

Verdon, F., October, 1997*

Ten years of International Research Ship Operators Meetings.

* NERC-RVS, Barry, UK (secretary of ISOM from 1987 till 1991)

May I begin with a personal 'thank you', to Dr Fay for inviting me to this 10th ISOM. I am delighted that Brian Hinde and Pierre Rouzaud, who were also at the first meeting, are here. I am reliably informed that before the 11th meeting, they also will have retired. So next year, Charles and Cok, the 10 year old baby will have new guardians.

When I arrived here earlier this week, Charles handed me a copy of some notes made by John Woods - in 1987, NERC's Director of Marine Sciences - who had a significant part in the setting up of ISOM. I was asked to say a few words about how far ISOM has fulfilled the aims of its progenitors.

John Woods wrote: "*Because of its global nature, marine science has a well-established tradition of international participation in research projects. At the present time, this is exemplified by programmes such as WOCE, TOGA, JGOFS, etc., where it is necessary for many countries to commit resources to allow these experiments to be undertaken.*"

Significantly, Dolly Dieter commented yesterday that the UNOLS sea days were down because of the winding down of the big programmes like WOCE, JGOFS, etc. Has ISOM therefore come to the end of its useful life? Before I offer a purely personal opinion, let me make a few comments using the privilege of age and retirement. As some of you will know, I was Secretary of this meeting from 1987 to 1991, and I am happy to see and hear that the agenda for and discussions at this meeting have changed only marginally since then! I do not intend this as a criticism, because one of the papers for this meeting noted:

"Main topics of the annual agenda are:

- *the exchange of ship time between countries;*
- *co-operation in the support of marine research;*
- *developments in national research fleets."*

To this, I would add another matter, again foreseen by John Woods, and that is insurance in all its aspects. The foregoing is essentially a list of ideals, of requirements, and it is noteworthy that in this context John Woods headed a section of his notes "The Mechanics". He wrote:-

"Whilst any of the above proposals are relatively straightforward, actually making the arrangements could present problems that should be addressed constructively at an early stage."

It is in this area that, it seems to me, the real strength of ISOM lies. The information provided on OCEANIC - a child whose growth was given positive support by ISOM; the programmes and papers laid on the table at the start of each meeting; the draft papers from working groups - at

this meeting on insurance, performance indicators, autosub, the technicians etc. - all show that the membership of ISOM see a constructive role for an annual get-together.

But it seems to me, as one who was once intimately involved with ISOM but now an outsider, that the real strengths of ISOM are several.

1. It is not a formal committee or sub-committee of any organisation. Not only does this remove the

pressure for "decisions" or "actions", but the willingness of attendees to use their own money to come year after year shows its value.

2. Members gain an appreciation of subtle changes that will improve collaboration. As an ex-Civil Servant, steeped in the ethos of the UK Government's financial year, I would never have countenanced the change of the NERC fleet's programming to a calendar year basis, that Caroline Harper announced yesterday.
3. Gerhard Kortum spoke of the tripartite co-operation between the UK, France and Germany, but then significantly he spoke of the benefits of meeting his counterparts from other countries, and that extending bartering arrangements was so much easier when it was possible to associate a face with an organisation. And this idea of a "network" of people has cropped up several times this morning.

In conclusion, then, I think I have made it fairly obvious that my sense of *deja vu* reinforces my impression that ISOM has matured in the 9 years since it was set up. The formal agenda may be predictable, but the discussion raises new nuances each year. Like any growing child, its needs and abilities change year by year. Like any growing child, it gains as much by informal contacts as formal activities. If ISOM did not exist now, we should need to invent it - but I have probably gone way beyond my brief and I must therefore shut up and sit down.

Thank you