

t turning the tide on coastal water monitoring

“ I am convinced that the project will promote innovation and technology transfer specifically related to the coordination of monitoring programmes for coastal water quality in shellfish-growing areas ”

In areas of shellfish production, statutory monitoring requirements under European food standards legislation overlap with those of the EU's Water Framework Directive.

Numerous monitoring programmes exist, but there are no national or European-wide systems to evaluate research, share data and identify duplication or omissions. COASTAL-ERA is contacting all the relevant authorities and public bodies to collate information on their existing research monitoring programmes and identify mechanisms for co-operation and data exchange between them. This marks the first step in collaboration between programme managers and paves the way for a full ERA-NET to coordinate future research needed for coastal monitoring in shellfish production areas.

Whether you think they taste terrible or regard them as a delicious treat, most consumers presume shellfish are safe to eat. Thanks to strict legislation and quality monitoring programmes, shellfish remain a nutritious and popular part of our diet.

However, the organisation of programmes for monitoring coastal waters in shellfish-growing areas is far from simple, not least because several pieces of EU legislation cover such activities. The Water Framework Directive (WFD), for instance, requires coastal water monitoring to measure pollution levels and help enforce 'up-stream' compliance with the law. At the same time, EU food safety regulations directly cover the quality of the shellfish themselves.

The situation is further complicated by the international nature of the European marine environment as tides and currents carry pollution across borders. Even on a small scale, the water quality in a single shellfish-growing area is likely to be dependent on the water management of numerous river basins, possibly in several different countries.

Good marine environmental management and quality shellfish production are therefore intrinsically linked at a transnational level – and both would benefit from relevant authorities and regulators overseeing 'the big

picture'. Yet current national and even regional monitoring programmes – let alone research programmes – of coastal waters in shellfish-growing areas are fragmented. There is little sharing of information and no infrastructure that can promote transnational exchanges or provide an overview of results.

A sea change

The Institute for Food and Agricultural Research and Technology in Spain is leading a consortium of agencies to investigate how an ERA-NET could foster greater co-operation and enable managers and 'funders' to work together, share results and coordinate their monitoring efforts.

The four partners in the COASTAL-ERA Specific Support Action (SSA) are conducting several feasibility studies. First, they have begun to compile a directory of all the institutions, agencies and public bodies involved in shellfish food safety and coastal water quality in the EU. The partners are also constructing a database to collate information on all their existing research and monitoring programmes. This database is designed to enable programme managers to identify research and data gaps, avoid duplication of effort and ensure that funding is used efficiently. It will also enable managers to standardise programmes to



Specific Support Action COASTAL-ERA



“ *For the first time, we are providing an integrated approach to policies that impact on the marine environment* ”

Full title:

Control objectives and shellfish target assurance levels ERA-NET

Research field:

Marine water quality/food standards

Co-ordinator:

Spain: Institute for Food and Agricultural Research and Technology

Partners:

- France: French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (IFREMER)
- Spain: Centro de Control do Medio Mariño
- United Kingdom: Environmental Agency of England and Wales

Further information:

Mr Agustí Fonts
Deputy General Manager
Institut de Recerca i Tecnologia Agroalimentàries (IRTA)
Passeig de Gràcia, 44, 3^a pl.
ES-08007 Barcelona
Fax: +34 93 467 40 42
e-mail: agusti.fonts@irta.es
website: <http://www.irta.es>

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produce comparable data and reports so that information can be shared and exploited more efficiently. The database may also be used by policy- and decision-makers at national and European levels to streamline future research calls.

Central to the work of the SSA will be a two-day seminar for relevant programme managers and other potential members of a future ERA-NET. The meeting will cover topics including the dissemination of information, transnational exchanges, and possible links with other schemes or networks. It will also be used to agree the aims and direction for a fully-fledged ERA-NET.

Establishing links

Although COASTAL-ERA is a preparatory action for the foundation of a subsequent ERA-NET, it has already begun the work of improving collaboration between research and monitoring programmes by bringing together – perhaps for the first time – managers responsible for shellfish food safety and coastal water quality. However,

COASTAL-ERA expects to take this networking to even greater levels. By examining the relationship between different EU Directives, the partners will suggest mechanisms for increased coordination and standardisation of coastal monitoring programmes with respect to shellfish-harvesting sites. COASTAL-ERA will publish draft recommendations on integrating data assessment across different authorities to improve access to environmental data between organisations and the public in general.

Recommendations like these will pave the way for the formation of a full ERA-NET, but the short-term achievements of this SSA must not be ignored: simply by bringing actors together, COASTAL-ERA has already begun the task of programme coordination. As a result, Europe should expect to see an improvement in shellfish quality, better consumer confidence, and economic growth for this increasingly important food production sector.