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## **Oceans for Tomorrow**

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Commission Info Day for Potential Research Projects on Oceans  
and Seas

**Brussels, 9<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

Commissioner Damanaki,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank you all for coming here today. I am pleased to see such strong interest in the "Ocean of Tomorrow" call for proposals. It is a pleasure to open this information day in front of such a distinguished assembly of marine scientists and maritime industries stakeholders.

The oceans of today provide an enormous contribution to our wealth and well-being. They are a critical source of food and energy, as well as a vital medium for the global transportation of goods. However, the seas and oceans can pay a heavy price for human activities, as we saw with the devastating oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico this year.

The Oceans of Tomorrow will be subject to even more human exploration and exploitation. As coastlines around Europe and around the world get more and more crowded and urbanised, we are already moving certain coastal activities offshore. Production of fossil and renewable energies is already moving to deeper areas; aquaculture is in critical need of space for growth, even our ports are finding it increasingly difficult to expand in response to the demands of international trade.

The increasing scarcity of mineral and biological resources provides another drive towards the exploration of the deep sea. Its rich biodiversity and mineral resources constitute an untapped potential and it is only normal that we seek to discover, understand and harness it. But this must not be done at the expense of the marine environment.

The environmental sustainability of ocean industries and activities is not an option, it is a pre-requisite for their continued development.

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive puts a legal obligation upon us to define and reach a Good Environmental Status of our sea basins by 2020. In this, the UN "International year of Biodiversity", it is more than ever essential to take steps to protect marine biodiversity over the long term.

The "Ocean of Tomorrow" call for proposals that will be presented in detail this morning seeks to generate the knowledge that will help us to innovate so that we can strike the balance making the most of the seas' and oceans' potential, while preserving the marine environment that is the source of this wealth.

The focus of this call on innovation is very timely. Addressing societal and environmental challenges, while at the same time converting them into economic opportunities, is a key objective of the Innovation Union that is at the core of the Europe 2020 strategy.

So, this call comes at a very interesting moment in the bigger picture of research and innovation in Europe, and in many ways reflects the goals and actions of major initiatives that we will soon launch.

The Europe 2020 strategy tabled by the European Commission in March this year is an ambitious, transformational agenda, designed to turn Europe into a smart, sustainable and socially inclusive market economy. It will help Europe find its way out of the recent economic crisis, so that through greater innovation we can turn recent signs of improvement into a long-term, sustainable trend that will help guarantee an economically stable Europe.

The Innovation Flagship that we will launch in a few weeks' time will propose a raft of bold actions to make Europe a true Innovation Union. It will underline the importance of innovation as a means of regaining and improving our competitiveness in a rapidly-changing global economy.

The Innovation Union will use all relevant resources and policy instruments at its disposal, at local, regional, national and European levels and across all policy areas and sectors. It will aim to be truly cross thematic.

We need to be ambitious, to look beyond greater competitiveness as an important goal in itself, because we need to be more innovative to tackle not just economic and industrial challenges, but also the other challenges faced by our society now and in the coming decades.

The Innovation Flagship will therefore also focus on the societal challenges that really matter to people, such as fighting climate change, using scarce resources more wisely and efficiently, and healthy living for the growing number of older people in Europe.

The Innovation Flagship will reflect a very broad and inclusive understanding of what innovation means, to include innovation in business models, management structures and processes, innovation in how the public sector delivers services, as well as innovation in design and marketing.

The Innovation Flagship will not only encourage more innovation, but the right kind of innovation: in an age of austerity, we need to concentrate on the areas that our citizens most care about, the societal challenges that I already mentioned. To do this, I intend to launch a small number of targeted "Innovation Partnerships" in areas where clear and measurable goals can be defined and with a direct link to the societal challenge. For example, adding extra healthy years to the lives of older people.

The Partnerships will provide a framework for pooling resources and bringing together key actors and relevant policies and instruments, simultaneously tackling bottlenecks and building bridges.

They will not be a brand-new instrument as such, but they will weave together in a new way the many existing instruments already in play.

I like to think of the Innovation Partnerships as a fast-track, speeding up breakthroughs and making sure these are more rapidly and more cleverly deployed. I see this as a great opportunity to simplify our actions and focus them on key priorities. The Innovation Flagship will propose to Member States the themes of the first Innovation Partnerships.

We need greater solidarity, greater cooperation and more innovation if we are to reach the goals of Europe 2020 and the Innovation Union. We need to work together to avoid duplicating efforts, we need to tackle fragmentation which could undermine the efficiency of European Research. And we must ensure that research and innovation have the critical mass of resources needed to make a significant impact on the societal challenges that we face.

Addressing societal and environmental challenges while capitalising on economic opportunities, is at the core of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Indeed, the selection of the Innovation Partnerships will be influenced by the market potential for European industry.

It is also a key goal of the EU integrated maritime policy. The EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research has been designed to provide the scientific knowledge necessary for the development of European maritime policy. It is important to keep a close link between our research work and the needs of maritime policy.

I'd like to mention the main aspects of the Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research, since I think they fit well with the wider objectives of the Innovation Union.

