

In collaboration with its sponsors Qatar University and ExxonMobil Qatar Limited, the SETAC Arabian Gulf Branch (under SETAC Europe) held their 2017 Annual Meeting on “Environmental Quality in the GCC\*: Addressing the Challenges” from March 21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 at Qatar University, Doha, Qatar. This 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting for the Branch was attended by 95 delegates from across the entire GCC member states, with representation from all sectors of government, industry and academia.

Three scientific sessions were held across the two day meeting on the following topics:

1. Oil Spill-Related Research and Monitoring 25 years after the Gulf Oil Spill
2. Assessing Environmental Impacts and Ecosystem Well-Being
3. Addressing Future Challenges to Environmental Quality

The meeting was opened with an address from Professor Mariam Al-Ali Al-Maadeed, Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies at Qatar University, and Professor Mohamed Alaa Abdel Moati, Environmental Consultant at the Qatar Ministry of Municipality and Environment, followed with the keynote address which helped set the tone for the meeting. His presentation highlighted that the Arabian Gulf consists of many sensitive habitats (corals, seagrasses and mangroves) and species (sea turtles, dugongs and whale sharks) with natural and anthropogenic stressors that present real environmental challenges to the marine and atmospheric environment. The challenges require integrated approaches to address effectively and sustainably. While the meeting provided a valuable opportunity for delegates to network and discuss their work, the outcomes will help the Branch find common areas of interest and important aspects of current and future needs for environment research and development, management and education.

“The meeting was a great example for the collaboration between government organizations, private sector and academia”, stated Ms. Hessa Al-Khaled, Head of Environmental Inspection and Monitoring Section with Kuwait EPA. “These annual meetings help develop solutions for regionally-shared environmental problems and aid in their implementation. We encourage more of these meetings in the future.”

“SETAC has done a very good job by organizing this scientific activity which succeeded in providing a productive meeting platform for local and regional scientists from academia, industry and government agencies to exchange and discuss some scientific issues related to Qatar and the region” commented Dr. Amjad Shraim from Qatar University. “Additionally, a strong participation from the student body was noticed through oral and poster presentations. I highly recommend organizing and hosting such scientific activities on a regular basis.”

Ms. Kavita Nair, a PhD candidate at Qatar University who is studying the development of a sustainable solution to the environmental impacts of chemical insecticide use in Qatar, was awarded the top student presentation. This award will provide Ms. Nair with a SETAC student membership and the opportunity to attend a future international SETAC meeting to present her work as the ExxonMobil Qatar Limited-SETAC AGB Student Scholar.

Dr. Christopher Warren, Environmental Research Lead at ExxonMobil Research Qatar and President of the AGB noted, “This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting for our Branch and it was great to see participation from across all sectors of Government, Academia and Industry. We also had speakers from across the GCC – Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait - which is a great accomplishment for our growing Branch. The student involvement was very impressive, providing high quality poster and platform presentations. The topics discussed are very relevant to addressing the environmental and sustainability challenges in the region. We look forward as an organization to do our part in helping achieve sustainable environmental management in the GCC, while also contributing to the global body of science”.

*\*GCC stands for Gulf Cooperation Council and is an intergovernmental political and economic union of the following states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.*