on a new four year service period in the ExCom regardless of service time as member. On the other hand, an outgoing chair can be elected as ExCom member at the same annual meeting as he or she steps down as chair and by that start on a new four year ExCom membership period.
- The ERVO chair is also the chair of the ERVO ExCom.
- The ERVO vice-chair is the ExCom secretary and responsible for the minutes of the ExCom meetings.
- All relevant ExCom material will be posted on the ERVO website.

The ERVO ExCom tasks are:

- Give inputs to the agenda of next year’s ERVO meeting
- Propose and maintain a standard format for the ERVO agenda to be used in the coming years, with thematic sessions such as Delegates report of activities, RV builds/modifications, Fleet scheduling, Regional cooperation/coordination, Technical issues, Manning/Safety/Training, Cooperation, Outreach, etc.
- Participate in the continuous development and improvement of the ERVO website.
- Maintain and adapt the ERVO Terms of Reference as necessary to reflect any new directions or organizational developments within ERVO.
- Develop and maintain an annual ERVO work plan, including a list of actions and associated milestones.
- Develop and maintain an ERVO strategy paper for the next 5 years, to be revised periodically, and to develop a list of topics of interest (e.g. EMSO, RV benchmarking, technical personnel training, safety training, medicals for scientists etc.).
- Develop and maintain a report covering the history and main events of ERVO.
- ERVO ExCom reports its annual work at the annual ERVO GA meeting for approval.

4.1.4 ERVO treasurer

A volunteer ERVO member acts as ERVO treasurer; collecting ERVO membership fees, paying EurOcean for the services provided to ERVO, managing the budget for ERVO ExCom and reports about budget, income and expenses at the annual ERVO GA in order to maintain transparency regarding financial matters. This task is expected to start in 2017.

4.2 Annual ERVO Meeting

A 1,5 day annual ERVO meeting should be arranged in May or June, alternating between in Northern and Southern Europe if possible. Just before the annual ERVO meeting, an annual ERVO General Assembly (GA) will take place.

This annual meeting will be preceded by a half-day regional focus meeting in order to foster more regional cooperation among ERVO members. It will focus on the specific European region where the annual meeting takes place (Black sea, Baltic Sea, Eastern Med, Western Med...).

To make it possible for all members to host such meeting, an annual conference fee can be agreed on before the meeting.

Non-members, such as industrial representatives, scientists, policymakers, stakeholders and others can be invited by the ERVO chair to attend all or part of the annual ERVO meetings.

The ERVO chair can decide to arrange “government only” sessions during annual ERVO meetings, or create “government only” working groups/workshops, if required by members in order to discuss topics that are competition sensitive and therefore not open to commercial operators/companies.

The hosting of the annual ERVO meeting is a voluntary task for a member or partner or guest of ERVO, and the meeting host is responsible for all local arrangements at the meeting site, and to help the meeting attendees with travel arrangements, accommodation etc. as necessary. The host is also welcome to arrange local tours/presentations of relevant infrastructure, in particular research vessels, equipment and/or land-based facilities. The host is also encouraged to invite local/national speakers or experts with special relevance to the ERVO group areas of interest, such as classification societies, maritime authorities, science groups, policy makers or stakeholders.

4.3 Workshops, ad hoc working groups and study groups

If the ERVO plenary meeting so desire, or if the ERVO chair by correspondence proposes it, a work shop, ad-hoc working group or study group to work on a particular issue or problem could be established, and the group then reports back to the next annual ERVO. If the European Science Foundation, the European Commission or other groups requests via the ERVO chair specific inputs from ERVO, this will also be done through an Ad hoc working group or study group.

4.4 Cooperation with EurOcean

In April 2014 a cooperation agreement between ERVO and the European information center for marine science and technology, EurOcean, was signed. The document defines the legal and financial framework for the development and execution of the activities to be performed for ERVO by EurOcean.

EurOcean is responsible for the ERVO web site as part of the EurOcean web portal, see www.eurocean.org for more details, and EurOcean is also responsible for the maintenance of the ERVO membership register, dissemination activities, development and maintenance of ERVO's graphical profile, and the production of posters, leaflets and other promotional material subject to a negotiated agreement between ERVO and EurOcean on a case-by-case basis.

The ERVO chair, vice-chair and ExCom members should, on behalf of ERVO, do their personal best in order to ensure that EurOcean grows and develops in directions that also benefits ERVO. This should first of all be done by staying in close contact with their respective EurOcean representatives, if their own institution is a member of EurOcean, to make sure that the dialogue and cooperation between the two groups is maintained and supported as necessary.

Such dialogues should not only be about the ERVO part of the EurOcean web portal, but also about the other parts covering topics of interest to ERVO, such as the RV Infobase, the Large Exchangeable Infobase (LEXI), and the Marine research infrastructures in Europe infobase to make sure they are relevant and useful to ERVO members and other stakeholders. During the annual ERVO meeting, the EurOcean representative will report to ERVO about EurOcean issues/policies/plans etc. seen from an ERVO point of view.

4.5 Relations to other groups and organizations

Since a number of ERVO members are also delegates in many others groups and organizations, they will make efforts to maintain and improve relationships with these groups and organizations to the benefit of both parties.

These groups and organizations are:

- European Science Foundation (www.esf.org)
- European Marine Board (www.marineboard.eu)
- International Research Ship Operators (IRSO) and INMARTECH (www.irso.info)
- Ocean Facilities Exchange Group (OFEG) and OFEG Tech (www.ofeg.org)
- Eurofleets project(s) (www.eurofleets.eu)
- EuroGOOS (www.eurogoos.eu)
- EOOS (European Ocean Observing System) (www.eurogoos.eu/eoos)
- European Polar Board (www.europeanpolarboard.org)
- UNOLS (University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System) and RVOC (Research Vessel Operator Committee) (www.unols.org)
- POGO (Partnership for Observations of the Global Oceans) (www.pogo-oceancruises.org)
- Seas-ERA (Towards Integrated Marine Research Strategy and Programmes) (www.seas-era.eu)
- SeaDataNet (Pan-European infrastructure for Ocean & Marine Data Management) (www.seadatanet.org)
- Jerico-Next (Transnational Access Program) (www.jerico-ri.eu)
- EMODNET (European Marine Observation and Data Network) (www.emodnet.eu)
- EMSO (European Multidisciplinary Seafloor and water-column Observatory) (www.emso.eu.org)
- IMP-Med (Project on Integrated Maritime Policy in the Mediterranean) (www.imp-med.eu)
- MISTRALS project (Mediterranean Integrated Studies at Regional And Local Scales) (www.mistrals-home.org)
- ...

These groups shall receive a formal invitation to attend the annual ERVO meetings as observers.