

The year 2003 can be considered as the beginning of a new episode for Royal NIOZ. After a financially difficult period of about 7 years, the Board of NWO has decided very early in 2003 to substantially enhance the basic annual funding as well as making available a very significant once-only contribution to improve working environment and labour conditions, to renovate some of our ships and harbour facilities, and to start the renovation of the older part of our institute. As a consequence of this financial injection and the financial transparency for the years to come, the atmosphere changed from one of uncertainty to one of enthusiasm with a view on the future, generating a myriad of building, logistic, technical and scientific activities, mostly based on already existing plans.

One of the highlights in 2003 was the official opening of the 3000 m² newly built offices, laboratories and canteen and the completely renovated large Experimental Facilities Building by her Majesty Queen Beatrix on April 4, during a visit of 4 hours in the presence of 100 invited guests and the collaborators of Royal NIOZ and ALTERRA. The latter organization focuses on applied marine sciences and rents ca. 1000 m² of the newly built lab and office space from Royal NIOZ on a long-term basis, thus enabling the sharing of scientific ideas and logistics between the two institutes. The day after the royal visit, Royal NIOZ and ALTERRA opened their doors for the general public to show them the new facilities and to present the latest results of our research and technology.

Many other building projects were started in 2003 and some were even finished before the end of the year. The extension of offices and workshops for the technical departments started in November, the library offices have been rebuilt, the building of a formalin storage facility started, 600 m² of the existing institute was renovated and detailed plans have been made to renovate the rest of the old part of the institute and our harbour. The preparations to build a completely new and larger guesthouse to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of temporary Dutch and foreign collaborators are nearly finished. On top of that, the building of a completely new and fast 20 m long transport and working ship for research activities in the Wadden Sea and the coastal North Sea was started just after summer and is nearly finished. This ship will be used together with another research organization nearby, i.e. TNO-MEP. The R/V *Navicula* is presently undergoing a highly necessary mid life turn-over to make it fully operational and up-to-date for sea-going activities in the decade to come.

On the logistic side several actions took place. The department Buildings and Installations (DGI), responsible for the maintenance of the buildings, was reorganized. The current three technical departments are in the process of integrating into one major technical department, whereas our financial department started to work with a completely new and modern financial software package. Furthermore, our largest research vessel, the R/V *Pelagia* as well as the large seagoing instrumentation became part of an international pool of research platforms consisting of English, French and German research vessels. As a consequence, shiptime is used more efficiently due to a major reduction of transit time, whereas the execution of expeditions on research platforms of other countries catalyses the exchange of expertise, technology, science, and culture.

The activities mentioned above all intend to create optimal facilities to further improve the quality of our science and technology. The direction of our scientific and technological efforts has been discussed in depth in 2003 and will lead to a new Science Plan with even more emphasis on integrated research themes. Two themes are currently being developed, related to the Wadden Sea/North Sea ecosystem on the one hand, and the Deep Ocean ecosystem on the other hand. The successful kick off of our major LOCO (Long-term Ocean Climate Observation) programme in 2003 was timely considering the world-wide political intention and scientific interest to implement a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained satellite and in-situ earth observation system in ten years time. On the technological side it is worthy to note that the first phase of the German-Dutch collaboration to develop a moving lander (MOVE!) for advanced geochemical and microbiological research has been finished by performing successful tests in the Wadden Sea.

The Excellent Post-doctorate programme is a new internal initiative to strengthen and rejuvenate our scientific staff. Corina Brussaard and Helmut Thomas have been appointed as the first two excellent post-docs to explore new and multidisciplinary research. The scientific ties with the universities were further intensified by the appointment of our senior scientists Tjeerd van Weering, Jaap Sinninghe Damsté and Theunis Piersma as part-time professors at the universities of Bremen and Amsterdam (VU), Utrecht, and Groningen respectively.

At the end of this introduction I wish to emphasize that starting in 2003, Royal NIOZ has entered a new, promising and fascinating era thanks to our major successful efforts to dramatically improve the facilities for marine science and technology at our institute and for the marine sciences of the Netherlands as a whole.

Jan W. de Leeuw

