

No Blue Growth without knowledge – no knowledge without data

The European maritime economy accounts for around 5% of Europe's GDP and provides for more than 5 million direct and 1,5 million indirect jobs. For the direct jobs, most important sectors are coastal tourism (49%), maritime transport (20%), fisheries/aquaculture (14%), maritime construction and repairs (11%), oil and gas (5%) and offshore wind energy (0,7%). All of these coastal and maritime activities rely heavily on data and information about the sea for their planning and operations. That is why **more than 1,4 billion euros are invested to collect data about the marine environment in Europe every year. But this investment is useless if Europe's scientists, engineers and policy experts are not able to easily find, access and re-use this data.**

On 20 October 2015, more than 350 European marine experts and maritime stakeholders are gathering in Oostende, Belgium, to discuss how we can unlock the wealth of marine data that is currently collected and stored in databases spread all over Europe. "Today ocean related data are collected by a myriad of private and public organisations and stored in databases scattered around Europe. Making these data more easily and freely available to users will reduce the costs of those working offshore, stimulate innovation and competition and increase our understanding of the behaviour of the sea" **explains Matthew King from the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.** "This is why, since 2009, the European Commission is funding the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) to ensure that existing and newly collected data is easily accessible to those who can use it."

These efforts are part of a strategic framework to develop the considerable potential for sustainable growth in marine and maritime sectors or so-called 'blue growth' strategy. It is based on the understanding that the **creation of marine knowledge begins with observation of the seas and oceans.** Data from these observations are assembled and analysed to generate information and ultimately to create knowledge. This knowledge can then be applied to **deliver smart sustainable growth, to assess the health of the marine ecosystem or to protect coastal communities.** The establishment and development of the long-term marine data infrastructure, known as EMODnet, will accelerate this process. It allows us to better protect our European seas and oceans but also to sustainably exploit their potential to contribute to societal needs.

Studies estimate that making high-quality marine data held by public bodies in the EU widely available would **improve productivity by over €1 billion a year.** It would also **stimulate innovation** in the blue economy by making information on the behaviour of the sea and the geology of the seabed more readily available, with **gains estimated in the order of €200 - €300 million a year.** It would also **improve maritime security** and help the public and private sectors manage risks and uncertainties connected with the sea – for example, the weather, major transport accidents, marine pollution or loss of critical infrastructure.

But access to marine data and information is not only important for our economy: Europe's seas are also its lifeblood. They are vital to our wellbeing, prosperity and security. Gathering information to understand them, to see how humans impact them, and what future changes might lie ahead, is critical for sound decision making and planning. The European Marine Observation and Data Network EMODnet is an important step towards a **sustainable management of our marine resources** and as such essential for the **future health of our oceans.**

About the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet)

In 2009, the European Commission set up the European Marine Observation Data Network, or EMODnet for short. EMODnet is a network of more than 100 organisations working together to observe and measure the oceans, process the data according to international standards and then make that information freely available. Usually, the data are collected via local, national and regional databases and then made available via EMODnet's central information gateway as interoperable data layers and data products.

Not only does this mean that people can access marine data quickly, they can also be reassured that the data is accurate and quality-controlled, and the different data layers can be used together. By adopting this "collect once and use many times" philosophy, the EU could save a large chunk of the one billion Euros spent each year on collecting marine data.

Currently EMODnet provides data via seven thematic portals covering Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Bathymetry, Physics, Human Activities and Seabed Habitats. It is also investigating the adequacy of the data currently available for practical applications on a regional sea-basin scale through a series of EMODnet Checkpoints covering the Arctic, Black Sea, Mediterranean, North Sea, Baltic Sea and the Atlantic. All of the resources are available via the central EMODnet portal www.emodnet.eu.

The European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) is financed by the European Commission under Regulation (EU) No. 1255/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2011 establishing a Programme to support the further development of an Integrated Maritime Policy.

About the EMODnet Open Conference (20 October 2015, Oostende, Belgium)

Five years after it was founded, EMODnet is approaching its third and final development phase III (2015-2020). As such it is timely to take stock of the progress made to date, to learn from past achievements, to exchange best practices between the thematic and regional projects and to make plans for the future. The EMODnet Open Conference provides a unique forum for the marine observation and data community, policy makers/advisors and stakeholders from various sectors and societal domains to meet, discuss and respond to the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The Conference aims to reinforce the foundations and consider avenues for the further development of an open, user-friendly and fit-for-purpose pan-European marine data infrastructure. The Conference will entail high-level presentations, interventions from stakeholders and experts, user testimonies and plenary discussions to stress the importance of marine observations and data for a wide range of users and to illustrate how EMODnet can and must contribute to economic recovery, job creation and blue-green growth.

Contact information:

EMODnet Secretariat: Jan-Bart Calewaert (janbart.calewaert@emodnet.eu), tel +32(0)497433371.

DG MARE: Iain Shepherd (Iain.SHEPHERD@ec.europa.eu)

Information about the conference: www.emodnet.eu/conference

