

Changing roles

Outgoing chair of CEDA's Marine Strategy Navigation Group Chantal Martens shares her most rewarding experiences there and has advice for her successor

Namrata Nadkarni, managing editor DPC

► **Curiosity and the willingness** to collaborate are the most defining traits of the outgoing committee chair of CEDA's Marine Strategy Navigation Group (NAVI), Chantal Martens, who has recently taken on the role of blue innovations officer at the Flanders Marine Institute.

"In my new job, I will be mainly acting as a knowledge broker between the institute and the wider public and will communicate everything about blue innovation and blue growth," she told DPC. "I will ensure that questions from industry reach the relevant academics, publicise academic work, facilitate research projects, and collaborate with other researchers."

Although the role may sound wide in scope, the Belgian national is well prepared for it thanks to her previous job in the Flemish government's department of mobility and private works, which includes all maritime access to sea harbours. For this, she co-ordinated all monitoring and research related to dredging or other works taking place in the North Sea.

Simultaneously, over the past two years, she steered discussions at NAVI, which contributes insight to the EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The directive, which aims to achieve good

environmental status of the EU's marine waters by 2020 and protect the resource base for marine-related economic and social activities, relies on insight from a variety of stakeholders.

"The point of NAVI chair – this can only be held by a CEDA member – is to make the group listen to everyone," she said, pointing out the group consists of 8 to 10 members from across the industry, each with an area of specialist knowledge pertaining to the 11 MSFD descriptors that include topics such as biodiversity, contaminants in seafood, and marine litter. With such expertise, "It was my job to ensure that they shared this information so we had greater cross-interaction and could make well-informed comments to the MSFD. The role was mainly about facilitating information sharing."

Martens added that this information sharing could sometimes be used to streamline existing procedures, as was the case with licensing. "The commission was looking at a study of licensing and permits to see how these could be used or changed to fit better with MSFD goals. It was great to talk to my practical colleagues and discover that, rather than introducing new legislation, there were existing regulations that those on the operations side pointed out could be used to adapt the

licensing and make it fit for this purpose," she recalled.

She is keen to be a part of evolving conversations that reflect the changing priorities of a generation and believes her new role will advance environmental awareness and transparency. "There is more general awareness and stakeholder involvement, which is really positive," she explained, stating that the days of making decisions without public consultation are gone. "The public is much quicker to call you into account and there are advantages to having locals involved, as a lot more information can come to light that you wouldn't otherwise have had access to. This can feed back into your project and make it better."

It is thus no surprise that Marten's advice to the new NAVI chair is, "Don't be afraid to ask questions. If you're not familiar with how processes work, it can be intimidating, but people are very friendly, open, and eager to explain. Don't feel like you have to know everything yourself. NAVI is a group of highly experienced technology specialists and it will benefit the rest of the group, as they will also be increasing their knowledge, when they hear the points being explained to you. "Most of all, enjoy it. There is so much to learn from being a NAVI chair." □

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Chantal Martens outgoing chair of CEDA's NAVI group

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