

getting the best from the Baltic

“BONUS removes a significant obstacle to the establishment of the Baltic Sea Research Area.”

The Baltic Sea is Europe's largest internal body of water, and represents an important natural resource. Its sustainable development requires regional policies based on sound scientific knowledge. Several associations link marine scientists from the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea, but joint planning of these countries' national research programmes has never taken place. The BONUS network brings together 11 organisations involved in the funding and organisation of Baltic marine science to pool their research funding and coordinate the use of infrastructures. Sharing good practice in programme management and removing administrative barriers will pave the way for joint research programmes. New structures created by the BONUS consortium will be responsible for fully integrated programme funding and management.

Our oceans and seas have always put international co-operation to the test. Borders can be drawn on a map, but waves, currents and sea creatures go where they please. The marine environment is oblivious to the politics of territorial waters, so its protection and sustainable development will always require international agreement. Recent disputes over fishing rights and the pollution of coastlines by oil spills have highlighted the need for greater international scientific collaboration to support policy-makers and advisors. For example, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment and the European Science Foundation (ESF) have both published recommendations for a European strategy in this field of research. Marine science in the Baltic Sea would particularly benefit from a coordinated approach of this kind. Nine countries surround this 422 000 km² body of water, and eight of these are either EU Member States or will shortly join the EU. European policies for the sustainable use and development of this heavily industrialised region must be founded on solid scientific knowledge. A coherent transnational strategy is essential to ensure that research is cost-effective, of high scientific quality, and addresses the real needs of policy-makers and of the Baltic region's economy and people.

Lack of strategic planning

Scientists from countries bordering the Baltic are well acquainted with international collaboration. Since the formation of the International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea (ICES) in 1902, numerous international bodies and associations have brought like-minded marine scientists together to share their findings and knowledge. More recently, an EU-funded multidisciplinary and transnational project, BASYS, has investigated the susceptibility of the Baltic Sea ecosystem to external influences, including human activity. Other projects funded by the EU or by governmental marine science institutes have also encouraged networking in the region. Yet despite this history of co-operation between scientists, the strategic planning of national research programmes is still not coordinated between countries. None of the ongoing research projects, for instance, have included any common agreement between funding agencies – grants have been made to individual scientists exclusively by national funding bodies.

A sea change

Under the ERA-NET scheme, BONUS aims to create a forum for joint oversight of national or international research programmes through the pooling of resources and the coherent planning of projects to complement policy developments. BONUS will bring together all of the key research funding organisations. Ten bodies representing eight countries around the Baltic Sea will take part, together with one inter-



Coordination Action



“ *The international networking of scientists, managers and decision-makers has brought real benefits to the Baltic Sea region. Until now funding agencies have been missing from this interplay.* ”

Full title:

BONUS for the Baltic Sea science
– network of funding agencies

Research field:

Marine Science

Coordinator:

Finland: Academy of Finland

Partners:

- Denmark: Danish Natural Science Council
- Estonia: Estonian Science Foundation
- Germany: Forschungszentrum Jülich — Projektträger Jülich
- Latvia: Latvian Council of Science
- Lithuania: Ministry of Education and Science
- Poland: Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology
- Sweden: Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research; Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning Foundation; Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
- International: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

A further seven funding organisations are associated with BONUS as observers.

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national organisation. They include national funding councils, agencies and ministries. BONUS adopts the key principles of both the Commission and the ESF strategy documents. It aims to create conditions for joint Baltic Sea research programmes which will substantially improve the effectiveness of environmental and sustainable development policies for the entire region.

The road to fully integrated research programmes encompasses four progressive work packages:

- The first will take stock of ongoing research funding mechanisms, and the way that results are currently disseminated. BONUS is investigating how different bodies define programme objectives and priorities, evaluate proposals and execute and evaluate the research. The purpose of this exercise is to **share best practice** among the different BONUS participants. The partners also plan to **create a central internet-based resource** where researchers and funders can access information about current research, funding opportunities, databases and marine research facilities in the Baltic Sea region.

- The second work package will bring about greater co-operation and collaboration between national programmes. The partners will **analyse and remove the administrative and legal barriers** that hinder joint programme and research activity. This process will lead to a **coordinated use of research infrastructures**. In addition, the participants will identify gaps in knowledge, both in terms of basic science and its management. The integration of candidate countries into a common funding scheme will be given special attention.

- An action plan for joint activities will be produced in the third work package. This plan will direct the creation of **joint research programmes** and establish agreed procedures for the management and shared use of research facilities, and will set up a **joint postgraduate training programme**.

- The fourth package will complete the **transition to joint research funding** in the Baltic Sea. It will define management and decision-making systems for long-lasting co-operation at programme level.

BONUS represents an excellent opportunity to develop a region-wide understanding of the Baltic Sea. Of course, the currents and creatures will still move freely, but their protection will be better ensured as a result.