

THE NEED FOR MARINE DATA - EUROPEAN MARINE OBSERVATION AND MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

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In planning activities on the sea – cabling, dredging, fish farming, gravel extracting, petroleum exploring, pipeline laying, renewable energy platform building – we need to know what lies underneath the waves. And we need this information quickly if the planning or licensing process is not to take too long and if we are to avoid irreversible harm to submerged landscape features or artefacts buried in the sediment. Consortia working under the European Union’s “marine knowledge 2020” initiative have contributed to this objective by creating gateways to observations held by hundreds of institutions. The data, metadata and data products are delivered to uniform standards and tagged with quality labels. The first phase of the project has been successful in delivering data products covering a selected number of European sea-basins. Challenges included persuading data holders to allow public access to low resolution bathymetry, finding a common classification for sediment data, determining distribution of chemical pollution from sparse measurements and estimating species abundance and diversity from surveys that had used different sampling methods. In 2012 work will begin on delivering complete coverage of European waters of these parameters.