

## Remarks on the Occasion of the Release of the First Census of Marine Life

*Royal Institution of Great Britain, London, 4 October 2010*

Paul L. Joskow  
**President, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**

We are here to share and to celebrate the scientific achievements of the Census of Marine Life. Ten years of work to expand knowledge about the diversity, distribution and abundance of life in the World's oceans. The achievements have been extraordinary: The identification of 6,000 potentially new species; proving out the utility and accuracy of barcoding techniques and using these techniques to "map" the proximity and distance between marine species; a collective digital archive with 30 million observations; the development and use of new technologies to map the distribution of marine life across the Earth's oceans, to track migration patterns, to aggregate the data collected and to make it easily accessible through OBIS; helping to create 90,000 web pages for inclusion in the Encyclopedia of Life, which is easily accessible to anyone with an internet connection and a web browser; not only expanding what is known about the oceans, but also more clearly defining what is unknown at the present time; over 2,600 published papers and many other achievements.

The achievements of the Census of Marine Life go well beyond what was discovered. It was an extraordinary organizational achievement demonstrating how a large number of scientists from many different laboratories, different disciplines, different countries, and with support from many funding sources could work together to achieve a common set of goals. 2,700 marine scientists participated in the Census, representing 80 countries from every continent, drawn from more than 670 laboratories, universities, museums, and aquariums around the world and organized into 17 project groups plus affiliated projects and collaborators. Census scientists participated in 540 oceanographic expeditions, were supported by total grant funding of about \$650 million (of which the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation contributed about \$75 million – in the foundation world they call that leverage). This has been an extraordinary, perhaps unique, model of interdisciplinary and inter-country scientific collaboration.

I was not at the Sloan Foundation when the Census of Marine Life began. I was a professor at MIT teaching and researching. To be completely honest, if I had been the president of the Sloan Foundation at the time, the organizational challenges and the total cost forecast to be required to support the anticipated research to achieve the Census' goals would have led me to be skeptical that it could be done as planned, on budget and on schedule. An enormous amount of credit goes to Jesse Ausubel, Vice President of the Sloan Foundation, for conceiving and managing this enormous effort, and to my predecessor Ralph Gomory and our Board of Trustees for supporting it. We should thank as well the members of the International Scientific Steering Committees, the Secretariat of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, the National and Regional Implementation Committees, the Synthesis Groups, the Mapping and Visualization Team, the Education and Outreach Team, affiliated projects, collaborators, partners and funders from around the world, and most importantly, the 2,700 scientists who have contributed to this effort.

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has been extremely pleased to have been closely associated with the Census and to play a role in getting it started and providing financial support along the way. We at Sloan view this program as a great success. Indeed, the Sloan Foundation feels that it is important for it to mark the end of Ten Years of Discovery by creating a legacy stimulated by the outstanding work of the Census' scientists. For over 55 years the Sloan Foundation has awarded Sloan Research Fellowships each year to the most outstanding young scientists working in the USA and Canada. The fields covered by the Sloan Research Fellowships now include physics, chemistry, mathematics, neuroscience, economics, computer science, and computational and evolutionary biology. Many of the young scholars who have received Sloan Research Fellowships have subsequently gone on to extremely successful scientific careers. Among former Sloan Research Fellowship winners, we can count 38 winners of the Nobel Prize, 57 winners of the U.S. National

Medal of Science, and many others who have gone on to receive top awards in their fields such as the Fields Medal in Mathematics.

I am pleased to announce the Trustees of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation have authorized adding the field of Ocean Sciences to the fields now eligible to receive Sloan Research Fellowships. Nominations will be solicited in mid-2011 and the first winners will be announced in early 2012. We are excited about bringing Ocean Sciences into the Sloan Research Fellowship family.

Thank you for your attention. I am looking forward to the rest of the events that will be part of this crescendo for the first Census of Marine Life.