



## MARITIME FORUM

# Third meeting between Commissioner Vella and Marine Research Institutes

Event date:  
10/07/2018 - 15:00

*observation, food from the oceans, UN decade of ocean science, moving closer to market, research priorities*



Commissioner Vella welcomed participants to this follow-up of two earlier meetings on [2 March](#) [3] and [8 July](#) [4] 2016 in order to take stock of what had been learnt since then and to look ahead to the next challenges.

### Marine observation

The European Marine Board, together with the EuroGOOS operational oceanography community are pushing a community-driven initiative to connect Europe's diverse ocean observing stakeholders together in a true European Ocean Observing System (EOOS). A conference on 21 - 23 November has attracted much interest. Already 100 participants have registered. Points raised were:

- we need to move ocean observation from being a set of separate scientific investigations to a public utility and illuminate the dark ocean in the same way that the industrial revolution brought light to the streets.
- there is already some degree of organization of physical and biogeochemical monitoring but sampling of species distribution and biodiversity is much more fragmented
- we need to distinguish between regular monitoring and observation. Understanding jellyfish abundance and distribution is hard because nobody is monitoring them.

- while the Commission's study on the benefits of ocean observation did not come up with a precise figure, it showed that the benefits exceeded the costs. NOAA had recently come to a similar conclusion. The OECD are compiling all such studies with a view to preparing a consensus view. All these will be presented at the November conference

 [presentation on ocean observation](#) [5]

## Food from the Oceans

The report on "Food from the Oceans" from the Commission's scientific advisers has given visibility and credibility to the ocean's potential contribution to the planet's food security through increased seafood production. The report concludes: "The scientific evidence unambiguously points to sustainable "culture" and "capture" at lower trophic levels (i.e. levels in the ocean food web below the carnivore levels currently mostly exploited) as the way to bring about such, an increase. The report suggests that we should significantly increase marine aquaculture production of non-carnivorous species including algae and bivalve shellfish and that we should move production "offshore". Further, that we should cautiously explore the potential of currently less-exploited mesopelagic stocks. These conclusions raise some important questions. The presentation explored the status of current EU seafood supplies, the advances made in aquaculture in Europe over the last 50 years and suggested some areas of future research.

For aquaculture:

presently 74% of the European market (by value) is wild fish. The most popular seafoods are cod, tuna and salmon, with salmon being produced through aquaculture.

- consumer preferred species will be adapted to more efficient production with little reliance on fish meal or fish oil. Considerable progress has been made in the development of aquaculture species over the last 50 years and further refinement of a limited number of profitable species is probably the future trajectory.
- the growth of the bivalve shellfish sector will be limited by consumer acceptance/demand, coupled to issues of poor water quality in some coastal waters (particularly in developing countries).
- offshore aquaculture remains challenging and biological and economic constraints (rather than engineering) are more likely to mean that we move some aquaculture into more exposed locations rather than "offshore".

With respect to capture fisheries:

- there will be better monitoring and management of fisheries using an array of new and emerging technologies which will help to make existing fisheries more sustainable - improving stock assessments, reducing bycatch and discards
- there will need to be research to understand the broader ecosystem context of exploiting lower trophic level fisheries
- there needs to be a global focus on small scale fisheries as these are the most numerous in terms of vessels and fishers but most are unregulated. New, low cost technologies open up the potential to monitor and manage this fishery to improve its sustainability and socio economic benefits.

Food waste was not covered in the "Food from the Oceans" advice but:

- 40-47% of US seafood is wasted (50% of this by the consumer, 16-32% discarded, 13-16% in distribution and retail - we do not know what that is in Europe.
- It is estimated that ~50% of all the food we produce is wasted before it is consumed by humans. It would seem likely that seafood waste is also significant and a ruthless focus on minimising waste would help to offset seafood demand.

The observation above, reinforce the need for truly holistic efforts including science, industry and

regulators to ensure that we can develop sustainable seafood supplies globally as well as for EU consumers.

 [presentation](#) [6]

## The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

Whilst sustainable development goal number 14 is specifically aimed at the ocean, the ocean can contribute to or benefit from reaching 60% of the 17 targets. Again the aim is to develop partnerships between industry, regulators, civil society and donors through a regionally driven process.

