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Table of contents

Foreword from co-coordinators	2
Committees	3
Programme of the 18th ICA	4
Abstracts – Plenary lectures	14
Abstracts – Oral presentations	18
Abstracts – Posters	78
List of participants	132

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Talitraits: a taxonomic backbone for talitrid amphipods' traits

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Organisms' traits are increasingly being targeted to describe systems and their functionality. In ecological studies, analysis of traits' as units are largely applied to communities, while the application of traits to taxonomic levels is receiving less attention. The project "Talitraits" was launched to target: 1) a relatively low taxonomic level, the family Talitridae and 2) a well-defined ecological level, marine coastal zones. The selection of these levels drives the focus towards a set of traits that characterises talitrid species resident in coastal zones worldwide.

The project was supported by the E-Science European LifeWatch Infrastructure for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research through LifeWatch Belgium. The Infrastructure targets different aspects of biodiversity research, and the Taxonomic Backbone of LifeWatch aims at bringing together taxonomic and species-related data and at filling the gaps in our knowledge, expanding the content and enhancing the quality of taxonomic databases. "Talitraits" thematic editors met to select a set of traits, consistent with the attributes already present in WoRMS on one hand, and sufficient to define coastal talitrids on the other. Traits were prioritized and addressed, using the published literature. Size, diet and relationship with substrate were set as initial priorities. Being the focus restricted to coastal organisms, distribution records were inserted as Country name - Exclusive Economic Zone. Traits specifically targeted by other thematic datasets (e.g. AMBI species, introduced species) were also prioritized.

The analysis of traits at family level and for a specific environment at global scale tightly connects to the species-environment perspective. It highlights the relevance of the local level within a global scale, and implies a connection of single species with environmental features (including human-driven ones). A set of additional traits, e.g. behavioural ones, will be a forthcoming priority area to address this specific theoretical frame. The Talitraits project highlights the issue of unbalanced literature within the Talitridae family, hence the dataset can be used to plan further gap-filling research.