

**Speech Manuela SOARES – Dir RTD/I**

*Info day Call "The ocean of tomorrow"*

*Brussels, 16 September 2009 – 10:45 to 11:00*

**Environmental challenges in the context of the EU Strategy for marine and maritime research**

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

I am very pleased to be here today for this information session on the Ocean of Tomorrow call. As mentioned by my colleague Andrés Siegler, the presence of so many of you shows the great interest devoted to the call.

In fact, this first joint marine call represents only the visible outcome of an intensive preparatory phase in which my services have played a **central role**.

Indeed, the Environment Directorate has long worked on initiatives that have contributed to structuring the European Research Area in the field of marine research. During the course of FP6, my Directorate funded **4 marine Networks of Excellence and a number of Large scale Integrated** projects. All these have brought together at the European level the resources and expertise needed to provide European leadership in domains such climate change, deep ocean research, marine biodiversity, genomics, development of ecosystem approaches and

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technologies crucial for the management and protection of the marine environment.

In 2006/2007, through the Eranet-schemes, we supported the **Bonus Eranet and Bonus Eranet Plus**, with the aim of integrating marine research in the Baltic Sea region. These projects were precursors for a Joint Research Programme for marine and sustainable development in the Baltic Region, which will soon be launched in the context of the application of Art. 169 of the Treaty. We hope that this process will also be beneficial for the other regions in Europe, beyond the Baltic Sea.

The Environment Directorate was also instrumental in structuring the Marine research community. In particular, it was heavily involved in the preparation of the **Galway Declaration and of the Aberdeen Declaration**.

**Last but not least**, Directorate I has funded many marine research projects. Just in the first three FP7 calls, we have funded over 30 marine related research projects that have received an EC contribution of more than 160 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.

The Environment Directorate also actively contributed to the **preparation of the Marine and Maritime Research Strategy**. We have contributed in particular, since the onset of the interservice

discussions, to the **implementation of the call "The Ocean of Tomorrow"**. That the environment theme is the main financial contributor to the call reflects our strong commitment to the Marine and Maritime Research Strategy; and we are also the service leading the topic on carbon storage and the marine environment, so our investment goes beyond mere financial support.

Our commitment to marine research is not going to stop. As mentioned in detail by the previous speaker, the marine and maritime strategy is developing along 4 main axes: fostering synergies, integration, capacity building and new forms of governance in research. Each of these 4 axes are reflected in the activities of my Directorate.

Concerning **synergies**, 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. Such a process will enable the delivery of an Integrated European marine research and innovation strategy, developing at the same time a coherent vision of the planning and use of the research infrastructure and thus strengthening the knowledge economy. In this context we are now in the process of negotiating the **proposal SEAS-Era** entitled "Towards integrated European marine research strategy and programmes".

Moreover, as I have mentioned before, my services are preparing the Article 169 legislative proposal of the Bonus initiative, which is planned to be submitted very soon.

Furthermore, 3 of the marine related **networks of excellence** funded under FP6 are now complete. To ensure support to the durable integration of these networks, we are proposing in our 2010 work programme an action that may deliver a **common coordination structure**.

Concerning **Integration**, in addition to the involvement of Directorate I in the preparation of the Ocean joint call, we are 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.

Now, on **Capacity building**: 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. However, it is clear that research projects alone will not suffice. This is why the staff of the Earth Observation sector of my Directorate works in close collaboration with the Commission's colleagues in charge of GMES (the Global Monitoring for the Environment and Security initiative). We hope that this initiative will bring the operational capability necessary to develop the European observing capacity. The same can be said of the European marine observation and data network initiative, EMODnet, led by DG MARE. In particular, common databases and common data sharing principles will be necessary in marine sciences. The European marine data infrastructure initiative will be a key contribution to these issues and we are committed to sustaining it.

Finally concerning **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. This forum is also expected to contribute to the development and implementation of an ambitious European Strategy and programme on Marine and Maritime research, essential to support the knowledge base of the EU Maritime Policy. As a response to the call we are now in the process of negotiating the **proposal MARCOM+** entitled

'Towards an Integrated Marine and Maritime Science Community'. This project is expected to be the catalyst for this forum.

This long list of achievements and future plans 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 submit of 2001 only a few months after the adoption of the Lisbon strategy. Since then, 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. This Directive is now recognized as the environmental pillar of the Maritime Policy.

Among the key elements of the Marine Strategy Directive is the precautionary approach to the management of the marine environment. The precautionary approach works only if sound information is available on the state of the environment and if a thorough understanding of the workings of the ocean and seas exists. 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. We hope that the Ocean of Tomorrow call will be remembered as a milestone in this quest.

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

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