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Environmental challenges in the context of the call

Dear Colleagues,

Dear Members of the marine and maritime science and research communities,

Ladies and gentlemen

It's a pleasure to be here today for this information session on the Ocean of Tomorrow call. As noted by the previous speakers, the presence of so many of you shows the great interest devoted to the call.

Oceans and seas are crucial for Europe. In fact **our continent** is the second-smallest continent in terms of its land area, but we sit between two oceans and five seas and have a coastline of 70,000km. Just to give you some more figures, **coastal waters** account for just 7% of the total area of the ocean. However the productivity of ecosystems such as the continental shelves, coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves means that this small area forms the basis of the world's primary fishing grounds, supplying an estimated 50% of the world's fisheries. They provide vital nutrition for close to 3 billion people, as well as 50% of animal protein and minerals to 400 million people of the least developed countries in the world.

There is now recognition that Europe's – and indeed the world's – future economic and physical well-being remains linked to its oceans and seas. Given the increasingly sophisticated and expanding **global competition** faced by Europe, investment in our competitive knowledge-based economy is one of the best ways, indeed perhaps the only way, for EU to foster economic growth and create more and better jobs, whilst at the same time ensuring social progress and environmental sustainability.

Marine science and technology therefore have a crucial role to play in improving our understanding of the oceanic environment and in guiding the practical application of research results for its sustainable management.

The Environment Directorate has long worked on initiatives that have contributed to strengthen **European leadership** and structuring the European Research Area in this research domain. During the course of FP6, the Directorate I am responsible for funded 4 marine Networks of Excellence and a number of Large scale Integrated projects.

Just to give you an example, as we are now celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity, let me highlight the contribution of the European scientists engaged within the **MARBEF** and **Marine Genomics** networks of excellence that gathered hundreds of institutes and scientists in Europe. The results from these projects helped us to understand the changes in biodiversity due to climate change. Did you know, contrary to common perception, that marine biodiversity in European Seas may be actually increasing as a result of climate change and the introduction

of invading species? The challenge is therefore not only to protect threatened species and habitats, but also to predict the consequences of changing biodiversity for the functioning and therefore the management of marine ecosystems.

Moreover, in the first four FP7 calls, we have funded over **45 marine related research projects that have received an EC contribution of more than 200 million euro**. This makes the Environment Programme the second largest contributor to marine/maritime research in FP7, a trend already observed during the course of FP6.

Our commitment to marine research does not stop here. In our 2009 work programme we have invited the scientific community to come forward with a support action aiming to streamline the existing marine ERA-Nets. The main mission of this ERAnet, the so called **overarching Eranet**, is to enhance cooperation and integration between the main marine research funding agencies and thereby develop a stable European overarching operational structure for marine research. In this context I am pleased to announce you that this Eranet entitled **SEAS-Era** "Towards integrated European marine research strategy and programmes" has kicked-off in June 2010. This process will feed the Joint Programming initiative on "Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans" mentioned by Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn in her talk.

Last year I've announced you that we were in the process of preparation of a Joint Research Programme for marine and sustainable development in the Baltic Region in the context of the application of Article 185 of the Treaty, **the Bonus Article 185**. Today I can tell you that we have completed this process with success and that **this proposal has been adopted** by the Council in May 2010 and the European Parliament in June 2010. We hope that this process will also be beneficial for the other regions in Europe, beyond the Baltic Sea.

A few more words concerning **research governance**: In the 2009 work programme we have called for a support action challenging the marine and maritime science communities to establish a partnership in the form of a forum, **the European Marine-Maritime Science Partnership** that should foster the dialogue and interactions between the research community, industry and other stakeholders. As a response to the call we concluded the negotiations of the **proposal MARCOM+** entitled 'Towards an Integrated Marine and Maritime Science Community'. This project kicked-off in January 2010 and is expected to be the catalyst for this forum.

Directorate for Environment is also coordinating the participation of the European Commission in the **Group on Earth Observation**. This initiative has the ambition to establish at the global level the Global Earth Observation System of Systems, better known by its acronym the GEOSS. Obviously, the marine component of the GEOSS is a very important one, not least because of the role played by the ocean to

regulate our climate system. We will be vigilant that this point is not forgotten at the global level.

