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Info day Call "The ocean of tomorrow"

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Call "The ocean of tomorrow": Rationale, context, content

Rationale

It may sound like a summer holiday story but I am sure many of you have experienced it: this summer jellyfishes invaded European shorelines again. In May a large mass of 12 km long was spotted in the Mediterranean near Corsica. The fact that this phenomenon is getting more common, although negligible as it may seem in comparison with the Arctic sea ice melting for example, it is a visible result of the combined impact on marine ecosystem of both climate change and human activities, producing positive conditions for jellyfish blooms: nutrient run-off, depletion of oxygen, rising sea-temperature, overfishing of natural predators. And in its turn it impacts on coastal regions' economies through tourism and fisheries.

This morning, we have been reminded that the key to an all embracing maritime policy is more specific knowledge and innovation for reconciling the sustainable economic growth of ocean-based activities with the threat of environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity.

With this in mind, we have developed a marine and maritime research strategy to solve complex issues and to find coherent solutions for exploiting the potential of the seas with an ecology-based approach, by encouraging wide cooperation and synergy between different scientific disciplines.

Our research strategy addresses science in two ways:

Firstly, it will inform policy makers about how ocean-based activities can be made sustainable and secondly, it will deliver technologies and innovations which will help the maritime economy grow sustainably.

At the heart of the strategy is the challenge to address the complexity of the marine environment by bringing together different knowledge 'strands'. We propose an approach that will require working across disciplines, strengthening EU marine research infrastructure and improving the synergies between member states and different regions.

And of course, we need your help. We need the support of a structured marine and maritime research community, organised with new governance mechanisms as the partnership forum mentioned by Commissioner Potocnik, which we need to build together.

Context

What do these challenges mean for the Directorate 'Biotechnologies, Agriculture, Food'? By building a knowledge-based bio-economy, we support the Lisbon goals and economic benefits of innovation and of social and environmental development. We are doing this by promoting research that contributes to the development of competitive and sustainable production systems, that improves the quality and safety of the food supply and that responds to consumers' and society's expectations.

In key sectors of the maritime bio-economy, such as fisheries, aquaculture, seafood production and marine-based – so-called "blue" – biotechnologies, my Directorate funds research with many purposes such as optimising fish health and welfare, enhancing safety and quality of aquaculture products while protecting the environment as well as improving the scientific and technical basis of fisheries management in line with the Common Fisheries Policy reform. And in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy, promoting greater sustainability in the harvesting of marine resources while safeguarding consumer health, developing new commodity products or bio-energy through the exploitation of our rich marine biodiversity such as marine micro and macro-algae.

Let me just mention a few figures in relation with the maritime bio-economy:

- The EU is the first world market for aquatic food, the seafood sector employs around half a million people and produces 35% of our seafood consumption with a total value of 20 billion Euro per year. Aquaculture in the EU appears well placed and provides suitable climatic conditions and sites for a majority of the species currently farmed.
- The very promising area of blue biotechnologies is emerging with a predicted growth of 10% per year and a estimated turn-over of 2,5 billion Euro.

But all this potential is at risk: the EU ocean-related economic sectors such as marine transport and ship building face economic problems due to global competition. And, as just set out by my colleague, the marine environment is having to cope with dramatic changes. Our seas and oceans are exposed to many types of threats ranging from chemical pollution, the discharge of dangerous and non-degradable substances, growing demand for maritime transport,

unsustainable coastal development, depletion of fish resources and natural habitats.

On top of all that, the seas and oceans are also significantly affected by global phenomena such as climate change, water acidification and coastal erosion. All these issues require a longer term strategy, not just a quick fix.

We all believe that EU member states and FP7 associated countries have a high potential for research in marine science and technology. But more synergies between all the different actors are required. Therefore, the Directorates 'Environment', 'Transport', 'Energy' and 'Science, economy and society' join forces with the Directorate 'Biotechnologies, Agriculture, Food' for this call. By pulling together different research communities, we hope to promote the sustainable growth of maritime activities such as fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, offshore energy, and tourism.

We need more knowledge for innovation, for delivering rational policies, and we need more integration between different scientific communities.

More than ever, we must invest in science and innovation in order to contribute to the sustainable development of ocean-based activities so that we can exploit the great opportunities that marine and maritime resources represent.

Content

We try a new approach based on our 20 years' experience of supporting the EU marine and maritime research communities through a host of research projects funded under the European Research Framework Programmes. From 2002 to 2006, about 5% of the FP6 budget of almost 18 billion Euro was committed to about 500 marine related research projects. For FP7, during the period 2007-2008, the Directorates represented in the call selected for funding 115 marine or maritime research projects, receiving a total EC contribution of 424 Million Euros. The weight of marine science and technology in the overall funding of the 7th Framework Programme will increase and will make the best use of all available instruments and particularly joint calls such as 'The ocean of tomorrow'.

As identified earlier by Commissioner Potocnik, EU research is still fragmented. To overcome fragmentation, we aim through "The ocean of tomorrow" call at integrating established marine and maritime research disciplines that enhance excellence in science.

In addition to reconciling the growth of sea-based activities with environmental sustainability, "The ocean of tomorrow" call aims at improving the capacity of

predicting how marine ecosystems respond to a combination of natural and anthropogenic factors. We want to investigate how rapid environmental changes will affect the full range of goods and services provided by the oceans. Which management measures, supporting policies and possible technologies could be developed to mitigate or adapt to these changes.

To this end, large, multi-disciplinary, collaborative projects are expected in answer to three global challenges in ocean management:

1. The far reaching consequences, both environmental and economic, of changing climatic conditions in the Arctic;
2. The impacts of humans and nature on marine life and, subsequently, on economic sectors such as transport, fisheries and tourism;
3. The potential impact of sub-seabed carbon storage on marine ecosystems.

34 Million Euros are dedicated to these three large topics of a cross-thematic nature. This represents about 30% of the annual budget for marine and maritime research in FP7. In addition to this call, the Research Directorates also dedicate substantial funding to other aspects of marine and maritime research. For example, research in blue biotechnologies or in support to different EU policies such as the Maritime Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, The Common Fisheries Policy and the International Maritime organisation.

Finally, let me remind you that the oceans belong to all mankind and that marine and maritime research is conducted in all parts of the world. We encourage you to conduct your research, in particular concerning the Arctic, with international partners, and to maximise the impact from your research in the domain of carbon storage by including expertise from the centres of excellence be it in the US, Japan or Australia.

Let me take now the opportunity to thank you for your participation and to wish you well in preparing your proposals in response to this call.

We look forward to the ensuing debate and are interested in hearing your views on our new approach and your ideas for future calls. For the afternoon brokerage session I hope that you can generate momentum for exchanging ideas and views on marine and maritime research and future needs.

Now, for a deeper description of the call, I hand you over to Mr Tim Hall, Head of Unit for Agriculture and Fisheries research.

Thank you