

SUPPORTING THE SCIENCE – FUTURE LOOK AT A NEW MARINE SCIENCE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

TOWARDS INTEGRATED MARINE RESEARCH STRATEGY AND PROGRAMMES (SEAS-ERA)

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In 2004, the Galway Declaration highlighted the crucial role that seas and oceans play in the planetary/ecosystem functioning. This was followed by the Aberdeen Declaration (2007) which called for integration across scientific disciplines. Since the development of those Declarations and the publication of various documents by the European Commission that were issued according to the 'Lisbon Strategy' for achieving a 'knowledge-based economy and society', a whole strategy of knowledge generation and management in the marine and maritime sectors has been delineated.

In this respect, the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) stresses the need to achieve the full economic potential of oceans and seas in harmony with the marine environment. This can only be done on the basis of a concerted definition of research needs and priorities leading to a more effective integration of knowledge and resources, enabling a "knowledge based" policy making.

The MSFD calls for particular attention to promote synergies at national and regional level and to mobilise national and regional funding to reach a critical mass to address marine research challenges. Responding to these objectives, a specific instrument dedicated to the co-ordination of national and regional programmes was included in the 6th Framework Programme. The ERA-NET scheme, aiming at networking of national and regional research programmes, was implemented through many thematic focused projects in order to facilitate the strategic planning and implementation of joint activities, including joint calls for research proposals.

The ERA-NET scheme was designed for Research Funding Organisations, specifically those managing competitive research funding programmes. It became a key instrument to tackle fragmentation in the areas of among others fisheries, accidental pollution, climate change and ecosystem impacts. Under FP6 several marine ERA-NETs were developed such as AMPERA, MarinERA and MariFish.

Recently, a new ERA-Net has been launched (SEAS-ERA) under FP7 in a process which is overarching marine research cooperation initiatives. This ERA-NET will be instrumental in promoting the integration of a European Maritime Research Strategy and enhancing and consolidating the marine element of the European Research Area (ERA).

In the context of broadening and strengthening the ERA, the Joint Programming Scheme as defined by the European Commission in July 2008, is a further structural component to be considered in the design of future work programmes, where multilateral cooperation will be enhanced.

These instruments have been and will be fundamental in terms of impact since almost 90% of all public research funding in Europe originates from national and regional programmes. It is therefore crucial that marine and maritime research funding schemes at national level are able to mobilise competitive and non-competitive funds for research in a more coordinated way, through common programs and joint calls. However, each of these funding sources operates according to its specific rules and procedures, introducing barriers to transnational collaboration and benchmarking of excellence across national boundaries. There are still difficulties in the creation of 'common pots' and in the long-term sustainability of initiatives. These are some aspects that require continued action.