Let me start with knowledge integration.

To make the most of ocean resources, while at the same time ensuring their sustainability, we need to break down any barriers between scientific disciplines and promote convergence between technologies. This is exactly the kind of cross-sectoral and cross thematic, innovative approach that the Innovation Union will champion. The answers to societal challenges are not to be found in one single discipline, but need a wide range of actors from different sectors to pull together.

We have been pursuing this approach with the “Ocean of Tomorrow” cross-thematic calls, which address concrete sea-related challenges of critical importance. They require inter-disciplinary cooperation on an unprecedented scale between marine scientists and maritime industries. I am therefore pleased with the success of the first Ocean of Tomorrow call last year, which sparked great interest with a good number of high quality proposals. Three large-scale projects have been awarded a total EU financing of 34 million Euro.

We are now launching this second "Ocean of Tomorrow" cross-thematic call, with a bigger budget of 45 million Euro. I invite you to engage fully in this cross-thematic cooperation, and help us break down barriers to scientific cooperation and promote the necessary convergence between ocean technologies. As in other areas of research and innovation, implementing a more cross-thematic approach can be a learning process. But I am convinced that this approach can bring many rewards and we wish to work in continued partnership with you. Indeed, in developing this call, we in the Commission have had to bring together departments and officials dealing with a variety of sectors, including food, biotechnology, transport, energy, and the environment.

Let me turn to infrastructure. Without world class marine research infrastructure, it is impossible to tackle the big challenges. It is indispensable to innovation in the marine bio-economy, in the area of renewable marine energy or for sustainable maritime transport.

In the global competition for research brains, the best infrastructure also helps to attract and keep the best researchers. But marine research infrastructures are also costly for single countries to support, and we can often ensure greater added value by pooling resources or coordinating initiatives at the EU level, such as in observation of the seas or in research on marine biodiversity.

We will work with Member States to achieve the best infrastructures for our budgets. We are investigating how different sources of funding could be better mobilised for these purposes. We already have some instructive examples in Member States. Using Structural Funds to build maritime clusters with high level marine research infrastructure is a worthy investment and it can be a key way to boost innovation and sustainability in the maritime economy.

Of course, this can serve as an example for research and innovation in the widest sense.

The Innovation Flagship will highlight the need to develop world class research infrastructures, and we are considering actions to improve the use of Cohesion and Structural Funds to support research and innovation capacities, which should be implemented by the Member States and regions within strategies of smart specialisation.

This brings me to the issue of synergies between Member States and regions. There are plenty of reasons for Member States to engage in cooperation actions at EU or regional level. The most compelling one is that marine ecosystems do not stop at maritime borders and actions taken in one Member State have consequences in regional waters. The EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research seeks to boost synergies both at EU level and at the level of regional seas. To do this we have already launched ERA-NETs at both the EU and regional level. As I already mentioned, a successful Innovation Union will require the engagement of all levels: local, regional, national and European.

Finally, Member States have endorsed a proposal to work together and coordinate national research efforts in a Joint Programming Initiative on "Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans". In 2011 we will prepare a recommendation for the launch of this important initiative.

On the issue of governance, tomorrow's maritime clusters will be more and more inter-disciplinary; they will combine a broad range of marine sciences and maritime technologies to tackle complex challenges such as those of ocean energy or the marine bio-economy. Just as oceans ignore borders, marine sciences and technologies are by their nature cross-cutting and involve many disciplines. There is no other way but to look beyond traditional sector-specific research to foster sustainable growth of maritime activities.

It is challenging to organise such a diverse range of marine scientific communities and ocean industries, and they must interact with policy makers who have to deal with a wide range of complex issues.

It is also necessary to help spread knowledge around this broad range of stakeholders. This is why we support the development of an inter-disciplinary marine and maritime research forum, which can advise us on research priorities, and which can also ensure integration and dissemination of scientific knowledge for policy making, including on crucial societal issues such as monitoring the environmental health of our seas.

I hope that the challenges and lessons of our efforts to develop this active and productive approach will inform actions in other research and innovation sectors in Europe.

The path to long term recovery from the current economic crisis; the path to tackling key societal challenges; the path to ensuring a prosperous and secure Europe, lie in research and innovation.

Only research and innovation can help us address these challenges, benefit from opportunities they may present, and help us remain competitive in tomorrow's smart economy. The marine environment is under great pressure but it can be part of the solution to our problems.

Marine and maritime research – the research that you are doing - has a lot to contribute to tomorrow's smart and green growth with, for example, ocean energy and the marine bio-economy, whose full potential remains to be realised. The EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research provides a framework to mobilise this contribution and this call is one more step taken by the Commission towards achieving this objective. You can also provide valuable experience and lessons for the wider innovation agenda that I have outlined today. I hope, therefore, that you will also see your current and future efforts as part of the bigger 'Innovation Union' picture. The challenge is great, and we need everyone to contribute.

I wish you well in your participation in this important initiative. I expect great things from this call: innovative, cutting edge research which will make a difference. We have plenty of challenges to address and as many compelling reasons to cooperate. Thank you for your attention.