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The ocean of tomorrow

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Meeting between Commissioners Maire Geoghegan-Quinn and Maria Damanaki and the European Marine and Maritime Science Community

Brussels, 9 September 2010

Dear Maire, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first thing I learnt on becoming Commissioner for maritime affairs and fisheries is that there is a lot that we don't know about the sea.

Consider the energy sector.

We don't know how or why the blowout valve failed in the Deepwater Horizon well in the Gulf of Mexico. We didn't know how to stop the flow of oil once it had started.

We don't know how the massive planned expansion of offshore wind power will affect other users of the sea.

We don't know yet how to harness the power of the waves and tides in an economically competitive way.

Or consider our moral and legal obligation to protect the environment.

We are able to assess a number of components of marine ecosystems but we lack an integrated methodology to assess their overall health status and how these ecosystems respond to external pressures.

We have prospected millions of square kilometres of sea bottom but still we know more about the surface of the moon than the bottom of the Mediterranean. Every new deep sea survey turns up new previously unknown species.

We know that circulation in the oceans influences the severity or mildness of the seasons in Europe and we know that climate change will affect this circulation but we don't know whether particular regions will be warmer or cooler, wetter or dryer.

Scientists have been engaged for decades in describing the dynamics of commercial fisheries but although a big progress has been made, we could write a book about what we still don't know about fish.

Uncertainty costs money. And these unknowns guide our definition of research priorities. We need to answer these questions if we are to benefit from the undoubted prosperity and well-being that better knowledge of the sea can bring.

Improving knowledge of the seas and oceans that make up 71% of our planet's surface is one of the three cross-cutting goals of the EU's integrated maritime policy.

Of course, we are not starting from scratch. Far from it.

Credit has to be given to some of the EU research projects over the past years that have enabled us to make significant progress on some of these issues.

For instance the HERMES project greatly enhanced our understanding of the impact of fisheries on species in the deep sea below the reach of trawlers.

Such projects have allowed researchers from different countries to join forces and tackle issues together. These formal and informal contacts are helping to create a genuine European research area.

This is why we are delighted to see the calls for proposals on cross-cutting issues that are the subject of this information meeting. These will encourage the different scientific communities to talk to each other; to look at things from a different angle and to put their research into a wider context.

The emphasis on the Mediterranean and Black Sea this year is also welcome. Improving the knowledge-base for maritime-policy making in the Mediterranean is one of the key priorities set in our 2009 strategy for improving governance in this particular sea-basin.

But we want to go further ahead.

A first step has been the publication in 2008 of the Communication on Marine and Maritime Research Strategy which establishes science and technology as a cornerstone to the IMP.

I am happy to announce today that we published yesterday a Communication on "Marine knowledge 2020" which explains our vision for improving matters.

This initiative aims to unlock and assemble marine data from different sources and facilitate their use for purposes than those for which they were originally intended. This will have three major benefits.

First, it will improve the efficiency of all those private bodies, public authorities and researchers which presently use marine data. Less time and effort will be spent assembling and processing incompatible data from heterogeneous sources.

Second, it will open up new opportunities and drive innovation in the maritime economy. I am confident that universal and reliable access to accurate marine data will enable European business to offer products and services that nobody could have anticipated beforehand.

And third, it will reduce uncertainties in our knowledge of the behaviour of the seas and oceans.

This will not only benefit those living and working on the seas and at the coast. Circulation in the oceans drives the terrestrial climate.

Improved knowledge of the sea is not a sufficient condition for better forecasting of the future severity or mildness of Europe's seasons. But it is a necessary one. Thus better marine knowledge can contribute towards Europe's adaptation to climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Maire,

I am confident that the results of the calls will feed into a more open and user-friendly European Marine Knowledge pool.

We definitely need more accessible knowledge if we want to imagine and work together on "The Ocean of tomorrow" .

Thank you.