



MARINE BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF THE EU INTEGRATED MARITIME POLICY

Statement of the meeting of the
European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy

"Life on the Blue Planet: Biodiversity Research and the new European Marine Policies",

held under the Portuguese Presidency of the EU, Porto, Portugal, 7th – 9th November 2007

Preamble

In its Communication on An Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union (the Blue Book), the European Commission stresses that *"an Integrated Maritime Policy (...) must be based on excellence in marine research, technology and innovation (...)"*.

As a contribution to the design and implementation of the Maritime Policy and the European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research, the participants to the EPBRs meeting call for substantial concerted action and wish to emphasise the following issues:

The crucial role of marine biodiversity research

Research on marine biodiversity and ecosystems is of crucial importance for achieving the ambitious objectives of the Maritime Policy. Such research adds value through:

- Providing better understanding of ecosystems structure and functioning, which is a necessary requirement for sustainable management of marine resources based on the ecosystem approach;
- Providing better understanding of the issue of biodiversity loss and change in marine ecosystems and the consequences in terms of sustainability and quality of life;
- Providing better understanding of impacts of human activities and climate change on ecosystems and the goods and services they provide;
- Defining products and tools that underpin European policies;
- Allowing the assessment of the quality of the marine environment;
- Creating opportunities for new industrial applications, including bioprospecting, biofuels, etc.;
- Allowing for the identification and development of biodiversity- and climate-friendly technologies;

Building the European Research Area in marine biodiversity research

Policy-relevant marine biodiversity research needs:

- Long-term integration and coordination of the scientific community across countries and disciplines in a dynamic and transparent way;
- A strategic long-term vision driving research orientation to allow for the consolidation of cooperation in science, sustained observations, and research on long-term changes in the marine environment, together with appropriate, sustained funding mechanisms;
- Research at the appropriate spatial scales (from regional to European) and temporal scales (years to decades) supported with adequate experimental facilities
- Innovative infrastructures and large-scale databases;
- Targeted training and education programmes;
- Extensive public communication and outreach programmes;

- Strategic and sustained relations with stakeholders, users and other relevant national, European and international institutions;
- Thorough mechanisms for interfacing science with policy in support of the Maritime Policy and ensuring that research responds to societal needs.

EU-funded Networks of Excellence, Integrated Projects, ERA-Nets and research infrastructure projects (e.g. Marbef, HERMES, Marine Genomics, EDIT, BiodivERsA, Life Watch, ...) significantly contribute to the structuring of the European Research Area (ERA) in the marine biodiversity domain. They are instrumental in organising science and sharing data. They also provide leverage for co-funding by Member States. Their continued operation is pivotal to achieving the Maritime Policy goals. It is essential that Member states and the EC develop and implement appropriate support mechanisms to further this structuring and to ensure the continuation of effective cooperation mechanisms and infrastructure development. Opportunities for smaller groups to do excellent and basic research should also be strengthened.

Existing mechanisms of interactions among networks, and between networks and other relevant organisations such as ICES and CIESM, can be further developed but new cooperative efforts have to be considered and promoted.

Member States and Associated Countries have to be encouraged to take responsibility to restructure their marine biodiversity research effort.

Ways forward

Several non-exclusive avenues require serious consideration to support the further strengthening of the European Research Area in the field of marine biodiversity in support of the Maritime Policy:

- The **clustering of marine biodiversity research programmes and networks** as a component of the Network of Networks under discussion in the Aberdeen process. The operation of such a cluster could be funded through the joint cross-cutting calls in FP7.
- **Benchmarking** experiences in the construction of the ERA in marine biodiversity science, for future strategic orientation and to support participation of more Member States and Associated Countries.
- The creation of a **European Marine Research Agency** that would include a significant biodiversity and ecosystems research component.
- Securing support by the EC and Member States for the development of **large biodiversity research infrastructures and equipments** necessary to achieve breakthrough with significant impact, such as Life Watch. These will allow generating, analysing and modelling large data sets on biodiversity, which is essential for new approaches to both integrated scientific research and policy advice.
- Creating **virtual research institutes** to promote cross-cutting marine biodiversity and ecosystem science.
- The development of pan-European mechanisms for **sustained long-term observation** of marine ecosystems and ensuring their appropriate funding and implementation;
- The reinforcement of **links between the marine biodiversity research community and industry** where appropriate. Efforts in this regard can be made by individual projects and networks –e.g. by sharing equipment, joint research efforts, co-funding. However, the establishment of a marine biodiversity industry platform would greatly enhance the collaboration between the scientific community and industry.
- Strengthening cooperation between EU biodiversity research communities and **non-European partners**, including developing countries partners.