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NUS National University of Singapore

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Singapore's national marine research facility broadens scope to lead marine science collaboration across Southeast Asia

Singapore, 25 November 2026 – The St John's Island National Marine Laboratory (SJINML) is expanding its scope beyond Singapore's waters to lead regional efforts in marine science. As part of this expanded role, the facility has been renamed the **National Marine Research Station (NMRS)**, and will lead the newly established Southeast Asia Marine Research Stations (SEAMaRS) network, the first of its kind in the region.

2 Hosted by the National University of Singapore (NUS), NMRS is Singapore's first and only offshore National Research Infrastructure dedicated to marine science. The Station is funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) under the Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2030 (RIE2030) plan. Building on a decade of enabling research in Singapore, NMRS will now serve as a regional platform where researchers across Southeast Asia can share facilities, data and expertise to address challenges facing the region's shared seas.

3 The expanded role of NMRS was launched at the start of the Marine Science Week by Guest-of-Honour Tharman Shanmugaratnam, President of the Republic of Singapore. Marine Science Week, held from 25 November to 2 December 2026, celebrates a decade of progress in marine science since SJINML's establishment in 2016.

4 President Tharman said, "Climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the health of our oceans are not separate problems, but deeply connected. Building on a decade of scientific work at NMRS, the new SEAMaRS network will bring together scientists from across Southeast Asia to learn from one another, and strengthen our collective ability to look after our seas, an effort that will matter even more in the years ahead."

A new name that reflects an expanded role

5 The renaming from SJINML to NMRS reflects how the facility has evolved as a National Research Infrastructure. Beyond providing laboratories and aquaria for research and development, NMRS now functions as a marine observatory, a platform for scientific training, an avenue to communicate science to the wider public, and a base where people, disciplines and ideas intersect, both in Singapore and beyond. It also serves as an offshore sentinel monitoring Singapore's urban waters and climate impacts.

6 To enable future research, NMRS will be equipped with a new research vessel, which will succeed the existing RV Galaxea[1]. The new research vessel will have a larger deck, a moonpool, a safer diving platform for rough weather and fittings to deploy and test equipment at sea. It will also carry a dinghy to reach shallow coastal areas and have a better design for seabed sampling efforts.

[1] Over 18 years, the RV Galaxea has supported a wide range of fieldwork, from seawater sampling and ecological monitoring to diving and testing marine robots and sensors.

7 NMRS will also bring in two new imaging instruments to strengthen plankton research. The Imaging FlowCytobot will take continuous, automated images of microscopic algae (phytoplankton), so researchers can track seasonal and long-term changes and spot sudden shifts in the marine environment. The FlowCam Macro will capture larger plankton and particles, so NMRS can study plankton of all sizes. Together, these tools will replace slow manual microscopy and help researchers identify plankton faster and more accurately.

8 Dr Jani Tanzil, Director of NMRS, said, “The renaming to NMRS captures what our facility has naturally grown into over the past decade. We have become a dynamic platform where science, policy, and technology converge. Our oceans are seamlessly interconnected and marine currents and ecosystems do not stop at national borders. Going forward, NMRS will not only support the best science needed to safeguard Singapore’s marine environment but will also act as an operational nexus for Southeast Asia. By leading the development of the SEAMaRS network, we aim to pool resources, share knowledge, nurture talent, and build collective action to address shared marine and coastal challenges."

Uniting the region via the SEAMaRS network

9 As the first network of its kind in the region, SEAMaRS addresses the need for greater coordinated research, shared facilities, capacity development, and integration of regional knowledge. Presently, NMRS brings together over 10 core member institutions across Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.[2] It serves as a shared regional platform to enhance cooperation and coordination among marine research stations, laboratories and field facilities across Southeast Asia, particularly ASEAN member countries.

10 As the network’s lead and current Secretariat host, NMRS will establish working groups around priority areas aligned with its objectives:

- **Advance regional collaboration and joint research towards strengthening science-policy linkages:** Address shared marine and coastal priorities and promote the use of scientific knowledge in policy and decision-making.

