



Press release: 6 November 2018

## New Marine Biological Association researcher will explore frontiers of evolutionary biology

The Marine Biological Association has awarded a prestigious Anne Warner Fellowship to Vengamanaidu (Venky) Modepalli, whose appointment will open up new areas of research in evolutionary biology.

Dr Modepalli's scientific goal is to understand the evolution of early animal life forms and its impact on current animal diversity. At the MBA he will study the genetic make-up of the starlet sea anemone (*Nematostella vectensis*). Sea anemones offer the opportunity to study the molecular evolution of mechanisms that govern development, reproduction and tissue regeneration. The fact that they share a common ancestor with animals such as worms, insects and mammals, means that scientists can search for similarities and fill in gaps in our knowledge of evolution.

As an internationally recognised scientist, Dr Modepalli will bring to the MBA extensive knowhow in bioinformatics, molecular biology, synthetic biology and cell culture. He said "The MBA is a vibrant marine research institute with impressive infrastructure; I am truly excited as this award will enable me to extend my research skills and to build my own research group."

MBA Director, Professor Willie Wilson said 'Venky has an outstanding scientific pedigree previously working in world-class laboratories in Australia and Israel. His pioneering research programme epitomises our founders' spirit of discovery by studying model marine organisms to find new solutions for human medicine.'

In common with other 'fundamental' research undertaken at the MBA's laboratory, the outputs from studies on these relatively simple animals are the foundations on which other scientists build, and on which many new technologies rely. Dr Modepalli's work will help us to understand more about evolutionary biology in the wider sense, with potential applications in biotechnology, medicine and conservation.

As well as adding further breadth to the MBA's science base, Dr Modepalli's appointment reinforces the message that the south-west is a great place for world-leading research.

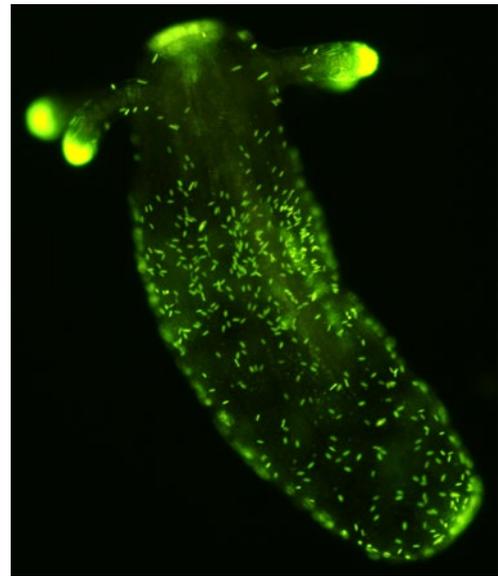


Figure 1. A fluorescent marker highlights the pattern of gene expression in a genetically altered organism. Image: Yehu Moran laboratory.



Dr Modepalli was previously a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Behaviour, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Ends**

**Notes for editors:**

The Anne Warner Fellowship was established to open a new research area in cell and molecular biology of marine organisms for outstanding early career scientists. The Warner legacy is highly beneficial to the south-west region in providing the “seed corn” that will attract further funding to establish a research team of promising young scientists. It will ensure that the MBA continues as one of Europe’s leading marine research organisations and will further strengthen the research capacity of the cluster of marine organisations in Plymouth.

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**The Marine Biological Association (MBA)** is a professional body for marine scientists with some 1,500 members world-wide. Since 1884 the MBA has established itself as a leading marine biological research organization contributing to the work of several Nobel Laureates and over 170 Fellows of the Royal Society. In 2013, the MBA was awarded a Royal Charter in recognition of its long and eminent history and its status within the field of marine biology. The award strengthens the Association’s role in promoting marine biology as a discipline and in representing the interests of the marine biological community.

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