



## 25 Years of Occupational Scientific Diving at RBINS

### Structured training of the occupational scientific diver in Belgium

Alain NORRO<sup>1,\*</sup>, Sven VAN HAELST<sup>2</sup> & Valerie WOIT<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Bruxelles, Belgium.*

<sup>2</sup> *VLIZ, Flanders Marine Institute, Ostend, Belgium.*

\* *Corresponding author: alain.norro@naturalsciences.be*

Occupational scientific diving is a field of activity undertaken by professional scientists, University students in aquatic sciences, and laboratory personnel at scientific institutions. Training for the occupational scientific diver is a legal requirement in Belgium. The Code of Well-being at Work -hyperbaric work- is part of the Belgian law and requires that training of the workers must be taken prior to any work starting. This is the employer's responsibility.

The Belgian Working Group on Scientific Diving (BWGSD) was created at the initiative of RBINS in 2007 and hosted by BELSPO, which has been authorised by the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, holding the Code of Well-being at Work, to deliver the professional competency for scientific diving. This authorisation was gained based on a training compliant with the (A)ESD competency levels for scientific diving at work from the European Scientific Diving Panel.

The training program by RBINS for BELSPO started in 2009, and today, with the help of VLIZ (From 2016 onward) includes two components.

1. On the one hand, the structured course meets the ESD standards (full compliance). This comprises a 4-day theoretical training session at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) as a 3-ECTS-credit course, with 75 h of study time. For the practical component, the two-week intensive practical internship covers all skills required at the ESD competency level and is organised to achieve 20 scientific dives in clear water. In 2026, It is planned to organise (RBINS & VLIZ) the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the structured training BSD (Belgian Scientific Diver).
2. On the other hand, the specific training includes first the "Offshore North Sea" that focuses on all the needs and environmental conditions of scientific work conducted in the Belgian part of the North Sea. Secondly, the ABSD training covers the training & assessment required to be a 'dive supervisor' in occupational scientific diving. Those additional training sessions are organised today only at the diver's employer's request. Continuous training may fall into specific training.

Over the years, the program has evolved and has been supplemented by additional sessions on tether diving, with a practical on blue water diving, a combined task allowing to better assess the applicant's ability to work safely in a team. The human factor in occupational scientific diving was introduced in the theoretical lessons. Applicants are asked to produce, as a team, a 5-minute film illustrating one of the skills they learned during the training.

Entry conditions for the training include a diving level equivalent to CMAS 2\* and a valid first-aid certificate, including oxygen administration. Applicants acknowledged by a Belgian scientific institution must be medically fit (Code of Well-being at work) and insured for occupational scientific diving. The BWGSD organises the formalities related to the certification of candidates, thereby formally establishing their professional competence as described in the Code of Well-being at Work.