

ADVANCED SOLUTIONS FOR EMERGING REGIONS

Visited for you - MEOST 2008

“The greatest challenge to the ocean science and technology sector is to protect the ocean environment and, at the same time, make use of the huge untapped energy reserves and food of the oceans together with using that same ocean as a medium for bulk transport,” said Ralph Rayner, Vice-president of the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) and chairman of the conference, setting the stage in his keynote lecture at the first Middle East Ocean Science and Technology Expo (MEOST), on 21–23 January 2008 in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates).<P>

During this heightened attention on environmental issues, this first MEOST was organised by Turret Media. The event was co-located with the World Future Energy Summit (WFES) in the Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Centre (UAE). The MEOST attracted some 35 international exhibitors, as well as several hundred visitors from all corners of the globe.

Ralph Rayner and other speakers made presentations on Renewable Marine Energy; Marine Oil and Gas: Exploration and Extraction; Marine Science and Construction; and Marine Environment. A few of the exhibitors, such as CARIS, Fugro and GeoAcoustics, organised workshops, demonstrations and small, in-conference seminars. The overall theme was sustainability; as Ralph Rayner posed in his keynote lecture, the biggest question for the ocean science technology sector in the future is: how to make use of this biggest resource of renewable energy and food – the ocean – and, at the same time, protect it in a way so that it will also remain useful for future generations? Dr Yasuyuki Ikegami, of the Institute of Ocean Energy at Saga University (Japan), pointed out the possibilities of using thermal energy created by warm water at the surface and cooler, deeper water. Martin Wright, of Marine Current Turbines, spoke about his company pioneering the development of tidal stream power systems.

Opportunities

This was the first exposition and conference on ocean science and technology in this part of the world and, of course, the region and its opportunities had an important role in the conference. The economy of the Middle East Gulf Coast is exploding – oil exploration has always been big, but artificial islands are being built and therefore the demand for surveying and dredging is growing strongly. David Millar, Vice-president of Coastal Mapping and LIDAR Services at Fugro Pelagos, explained that hydrographic LIDAR is so successful in this area, with relatively shallow and clear waters, whereas development of this technique in other parts of the world has been slower. Robert van de Poll, International Manager Law of the Sea, also at Fugro Pelagos, made delegates aware of the unresolved Middle East maritime boundaries and their impact on future oil and gas development.

Many MEOST visitors and exhibitors took a stroll to the huge WFES exhibition, just two halls away in the same exhibition centre. Here, giants such as BP, Shell, ConocoPhillips and GE had spent big money to impress visitors with their ideas on renewable energy. The conference was presided over by Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. HRH The Duke of York, Prince Andrew, addressed the conference audience and his brother, HRH The Prince of Wales, was present via hologram, in order to reduce his carbon footprint.

The ambitious and dynamic WFES must have made exhibitors and visitors of the MEOST a little bit jealous. Even just considering a few of the speakers and two of the major themes, it is evident that the focus of the MEOST conference and exhibition was broad enough to have attracted more visitors than the actual number who attended. On the one hand, it may have been a wait-and-see policy of the oceanographic and hydrographic community. On the other hand, a critical note about Turret Media, as organiser of this first oceanology science and technology event, is also justified. If they really wanted this show to be a success, they would have given the MEOST a place in a hall adjacent to the WFES instead of tucking them away in a far corner of the exhibition centre (and most exhibitors did feel hidden away). Although some exhibitors said they were doing good business, MEOST has the potential to grow and be more successful. There are two options for achieving this. The first option is for it to be organised as a standalone event, in order to attract all visitors specifically to it; and the second option is to hold it at a large summit with which it has some overlap and, most importantly, to make the synergy obvious on site.

Fugro was main sponsor of the MEOST event.