The International Oceanographic Commission, who have been appointed lead agency for the decade, sent out a call for expression of interest through a circular letter in May 2018. The EU can contribute to the planning, host and organise events, provide staff and finance and communicate about the decade. The decade of Ocean Science will be a focus for the EuroOCEAN 2019 conference. The European marine Board have proposed that this conference might be a good place to have a regional planning meeting for the European contribution to the Decade.

 [presentation](#) [7]

## Bringing research closer to the market and Horizon Europe

The Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe, the research programme for 2021-2027, will offer a broad range of instruments. As well as curiosity-driven investigations-driven by single researchers and targeted efforts to tackle societal issues such as the ocean's role in climate there will be considerable support for realising the potential of the sea and bringing innovation to the market. Flexibility to combine with other EU instruments will increase. Points raised included:

- "A plastic-free ocean" is only one research target but is exciting because of the many disciplines that can be brought to bear and the possibility to define measurable objectives and targets. But what are our other targets? Where should the ocean be in ten years?
- how can we use our new tools? DNA analysis promises to deliver not only new insights in marine biodiversity but also benefits to mankind through new medicines.
- being closer to the market does not exclude excellent science which is a requirement in many national funding programmes
- we need to bring ocean science closer to the people. Cheap technology allows citizen science by non-professionals to contribute. Horizon2020 supports two ocean literacy projects.
- the media can help (Blue Planet was BBC's most-watched programme, plastic in a beached whale's stomach shocked the Norwegian people.

The Commission urged the science community to engage fully in the discussion.

## Summary

Commissioner Vella thanked the group. We are on the same wavelength. These are all important and urgent issues but we need to act fast. Changes to Arctic ice and the Great Barrier Reef happened faster than forecast. Prevention must be our goal; not remediation

And as the planet changes, we must change too. Malta's freshwater is already largely from desalination.

We agree that getting media on-board is definitely useful. Public pressure helped with the plastic. Coverage from BBC and Sky helped prepare the way for proposals on plastic reduction in a way that did not happen with other well-meaning proposals such as kettle design. Could it also help with environmental pressures that are arguably worse such as agriculture? Can science help to make these issues more

visible?

Scientists need to become activists. They need to promote rational arguments and engage the wider community. Some non governmental bodies only follow scientific advice if it suits them.

We are working with FAO on small-scale fisheries. There will be a conference in September. Representatives of these fishermen push for exemptions from all rules but we cannot help them without better knowledge of what they are doing.

We should think about these issues and come back for further discussions in autumn.

PARTICIPANT	AFFILIATION	TITLE
Karmenu Vella	European Commission	European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Andras Inotai	Cabinet of Commissioner Vella	Member of the Cabinet
Sheila Heymans	European Marine Board	Executive Director
Kate Larkin	European Marine Board	Senior Science Officer
Jan Mees	Research Foundation Flanders and Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) Belgium	General Director
Gilles Lericolais	French Institute for the exploitation of the Sea (Ifremer), France	Director of European and International Affairs
Peter Herzig	German Marine Research Consortium (KDM) and GEOMAR, Germany	Executive Vice President
Vasileios Lykousis	Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR), Greece	Director of the Institute of Oceanography
Peter Heffernan	Marine Institute (MI), Ireland	Chief Executive
Ferdinando Boero	National Inter-University Consortium for Marine Sciences (CoNISMa), University of Salento, Italy	Professor of Zoology
Karin Kroon Boxaspen	Institute of Marine Research (IMR), Norway	Research Director
Jan Marcin Weslawski	Institute of Oceanology Polish Academy of Sciences (IOPAN), Poland	Director
Vitor Vasconcellos	Centre for Marine and Environmental Research (CIMAR), Portugal	Director
Carlos Garcia-Soto	Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) Spain	Joint RDI Director
Mark James	Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland (MASTS), UK	Operations Director
Robert Precali	Ruder Boskovic Institute (IRB), Croatia	Head of Center for Marine Research
Yves-Marie Paulet	Marine Universities of France and European Institute for Marine Studies (IUEM), France	Vice President MER de l'universite
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