In order to enhance our capacity to observe the ocean, various projects have been selected under our Earth Observation and Marine resources activities. We make sure that these projects work together in order to build this capacity in a coordinated manner. The symbiosis between the **ESONET Network of Excellence** (the European Sea Floor Observatory Network) and the **Eurosites** collaborative project (a project on Integration and enhancement of key existing European deep-ocean observatories) is one example among many others of how research projects can contribute to the enhancement of our observing capacity.

I would like to insist on a point that is becoming a priority in these times of economic difficulties: seabed observatories and other deep sea observing techniques are among the most **innovative technologies** supported by the Environment Directorate. Our Commissioner has clearly indicated her intention to **promote innovation in Europe**. I believe that deep sea technologies can play a role to boost innovation in Europe. There is a niche market in monitoring technologies for the deep sea where Europe has a lot of potential. This potential needs to be developed in order to compete with North American companies that currently dominate the market. Let's not forget that the developments made to serve the needs of the research community can also serve the needs of the broader market of the energy industry. The oil industry, in

particular, could benefit from innovative developments brought about by the research community.

This long list of achievements should not make us forget the reasons why we deploy this intense activity. The reason why we support environmental research is because **it plays a key role in the sustainable economic development** that is at the heart of the European model. This essential commitment to sustainability was recalled during the Goteborg summit of 2001 and more recently in the EU's 2020 strategy. The European Commission has never ceased to emphasize the importance of environmental issues. In the context of the marine environment, we adopted the **Marine Strategy Directive** to protect our seas and oceans. The adoption of the Marine Strategy Directive is an opportunity for a comprehensive policy for protecting, improving and sustainably using Europe's environmentally degraded seas. It calls for an ecosystem-based approach to management where humans are regarded as a system component. The central policy goal remains achieving "Good Environmental Status". In this context let me highlight the contribution of the projects **KNOWSEAS** (a project strengthening the science base for managing Europe's seas) and **MEECE** (developing indicators of (good) ecosystem status e.g. impacts of over fishing, pollution, biopollution).

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you can see a number of new initiatives to structure the Marine Research Area and strengthen the integration of marine and maritime research have been launched in Europe. At the same time new policy instruments and legislation have been adopted, requiring sound information on the state of the environment and a thorough understanding of the workings of the ocean and seas. This is **the role of the environment research community**. Only with your advice and the knowledge you generate can decision makers make investment or legislative decisions that are **environmentally sound**. And it is **our role in DG Research** to help you in producing the research that will deliver the best scientific advice..

The involvement of Directorate for Environment in the Ocean calls reflects our commitment to reinforce the environmental research dimension of the initiatives that we are launching through these cross-sectoral calls. For instance in **Topic 1** of the present call, we request consortia to develop a comprehensive environmental impact assessment methodology linked to the installation of large scale multi use offshore platforms in the marine environment. **As regards the second topic**, research should help us to better understand the complexity of marine microbial communities and their role on climate change and the parameters driving the functioning of marine ecosystems. **The third and fourth topics** have a regional dimension, in this case on the Mediterranean and Black seas. In both cases the purpose is to provide

scientific outputs in order to facilitate the implementation of ecosystem-based management in Mediterranean and Black Sea basins and support the development and implementation of 'fit-for-purpose' ecosystem-based regulations, policies and management practices aimed at safeguarding the sustainable use of the ecosystem's goods and services.

The environmental dimension is therefore at the heart of this call and it offers a challenge to the science community, a challenge that we would like to see addressed in the proposals. I invite all the participants to this information day to follow the presentations where a more comprehensive description of the call topics will be made and read carefully the related workprogramme in order to seize the dimension of this challenge and to adequately respond to it.

Finally, I would invite you to join us in the **EurOcean2010** conference, an event organized under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency. This conference will take place in Ostend in the 12th and 13th of October 2010; the focus of the discussions will be the grand challenges and opportunities for marine science in the next decade in Europe and a key objective the adoption of the "**Ostend Declaration**" reflecting the view of the European marine science community.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful session.