

Network session Report

2021

Gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion in ICES community

Conveners: Ellen Johannesen (ICES Secretariat), Alina Wieczorek (Ireland), Rasa Morkūnė (Lithuania), Mark Dickey-Collas (Advisory Committee Chair)

In the 2019 Strategic Plan, ICES committed to creating a more diverse, inclusive, and gender balanced as well as respectful working environment. But how do we do that and what does it look like when we get there? Can we expect transformational science within the current system? Annual Science Conference participants were invited to participate in a network session about gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organisation.

The session included a panel discussion featuring inspiring invited guests who provided a variety of perspectives on the importance of creating inclusive environments for underrepresented groups and why this is critical for marine science and the Ocean Decade. Audience engagement and feedback was solicited via Mentimeter.

The aim of the session was to raise awareness about the importance of creating an enabling environment that supports diversity and inclusion, also at international level. As well as to solicit feedback from the ICES community on what changes are needed at individual and institutional level.

The Panel discussion featured: Anna Ólafsdóttir, Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, Iceland, who was invited following her recent work on tackling the gender gap in marine science; Huw Griffiths, British Antarctic Survey, who was invited given his leading role within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sphere in polar science, serving as a committee member for the Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative; and Stephanie Brodie, University of California Santa Cruz and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who was invited in her capacity as Chair of the Interdisciplinary Marine Early Career Network (IMECaN).

Anna Ólafsdóttir shared her personal experience of working in marine science, reflecting on gender-based inequalities in the system. Huw Griffiths also shared personal reflections on being part of an underrepresented group and working with the British Antarctic survey, Stephanie Brodie shared an early career perspective on the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The sharing of these experiences provided important context, and allowed a good discussion to develop around how to tackle these issues at individual, institutional, and organisational levels.

Panelists gave some specific recommendations on actions that should be prioritised:

- Set goals, and make it part of the work of (ICES) expert groups, go beyond box checking. Bring awareness and use the working groups to improve on diversity and inclusion.
- International Council for Science rules requires representation across gender or geography, consider adopting similarly appropriate standards.
- Individuals should reflect on “just because it works for me, does it work for others?”
- Ensure diverse representation at all levels, as well as in outreach communication products.
- Create and normalise a culture of talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion, you don’t have to be an expert. Start changing the culture and this will help uptake of new policies, rules, or practices enacted aimed at creating a more inclusive working environment.

The session was well attended with 60 (peak) participants. Mentimeter questions were used to engage audience and gather feedback with 40 participants actively responding. Based on the responses, participants were mostly from Europe, and a majority based in Northern Europe, 20% based in North America, additional attendee locations included Iceland and Africa. In terms of gender diversity, 73% female, 25% male, and one person identifying as preferring to “self-describe”. There was a good mix of participants with varying levels of experience participating in ICES activities, 17% indicating this was their first ICES event, 29% indicating less than 5 years (and a potential proxy for early career status), 27% indicating 5-15 years, and 27% also for 15+ years.

Respondents were asked to indicate if they identified with an underrepresented group in the ICES community. This was defined broadly (including but not limited to gender identity, nationality, racial, or ethnic diversity, sexual orientation, career stage, class, disability, neurodiversity, among other things) and left to participants to acknowledge themselves. Among responses, 32% identified as “underrepresented”, 17% were unsure, and the majority (51%), did not identify as underrepresented. While women have been identified as underrepresented in decision-making roles within ICES, and this was discussed at the session, a majority of females (70%), did not identify as underrepresented, this may also relate to an unclear context provided by conveners for the definition of “underrepresentation”.

Respondents were also asked to indicate if they had ever experienced gender-based harassment, (also defined broadly), 8% (3 respondents) reported never having experienced gender-based harassment while working in marine science, while 17.5% responded “once or twice”, 72.5% “A few times”, and 2.5% (1) reporting “often”. The question was asked in a broad way, so it is difficult to speculate if these occurrences happened in ICES or national contexts. Regardless, given the very few instances of harassment ever being reported to the Secretariat (as directed by the current policy outlined in ICES “meeting etiquette”) it demonstrates the need for specific actions to prevent further instances, through awareness, training, and developing clear lines of accountability.

With women “overrepresented” at the session, it follows that these experiences mostly relate to women.

Session participants were also asked to rate various initiated and potential actions with results as provided in figure 1. Interestingly, the highest rated actions are those issues where resources have not yet been allocated.

How effective would you rate the following initiated and potential actions?

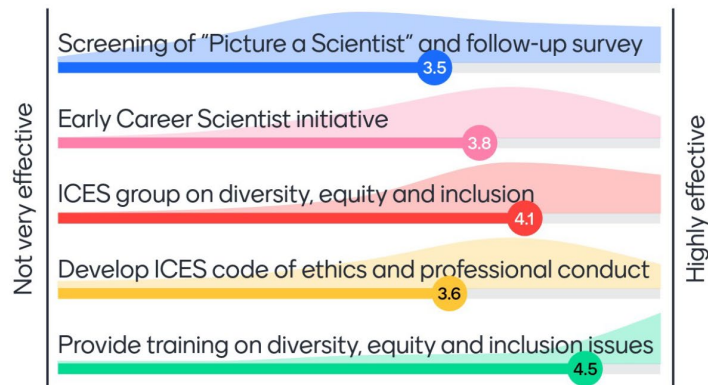


Figure 1. Mentimeter rating by session participants of perceived effectiveness of some initiated and proposed actions for developing the ICES community.

Participants were asked if they would be willing to contribute time and energy to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in ICES. Examples of efforts given by the convener included “contribute to an organised initiative”; “mentoring”; and “training”. Responses showed 76% indicating “yes”, 21% “not sure”, and 3% (1) indicating “no”. During the discussion it was noted, that “no” is also an acceptable answer as it cannot be only the responsibility of underrepresented groups to do the work on diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the chat, the participant that registered this negative answer, confirmed this was why they would not be willing to contribute on further initiatives, as they are themselves from an underrepresented group, and therefore already dealing with many challenges.

The title of the session was gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and the majority of participants were women. It will be difficult to achieve greater gender balance in the organisation if we cannot attract a greater balance of genders to the dialogue and conversations. It will therefore be important to identify ways to engage the wider community with this issue.

Finally, participants were asked to give a free text response to what is the most important thing that ICES can do to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. A range of responses were provided by participants, here grouped into categories: Training, raising awareness, allocation of resources, knowledge exchange, collect statistics/monitoring, personal reflection/actions, representation (in outreach media), accountability, understand drivers, and create safe and inclusive working environments.

Main take-aways:

- ICES is visible and respected, it should take an important role modeling best practice
- Inclusion is an action, we need a plan and structure
- Those in power don't always see the need for change
- Continue to bring attention to the issue and make resources available & visible

Next steps being developed – with representatives from across ICES:

- Code of ethics and professional conduct
- Plan for training
- Planning further community involvement/ongoing dialogue, specific structure or initiative still being considered
- The Strategic Initiative on Integration of Early Career Scientists (SIECS) has a specific Term of Reference on DEI
- Develop a Gender Equality Plan