

Marine science – “Ostend Declaration” calls for a Blue Future for Europe

Marine scientists from across Europe gathered in Ostend at the EurOCEAN 2010 Conference (12-13 October) where the Ostend Declaration was adopted. This declaration will act as a guideline to address the grand challenges and opportunities facing Europe's seas and oceans in the coming decade.

Presenting the Ostend Declaration to Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Lars Horn (Marine Board-ESF chair) said: “*The marine community has identified the key challenges facing us in the coming years. Across Europe, scientists are working together to ensure the potential health and wealth that could come from our seas and oceans. In return, there is a need to safeguard the future health of our seas too. We need to underpin this by observing and monitoring changes.*”

Máire Geoghegan-Quinn welcomed the Ostend Declaration “*as an impetus for new ideas to boost marine research to innovate and address the challenges represented by our seas and oceans*”. She also pointed that “*achieving the 3% target of EU GDP dedicated to research could create up to 3.7 million new jobs and EUR 800 billion in additional GDP by 2025*”. Marine and maritime research and technologies could undoubtedly contribute to such a virtuous process keeping in mind that “*tomorrow's innovation starts with today's blue skies research.*”

Lars Horn continued: “*The role of the oceans in our global environment has yet to be fully appreciated; we need to collaborate across Europe in joint programmes as this task is too big for a single country. The Ostend Declaration calls for an integrated European Ocean Observing System that will respond to Europe's societal needs by supporting major policy initiatives. To be successful, the marine science community needs to share data, information and knowledge not only with its European neighbours but with the global science community – particularly in the developing world. Training the next generation of scientists will be crucial to maintaining the position Europe has in ocean science.*”

At the two-day event, high-level speakers presented a state-of-the-art overview of major marine and maritime research and technology, outlining their proposals for Europe's “Blue Future”. The Ostend Declaration, adopted at the EurOCEAN 2010 Conference, is the outcome of a thorough preparatory process, an open on-line consultation organised prior to the event and active discussions during the conference which allowed reaching a solid consensus amongst the broader marine and maritime science community, policy-makers, stakeholders and the 430 participants present at the conference.

During the opening session of the conference, Maria Damanaki, EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, highlighted the potential of marine innovation: “*New growth can be Blue Growth and new jobs can be Blue Jobs. To create knowledge we need the marine community to continue making ocean measurements.*”

Also Ingrid Lieten, Flemish Minister for Innovation, Public Investment, Media and Poverty Reduction, fully supports the “Ostend Declaration”, recognising the importance of seas and oceans for the Flemish knowledge society and economy.

Representing the Belgium EU Presidency, the Belgian Federal Minister for Science Policy, Sabine Laruelle, expressed her support to the Ostend Declaration and willingness to take up the actions highlighted in the declaration: “*The long tradition of support to marine sciences by the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO) will be pursued. For more than 40 years research programmes on marine sciences with special attention to our North Sea have been implemented. Researchers from the North and the South of our country are participating in those programmes, as well as foreign researchers. The importance given to international cooperation in the field of marine sciences is underlined by the participation of BELSPO in marine ERA-NET projects. Such projects will give a crucial input towards the development of the Joint Programming Initiative.*”

Sabine Laruelle added “*Within our federal research institutions a strong expertise in marine sciences has been built up. The Management Unit of the Mathematical Model of the North Sea (MUMM), a department of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, has more than 30 years of expertise in modelling, monitoring and managing our marine waters. With regard to ocean observation they are already actively contributing to several international and European initiatives in this domain such as EMODNET, Myocean/GMES, EuroGOOS.*”

The Ostend EurOCEAN 2010 builds on the success of earlier conferences in Aberdeen (2007) and Galway (2004). EurOCEAN 2010 was organised as a Belgian EU Presidency event in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Marine Board-ESF.

Ends

Additional material on www.eurocean2010.eu

- The Ostend Declaration (www.eurocean2010.eu/declaration)
- Flyer "The Ocean, it's in your hands" (<http://www.eurocean2010.eu/pers/docs/EurOCEAN2010-Leaflet-EN.pdf>)
- Pictures and earlier press releases available on:
<http://www.eurocean2010.eu/component/content/article/18>

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