

The North Sea Benthos Project: integrating biogeographical data from various sources

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The ICES Benthos Ecology Working Group is integrating recent macrobenthic infaunal data (1999-2001) available from various sources, including national monitoring surveys, in North Sea soft bottom sediments.

Data for the North Sea Benthos Project were provided by 14 marine biology institutions/research groups. Sampling was done in a quasi-standardised way, and occurred mainly in spring and early summer of 2000. A total of approximately 1500 stations was sampled, covering almost the whole North Sea from the English Channel to about 60°N, and an area northwards along the Norwegian oil fields.

Taxonomic names were checked using the database Integrated Taxonomic Information System. After excluding spelling variations, the database contained 1426 taxonomic entities, of which 814 (57%) are unique to individual datasets. The high incidence of occurrences unique to individual datasets indicates that there could be differences in interpretation of the taxonomic literature between the different data contributors.

Data were sent to VLIZ either as Excel sheets, or as structured text or Word documents. Information was then first converted into separate Access databases, taking care to preserve the information as supplied by the research groups. After an initial quality check the data were then uploaded into a central database. This database is an MS SQL server database, with a front-end developed in MS Access. Extensive meta-information (including cruise- and project information, and documentation on quality control procedures and Standard Operational Procedures) is an integral part of the database.