Marine Data Archeology: Bringing historical data back alive

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Digitization of historical data is crucial to fill spatial and temporal gaps in datasets that are currently available to science and to give researchers insight in the underlying processes that control the functioning of our ecosystems. Within the LifeWatch project a data archeology strategy was developed to identify, prioritize, digitize, quality control the data, and eventually to publish the dataset.

Since 2012 more than 100 historic biodiversity datasets created by or in close collaboration with Belgian Marine Scientists were identified and recovered. Datasets were clustered in geographic and thematic series:

- Scientific papers on the Belgian Antarctic expedition (1897-1899)
- Scientific papers on the Belgian Arctic expedition (1907)
- Temperature and salinity data in the Southern North Sea and the English Channel (1903-1965)
- Zooplankton data from Belgian research campaigns in the Southern North Sea (1902-1979)
- Historical Kenyan-Belgian research datasets (1873-1999)
- Historical catch data from shrimp fisheries in the Belgian Part of the North Sea (1932-2001)
- Historical Sluice Dock datasets (1960-1991)
- Water temperature and salinity measurements on board the lightship West-Hinder (1904-1979)

All these data are now assigned with a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), are stored in the Marine Data Archive (MDA) and are made available (open access) to the scientific community through the Integrated Marine Information System (IMIS).

Visit http://www.lifewatch.be/en/marine-data-archeology to check out the results.

Keywords: data archeology; historical datasets; marine; biodiversity