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More Female Marine Scientists in Leadership Positions Successful kick-off event of the GEOMAR Women's Executive Board

22 October 2013/Kiel. Research and exploration of the oceans are equally shared by men and women today. However, women are still under-represented in leadership positions of marine research, as they are in many areas of science. To counteract this, and to support and network women, the female executives of GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel have come together and founded the Women's Executive Board (WEB). The successful launch of the WEB activities took place yesterday with the first lecture of the "Marie Tharp Lecture Series for Ocean Research".

Only 40 years ago, marine sciences were an exclusively male domain. That has now changed significantly: More than half of young scientists at GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel are female. Yet, at the higher academic levels, such as permanent scientific positions and professorships, the percentage of women is still rather low.

The GEOMAR Women's Executive Board (WEB), founded earlier this year as a coalition of female managers with personnel responsibility at GEOMAR, has vowed to change this. "The aim of WEB is to achieve a gender balance in permanent scientific and leadership positions," says Prof. Dr. Katja Matthes, chairperson of WEB. For this reason, the panel supports women in their career planning.

At GEOMAR itself, there is already a well-balanced ratio of men and women at some levels. These include the doctoral, post-doctoral researchers and junior professors. Here the proportion of women is between 40 and 53%. In other positions, such as in permanent scientific positions and professorships, only between 8 and 21 percent of the positions are held by women. "The WEB has made it its goal to fill these gaps and to support and promote women along their way," said Prof. Dr. Matthes. "The already high proportion of women at the lower levels is a great motivation to pursue it at the upper levels as well. Especially because we know that the female scientists also want this," says Dr. Schmidt.

In order to present the professional success of female scientists and to offer a networking opportunity among women, the WEB has, among others, launched the "Marie Tharp Lecture Series for Ocean Research". Role model and figure head of the lecture series is the geologist and cartographer Marie Tharp who died in 2006. The American scientist had mainly concerned herself with surveying the ocean floors. Tharp was the one that generated a highly accurate map of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, or the mid-ocean ridges in general, despite imprecise and missing data. However, the first awards for this work were received by her male collaborator, geologist Bruce Charles Heezen. "It was not until the late 1990s that it became known that, with the discovery of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Tharp contributed the key findings to and thus helped with the acceptance of the theory of plate tectonics," says Dr. Schmidt, Head of Science Coordination at GEOMAR and a WEB member. Today the bathymetric map is known as the Heezen-Tharp map.

The first event of this new lecture series took place yesterday with the presentation by Prof. Dr. Cindy Lee entitled "Particles in the Sea: What, Where, When & Why", attended by nearly 100 people - women as well as men. Professor Lee is a renowned U.S. marine chemist from the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at Stony Brook University in New York. She

emphasized that it is particularly important that female scientists form a network where everyone knows each other. Lee, who has also spent a sabbatical year in Bremen, says: "In Germany it is much more difficult for a woman to pursue a career in science than in America."

Following the public portion of the lecture, participating women met for a closed get-together. This provided an opportunity to discuss career paths and to exchange experiences and ideas. "It is this kind of exchange and discussion about their own career paths that is very important," says Prof. Dr. Anja Engel, director of the GEOMAR Research Center for Marine Biogeochemistry and a WEB member. "PhD students and postdocs frequently do not have a concrete picture of their career, or how they can combine career and family, and what support already exists. Too often they also lack role models," said Engel. "This is what we are trying to bring together with the lecture series. In general, we have noted at the Helmholtz Association that such measures are very effective."

The next presentation in the GEOMAR Marie Tharp for Ocean Research Lecture Series takes place on 29 November 2013. The topic presented by marine biologist Prof. Dr. Heike Lotze from Canada is "Lessons from the past: How historical changes in the sea affect marine ecosystems today".

Links:

www.geomar.de GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel
www.geomar.de/go/web The GEOMAR Women's Executive Board

Images:

Images are available for download at www.geomar.de/n1556-e

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Katja Matthes (GEOMAR, FB1-Maritime Meteorology), kmatthes@geomar.de
Jan Steffen (GEOMAR, Communication & Media), Tel.: (+49) 0431 600-2811, jsteffen@geomar.de