

Grand Opening for EMODnet Secretariat Office



On Wednesday 19 February 2014, the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) celebrated the opening of its Secretariat Office at the InnovOcean site in Ostend, Belgium. At the InnovOcean site, the EMODnet Secretariat is now co-located with other organisations including Flanders Marine Institute, the European Marine Board and the IODE project office for IOC/UNESCO.

More than 100 marine and maritime researchers, policy advisors, data experts and other stakeholders attended the inauguration which highlighted the importance of providing unrestricted access to marine observation data to generate critical knowledge about the seas and oceans, better manage our marine environment and support the development of a 'blue economy'.

The event marked the installation of the established EMODnet Secretariat and the onset of the second phase of EMODnet as a network of more than 120 organisations aiming to provide open access to marine data to a wide range of users including private bodies, public authorities and researchers. After years of preparatory phase, EMODnet now provides Europe with an instrument to support the marine data and information needs of initiatives such as the Integrated Maritime Policy (2007), the European Marine and Maritime Research Strategy (2008), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008) and the communication on Marine Knowledge 2020. New additions in this second phase include the establishment of EMODnet sea-basin checkpoints to analyse the observational capacities of Member States at the basin level and the newly developed EMODnet central portal (www.emodnet.eu) providing access to data, metadata and data products deriving from seven discipline-based gateways (bathymetry, geology, physics, chemistry, biology, seabed habitats and human activities).

The grand opening welcomed interventions from honoured guests representing the Flemish Government, the European Commission, the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the European Marine Board.

According to Lowri Evans, Director-General of DG Maritime Affairs fisheries (DG-Mare) of the European Commission, the EMODnet initiative, that is recovering the collected data and information as much as possible and is making them readily available, is groundbreaking. It is a fine example of how the whole is more than the sum of the (former) parts. It is an essential step towards a 'blue growth' - in Flanders/Belgium as well as broadly on the old continent - all starting from observations of Europe's seas and coasts.

The endeavours of the European Commission to establish and develop EMODnet as the gateway to marine data in Europe can count on the support of major data provider and user communities, as was reflected in the speech from Gilles Bessero, director at the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), who underlined that EMODnet has the full support of the hydrographic community as embodied by the IHO and its membership of 82 maritime States.

The international dimension of marine data acquisition, processing and management was highlighted by Dr Wendy Watson-Wright, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, who said that the sustainable exploitation of our oceans is a global challenge that cannot be restricted by borders. The continued building and operating of global observation systems will be essential to monitor these challenges, among them climate change, in order to develop adaptive measures beneficial for the global population.

The Flemish Government, through the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), supports EMODnet by hosting its secretariat and by offering technical and scientific support to construct and operate the central portal and to develop user services to facilitate and increase access and usage of the portal.

Dirk Van Melkebeke, Secretary-General of the Department Economy, Science and Innovation of the Flemish Government, described it as an important day for Flanders. He stated that he was happy and honoured that the European Commission accepted the offer of the Government of Flanders to host and support this prestigious office in Ostend and to boost, via an integrated knowledge base, the maritime economy in this and other European regions. It also confirms the intention of the Flemish Government to embed regionally the core activities of VLIZ.

Image: from left to right: Iain Shepherd (DG MARE), Phil Weaver (EMODnet Secretariat), Lowry Evans (DG MARE), Dick Schaap (EMODnet Bathymetry), Alan Stevenson (EMODnet Geology), Liesbeth Renders (EMODnet Secretariat), Dirk Van Melkebeke (EWI), Jacques Populus (EMODnet Seabed habitats), Rudy Herman (EWI), Antonio Novellino (EMODnet Physics), Alessandra Giorgetti (EMODnet Chemistry), Jan-Bart Calewaert (EMODnet Secretariat), Simon Claus (EMODnet Biology), Vicky Gunn (EMODnet Secretariat), Alessandro Pittito (EMODnet Human Activities).

