

n etwork to catch ocean treasures

“ *Marine sciences and technology must be developed at the European level for a variety of reasons – the scale and complexity of the problems, the fact that the ocean ignores boundaries, and that although marine socio-economic activities at sea are international, marine public policies are European.* ”

Two-thirds of the world's surface is covered by seas and oceans, which are the basis for economic activity and a major part of the global environment. Marine science and technology research is still organised largely on a national basis, even though ocean systems recognise no frontiers and there have been numerous efforts to increase international collaboration. The ERA-NET scheme, which is designed to coordinate national and regional marine RTD programmes in Europe (MarinERA), aims to integrate national research programmes in this area and get more value from budgets. The partners include most of Europe's maritime nations.

The vast resource of the oceans yields many products, from fish and salt to offshore oil and gas. It supports the major industries of shipping and tourism which need nurturing to provide economic growth while ensuring that they remain sustainable and do not damage the marine environment. Socio-economic effects, such as safety and security, are important in this working environment too.

The oceans also play a complex role in determining climate through the transport of heat over long distances and through their interaction with the atmosphere. They absorb carbon dioxide and are thus helpful in combating the greenhouse effect, while marine micro-organisms and plants have the potential to yield new drugs and diagnostic chemicals. So basic research in many overlapping disciplines is vital both to Europe's future economy and to safeguarding the ocean environment.

International collaboration

Europe recognises the value of more transnational funding for fundamental and strategic research. Some research is already being coordinated at a European scale – e.g. via ICES, the Marine Board and via the ERA-NETs BONUS and ECORD. The international membership of MarinERA is targeted at smoothing their path.

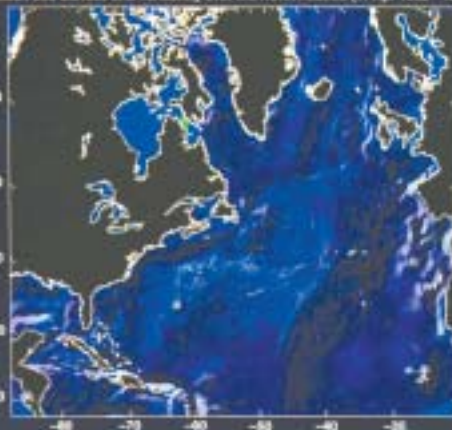
The European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructure (ESFRI) has made recommendations for integrating marine science in Europe. It has called for better use of existing research mechanisms and coordination of the research infrastructure. The Marine Board of ESF is a core member of the MarinERA consortium, along with 14 research-funding bodies of European maritime Member States. In addition, seven observers from existing marine research networks strengthen the consortium. These organisations include The European Global Ocean Observation System (EUROGOOS) focusing on oceanography, The European Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Organisations, and the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas. MarinERA has launched the coordination of national marine research programmes and will help them navigate towards greater mutual openness, so that research funding can yield the maximum benefits to all the participants.



Coordination Action MARINERA

Photo: ESA

ERS-1 Mean Sea Surface and Variability over the North Atlantic (11 Apr 1992 – 19 Sep 1992)



Full title:

Coordination of national and regional marine RTD programmes in Europe

Research field:

Marine science and technology

Coordinator:

France: Institut Français de Recherche pour l'Exploitation de la Mer

Partners:

- Finland: Academy of Finland
- France: European Science Foundation - Marine Board
- Germany: Jülich Research Centre GmbH - Projektträger
- Greece: General Secretariat for Research and Technology - Ministry of Development
- Ireland: Irish Marine Institute
- Netherlands: Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
- Norway: Research Council of Norway
- Portugal: Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation
- Spain: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia
- UK: Natural Environment Research Council
- Malta: Malta Council for Science and Technology
- Belgium: Federal Public Planning Service Science Policy and Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap
- Poland: Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology

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“ I believe MarinEra will help us consolidate our knowledge and introduce new steps such as opening of national programmes and more open access to marine infrastructures. ”

Marine themes

Marine science in Europe could be coordinated in various ways. One approach involves a grouping along regional lines, studying the processes of the Baltic or Mediterranean and their effects on local economies and societies. Another arrangement would be on thematic lines, such as analysis of deep-ocean-floor sediments, marine biodiversity, or the impact of oil pollution on marine life. A further strand covers the research infrastructure, setting up communication systems, data-processing tools and networks for sharing information. MarinEra is setting up thematic and regional modules to cover topics of interest to its participants and to help to implement its goals.

MarinEra is also standardising descriptions of programmes and the infrastructure so that comparisons are easier. A new system will document progress of national research projects from the call for proposals to final results. This will encourage comparative evaluation of projects and lead to a common evaluation system for the EU and its members.

An important resource to be better exploited

The overall mass of resources managed by MarinEra partners is as high as one-third of the global marine research resource in Europe. ERA-NET funding is being used in specific ways to increase the value of these resources. They include coordinating the network through the Secretariat and enabling members to go to meetings and workshops. The CA is developing an information resource to act as a central forum for the fragmented marine research community. This will encourage cooperation and disseminate information about new projects and calls for proposals. It also aims to reach industry and SMEs. Information services are delivered through the MarinEra portal on the EurOcean website: <http://ioc.unesco.org/eurocean> This will greatly simplify access to data on marine RTD, reducing duplication and making structures more efficient.

MarinEra is on course to secure Europe's position as a global leader of marine RTD and education, making a crucial contribution to the knowledge-based economy. It will encourage the best research and operational practice and help to retain top researchers in Europe by giving them stimulating opportunities and challenges. The supra-national character of ocean systems makes marine science an ideal subject to trial the use of an ERA-NET to open up national research programmes to a wider range of participation and to implement marine science as a transversal theme in the European Research Area.