

TISBE: Taxonomic Information System for the BELgian continental shelf

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One of the objectives of the Flanders Marine Institute (Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee, VLIZ), and of the Flanders Marine Data- and Information Centre (VMDC), which is part of VLIZ, is to offer data and information to scientists, policy makers and the interested layman. One of the databases under development is a species register for the Belgian coast and adjacent areas (including the Scheldt Estuary). The TISBE database will contain detailed taxonomic information, and information on the distribution within the area of interest. The Marine Species Database for Eastern Africa (MASDEA), maintained by VLIZ and hosted on the VLIZ web site, served as a model while developing TISBE. An effort will be made to minimize duplication of other initiatives, both those within the VLIZ (e.g. the North Sea Benthos Project in collaboration with ICES; Aphia, VLIZ's North Sea species register), and those from other institutions (e.g. the databases developed at Ghent University and the Centre for Estuarine and Coastal Ecology; the European Register of Marine Species). The TISBE database will be integrated in the other databases of VLIZ: literature, datasets, experts and institutions will be taken from the Integrated Marine Information System (IMIS).

The objective of TISBE is to become a comprehensive list of all records of species from the area, with detailed taxonomic and distribution information abstracted from scientific literature. Links with the taxonomic literature and to the original publication of the distribution record will assist in tracing the history of records. By providing a synonymised list of species records, TISBE will be a tool to assess marine biodiversity and to monitor the species composition of the ecological communities along the Belgian coast.

The structure of the data is a modification of the structure used in the International Taxonomic Information System (ITIS), and information from TISBE is easily converted to the ITIS format. Taxonomic reference numbers (TSN), the unique identifiers used in ITIS, are stored in the TISBE database, and permit immediate comparison of the two databases, checking for records that would be missing in ITIS; one of the ambitions with our application is to provide input in ITIS.