Speech for Chairman, National Research Foundation at the Launch of the Marine Science Week

St. John's Island, 25 November 2026

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Prof Yaacob Ibrahim, Chairman of the St John's Island National Marine Laboratory Governing Board

Prof. Liu Bin, Deputy President of Research and Technology of the National University of Singapore,

Distinguished guests, marine scientists and researchers, colleagues from across Southeast Asia, and friends,

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to join you here at the start of Marine Science Week.

I was last here in 2022, when the marine lab reopened its doors after renovations and the pandemic. It is good to be back, and to be here with all of you as we celebrate an important milestone.

Ten years ago, the National Research Foundation made a deliberate investment in marine science infrastructure. Singapore's first and only offshore marine research station was established here as the St John's Island National Marine Laboratory, a national resource and focal point for marine science expertise and capabilities.

Over the past ten years, our marine science community has pushed the frontiers of knowledge. We have deepened our understanding of the ocean and climate, advanced the science of ecosystem resilience and restoration, and even uncovered new species. In the last five years alone, scientists based at this lab have discovered more than 20 species new to science in our very own waters, and many more across the region with our international partners. One of them is a box jellyfish named after Blakang Mati, the old name for Sentosa, just next door. Our seas, it seems, still hold many secrets.

Our marine environment is an asset and a key responsibility

Singapore has always had a deep relationship with the sea. We are, by geography and by history, a maritime nation. But our connection to the marine environment is more than shipping and trade.

Situated at the crossroads of major oceanic flows, Singapore's waters support biodiversity, help regulate our climate, protect our coastlines, and provide food and other resources. In many ways, the health of our marine environment is closely tied to the liveability of our island nation.

For a small and highly urbanised country like Singapore, whose waters are among the most intensively used in the world, our marine environment is a precious asset. We must understand it well so that we can steward it responsibly and sustainably.

Marine science in RIE2030

This is why marine science continues to be an important part of our Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2030 or RIE 2030 plan. Under RIE2030, we are deepening our investments in climate science and adaptation, focusing on key areas such as weather science, coastal protection and flood management, as well as heat resilience.

The groundwork is already in place. Under RIE2025, our researchers produced Singapore's first comprehensive 10,000-year sea-level record, which has informed our coastal protection plans. RIE2030 builds on this foundation by strengthening the scientific capabilities, talent and partnerships that will help us anticipate change and translate knowledge into action.

This morning, I am pleased to announce the next chapter of Singapore's marine science journey.

National Marine Research Station (NMRS)

The marine lab is expanding its role to lead marine science efforts across Southeast Asia. To reflect this wider role, **the St John's Island National Marine Laboratory will now be known as the National Marine Research Station, or NMRS**.

This is more than a change of name. Together with the recently established National Institute for Marine and Ocean Sciences, or NIMOS, a new marine science Research Centre of Excellence under RIE2030,

these developments mark an important next phase in how Singapore approaches marine science.

Both NIMOS and NMRS will strengthen our national marine science capabilities, developing the people and knowledge we will need for the future.

Upgrading NMRS's equipment and capabilities

Beyond providing laboratories and aquaria for research and development, NMRS today serves as a marine observatory, a platform for scientific training, an avenue for sharing science with the public, and a base where people, disciplines and ideas come together, both in Singapore and beyond.

NMRS allows us to track changes in our marine environment over time, including the impacts of climate change, and supports the research that informs decisions on our coastlines, our sea space and ultimately the resilience of our island.

To support this work, **NMRS will get a new research vessel to succeed the RV Galaxea, which has served our researchers well for 18 years**. The new vessel will have a larger deck, a moonpool, a safer diving platform for rough weather, and fittings to deploy and test equipment at sea. NMRS will also bring in new imaging instruments that will help researchers study plankton, the tiny organisms at the base of the marine food web, faster and more accurately.

These capabilities will support a wider range of field research, including on ocean biogeochemical processes, marine ecosystems and the

development and testing of marine technologies. In addition, they will strengthen our ability to understand changes in Singapore's marine environment and the pressures on our coastal and marine ecosystems.

Southeast Asia Marine Research Stations Network (SEAMaRS)

I am also pleased to announce that **NMRS will lead a new regional initiative, the Southeast Asia Marine Research Stations network, or SEAMaRS**. SEAMaRS will be a key vehicle to foster closer collaboration with our regional partners, and enable Singapore to contribute to marine science across the region. NMRS will host its Secretariat.

This is particularly timely as Singapore prepares to take on the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2027. Through SEAMaRS, we can strengthen the connections among marine research stations across our region while building on the strengths and capabilities that each country already has. Research vessels, laboratories, datasets and specialised capabilities can be shared and research teams can come together to tackle questions that no single country can answer alone.

The benefits of this network will extend beyond science. Where scientists work together, they build relationships and trust. And trust, once built, outlasts any single project. I hope that SEAMaRS will build not just a network of research stations, but something more enduring – a regional marine science community, united by a shared responsibility to understand, protect and sustain our seas.

Charting the next decade, together

None of what we celebrate today would have been possible without the people behind it: the researchers and students, the technicians and boat crews who head out to sea in difficult conditions, and our partners across agencies, industry and the region. Much of this work happens quietly, away from the spotlight. To all of you, thank you.

The next decade will ask even more of us, and I have no doubt that we will be ready. So let us continue to work together, ask difficult questions, pursue evidence wherever it may lead, and build the knowledge we need to meet the challenges ahead.

Ten years ago, we began with a laboratory on a small island. Today, it is a platform for excellent science and trusted partnerships, focussed on challenges that matter to Singapore and our neighbours.

I wish the marine science community every success in the years ahead, as we celebrate a fruitful first decade and begin a new chapter of discovery and possibility.

Thank you.