

Enhancing the Role of Information Management in Marine Science and Technology as a Key Component of a European Maritime Policy

*A Contribution from EurOcean
to the Green Paper on a Future European Maritime Policy*

Present Situation

At this crucial moment, when Europe is about to launch an all-embracing maritime policy, timely and reliable information will be required on key aspects of maritime affairs, in particular regarding the implementation of the sustainability principle. In this context, the eco-system-based approach and the integrated ocean management are both essential and innovative strategies being considered in the perspective of a future European maritime policy. The implementation of these forthcoming strategies will require considerable improvements in existing data and information management systems. Furthermore the 7th Framework Programme (FP) states that "special attention will be paid to priority scientific and technological areas which cut across themes, such as marine sciences and technologies" and, in this respect, promoting information across marine themes is a way to address this requirement identified in the FP7.

The Green Paper is far-sightedly arguing the creation of a European Marine Data and Observatory Network but more attention should be given to marine information management related to research, technology and development. Indeed, while the oceanographic data centers are well identified at national level and are getting more and more articulated and coordinated at European level (e.g., through the FP6 Seadatanet project) and at international level through the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the current initiatives for collection, analysis and dissemination of marine research related information are still mostly comprised of fragmented efforts on the part of both public and private organizations, with limited harmonization and coordinated approach. Therefore, critical information is not properly accessible to and shared by the marine stakeholder community, including:

- the various science and technology sectors related to the ocean;
- the diverse actors and users of marine research;
- the different institutions concerned with marine research and its applications, at the national, regional, European and global levels.

In order to overcome this waste of information resources and opportunities, information management should be given higher consideration within the on-going public debate aiming to the preparation of a possible European Maritime Policy.

A Vision for Information on Marine Science and Technology Affairs in Europe

Addressing the requirements for information management on marine science, technology and related issues should embrace:

- facilitating the access to valuable information related to research activities and technological development on key aspects addressed by the Green Paper for a European Maritime Strategy;
- stimulating the development of quantitative indicators, including common standards, on marine science and technology and related to environment and socio-economics;
- contributing towards improved cooperation and coordination between the European organizations through sharing information;
- enhancing public outreach and education activities.

Addressing these issues is a challenging task but, today, thanks to the opportunities offered by the developments of information technology, there are no technological constraints to successfully implement the appropriate tools to tailor the information as required by the end-users.

Managing Information on Marine Science and Technology Affairs in Europe

With the objective of sharing information to help creating synergy among all the various actors and institutions involved in Ocean Affairs in Europe - at the national, regional and European levels - and building up on the experience gained by EurOcean since its creation in 2002, enhancing management of information on marine science and technology in Europe, as an operational service, would require:

- a sharing network through which owners and end-users of information may benefit from an active exchange of information, of other experiences and of know-how in the maritime regions;
- the provision of dedicated support services aiming at providing users with an array of products on key topics;
- the consultation with and the participation of all interested partners in the development and the management of information systems in order to be responsive to the societal needs and to be able to rapidly react to complex demands in an easy and accessible form.

Such a strategy should rely on two pillars:

- a dynamic, innovative and flexible network of existing European institutions working on different aspects of marine science and technology and related issues that can provide key information, knowledge and experience to the network;
- a permanent mechanism acting as a focal point and supported by the European Commission with the tasks of: i) integrating inputs; ii) providing quality control; iii) disseminating outputs through efficient tools; iv) maintaining the coherence and insuring the long term continuity of the services required by information management.

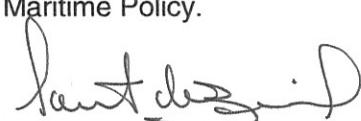
Taking into account the large diversity of the marine stakeholder community and its interrelated requirements for information, a comprehensive strategic approach to information management on Ocean Affairs through a **European Marine Information Network**, of which marine science and technology would be a key component, should be thoughtfully considered in the perspective of a European Maritime Policy.



Mário Ruivo,
President



Per Nieuwejaar
Vice-President



Laurent d'Ozouville
Executive Director