- **Facilitate sharing of infrastructure, resources and expertise:** Encourage shared access to research facilities, vessels, equipment and technical expertise.

- **Strengthen the regional marine science community as a whole:** Enhance its visibility and facilitate partnerships, resource mobilisation and collaborative funding opportunities.

- **Build regional capacity and facilitate science mobility:** Support training, student and researcher exchanges, fellowships and professional development.

- **Strengthen marine observation, data and knowledge sharing:** Promote long-term marine monitoring, harmonised observation systems, data sharing, interoperability and open science practices, where appropriate.

11 NMRS will advance multidisciplinary marine science research and technical training across Singapore and Southeast Asia. To meet evolving environmental needs, it will widen access to advanced facilities, expertise and specialised training, working closely with scientists, industry partners and government agencies. Through stronger international

[2] These include Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Bintan, Indonesia; Institut Marine Borneo, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia; Coastal Oceanography and Climate Change Research Center, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand; and Center for Marine Science Studies, Holy Name University, the Philippines.

collaborations, NMRS aims to build local capabilities, drive impactful breakthroughs and become a leading marine research station.

12 The Marine Science Week celebrates the decade of progress, which lays the foundation for NMRS' next phase. Since NRF designated the St John's Island facility as a National Research Infrastructure in 2016, the station has transformed marine science research and education in Singapore through:

- **Discovery of new species:** Station-based scientists have discovered more than 20 species new to science in local waters, such as *Macrodactyla fautinae* (sea anemone), and *Chironex blakangmati* (box jellyfish), discovered in the past five years, alongside numerous regional discoveries.

- **Research enabling node:** Supported local and international researchers, facilitating multidisciplinary projects across numerous academic institutions, industry partners, and government agencies.

- **Education & lifelong learning:** Conducted scientific training and workshops, research seminars, and learning journeys to inspire future generations of marine scientists.

13 Please refer to the **Annex** for more information on these research domains.

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About National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 15 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established about 15 NUS Overseas Colleges entrepreneurial hubs around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

For more information on NUS, please visit nus.edu.sg.

About National Research Foundation (NRF)

The National Research Foundation, Singapore (NRF), set up on 1 January 2006, is a department within the Prime Minister's Office. The NRF sets the national direction for research and development (R&D) by developing policies, plans and strategies for research, innovation and enterprise. It also funds strategic initiatives and builds up R&D capabilities by nurturing research talent. Learn more about the NRF at www.nrf.gov.sg.

ANNEX: Research projects supported by facilities at National Marine Research Station (NMRS)

In **ecosystem restoration**, the National Parks Board (NParks) and NMRS are working together for the 100K Corals Initiative — Singapore's largest coral restoration effort to date that builds on the outcomes from decades of reef restoration research. As part of NParks' Marine Park Outreach and Education Centre, NMRS hosts the large-scale coral culture facility that supports the 100K Corals Initiative. Complementing these efforts, a project under the Marine Climate Change Science (MCCS) programme combines expertise from NUS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to investigate how microbial communities help corals withstand climate stress in busy tropical port environments. Through a regional network, the knowledge and solutions emerging from such research and efforts can be shared, adapted and applied to support coastal restoration projects across Southeast Asia.

In **marine oceanography and climate mitigation**, ongoing research focuses on seagrass restoration, blue carbon dynamics and tracing organic matter flows from land to coastal seas. NMRS is operationalising the Marine Environment Sensing Network (MESN) to serve as a high-tech marine observatory that tracks environmental changes in near real time. Expanding this sensing network regionally could enable seamless data sharing, giving scientists a unified understanding of oceanographic fluxes and coastal water quality in connected regional seas.

In **marine biodiversity**, recent research highlights how much remains to be discovered in Southeast Asian waters. NMRS plays an important role as a research infrastructure supporting efforts to advance the understanding of marine life in Singapore and beyond. These include projects such as the Comprehensive Marine Biodiversity Survey II by NParks and NUS, and deep-sea expeditions which have contributed to exciting discoveries of marine species new to science. A regional network will help amplify these efforts by enabling joint research expeditions, shared taxonomical expertise and coordinated conservation strategies to protect the region's rich marine heritage.