



VLIZ and RBINS Scientific Diving: 20 Years of Collaboration

Sven VAN HAELST^{1,*}, Klaas DENEUDT¹, Patrick HENDRIKS¹,
Daniel MARSHAM¹ & Jan REUBENS¹

¹ VLIZ, Flanders Marine Institute, Ostend, Belgium.

* Corresponding author: sven.vanhaelst@vliz.be

More than 20 years ago, in August 2004, VLIZ carried out its first scientific dives. From the very start, scientific diving by VLIZ was organised as a collaborative effort, and over the years it has involved many Flemish and Belgian institutions (e.g. UGent, ILVO, Onroerend Erfgoed, UCL, RBINS, Belgian defence) and volunteer divers. In the early days, dives were conducted from the RV Zeeleeuw, and later from the RV Simon Stevin and Abbé Mann, strengthening logistics capabilities and reducing operational risks.

Scientific diving at VLIZ started with the BEWREMABI project, in which divers mapped the biodiversity on shipwrecks in the Belgian Part of the North Sea. In 2007 the Belgian Working Group on Scientific Diving (BWGSD) was established, initiated by RBINS and hosted by BELSPO. The BWGSD integrated occupational diving regulations from the Belgian legislation and developed the Belgian sector of occupational scientific diving. From 2009 onwards, RBINS/ BWGSD has organised a yearly training for Belgian scientific divers which is fully compliant with the (A)ESD competency levels for scientific diving at work defined by the European Scientific Diving Panel.

Since the establishment of the BWGSD the close collaboration between the scientific divers from VLIZ and RBINS continued after BEWREMABI through joint research projects (Artificial reefs II, Persuade, OUTFLOW,...) and PhD research, while also supporting each other with diver capacity and ship time when needed. Since 2018, VLIZ has taken an active role in training new scientific divers and co-organises the training programme with RBINS. On top of all the scientific output based on this long-standing cooperation, working together in the often harsh conditions of the North Sea have created a strong network of scientific divers across the institutes, strengthening both research capacity and operational safety.