

Malta EU presidency ready to take on challenges of world's oceans

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Thought Leader

2017 is set to be Malta's year for the oceans, explains Pierre Bahurel.



Pierre Bahurel | *Photo credit: Mercator Ocean*

Malta is about to take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union at a time when, although there are more environmental, economic and societal issues concerning the ocean than ever before, the world's attitude to these questions seems to have shifted.

Until a few years ago, the oceans appeared to interest only a handful of specialists and small groups of experts dispersed around the world. Today, their immense efforts seem to have created a dynamic groundswell.

The United Nations had opened the way some time ago, and the oceans now feature on the agendas of other major global forums, such as the COP21 and COP22 climate change conferences and the last G7 in Tokyo, and the next G7 in Italy.

Meanwhile the OECD has published a fascinating and informative report entitled “The Ocean Economy in 2030”. The oceans are the subject of numerous initiatives and global conferences such as “Our Ocean”, whose next edition will take place in Malta in 2017.

The challenges raised by the oceans affect the entire planet, but the European Union has had them on its policy agenda for a long time.

The European Parliament, through its committees and intergroup, is strongly involved in ocean-related initiatives. The European Commission is actively engaged in improving international governance of the oceans and seas, to promote sustainable blue growth. It has also set up a service unlike any other in the world: The Copernicus Marine Service.

The progress that has been made since the first attempts at operational oceanography more than 20 years ago and the recent achievements of the Copernicus Marine Service, operational since May 2015 are tremendous.

Today it delivers free ocean information to more than 8000 users around the world; information that is up-to-date, scientific quality demand valuable for commercial companies and scientists, public services and NGOs, European and national policy makers.

The EU’s vision is as follows: the Copernicus Marine Service, one of six in the Copernicus programme, creates value by distributing useful ocean information like ocean forecasts and indicators for the entire world, making the EU an international leader in the field and contributing to the development of downstream ocean related services in all member states.

In the year that Malta holds the presidency of the Council, the Copernicus Marine Service is gearing up to work with Maltese experts to determine the needs of national users, in the private, public and scientific sectors, and will be contributing to an event to be held in Malta on 27 June 2017 gathering Maltese stakeholders of the blue economy.

The capabilities of the Copernicus Marine Service and its innovative services covering all the world’s oceans provide input for the developers of specialised downstream applications (offshore energy, ports, fishing, aquaculture, transport, etc.): A virtuous alliance boosting Blue Growth and Sustainable Oceans.

About the author

Pierre Bahrel is Director of Mercator Ocean, the French global ocean analysis and forecasting centre entrusted to operate the Copernicus Marine Service

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