

Report on MASTS PEER funding support for the development of the “SeaMonitor” project.

Colin Adams, University of Glasgow.

The project

SeaMonitor is a project proposal to the *EU Interreg IVA*; under Programme: Priority P2: *Environment*, Specific Objective SO2.2: *To develop cross-border capacity for the monitoring and management of marine protected area and species in the region.*

The project combines the expertise from nine institutions. It will be led by the Loughs Agency (a NI / ROI cross border organisation). Other partners are: the Marine Institute, the University of Glasgow, Queen’s University Belfast, the Agriculture Food and Biosciences Institute, University College Cork, Mayo Institute of Technology, University of California Davis and the Ocean Tracking network (Canada).

The total value of the project is €4.8M. **N.B. This project was successfully approved for funding on the 24th July 2018.**

The project will begin in autumn 2018 and run until 2022.

Project summary

SeaMonitor is a novel and comprehensive project focussing on a wide range of issues across the Programme Area of western Scotland and the coastal areas of northern Ireland and Ireland.

The project will facilitate the development and growth of a regional ‘blue economy’ based on its maritime resources and the alignment of regional activities with the EU’s Atlantic Strategy through the potential of e.g. developing and strengthening the growth of Marine Tourism, providing Management Plans enabling sustainable development to occur in often sensitive environments.

It will deliver models aimed at improving the understanding of management options for sensitive marine areas and species. It will deliver Management Plans specific to habitat and species of conservation interest in the marine areas bordering Ireland, Northern Ireland and west Scotland.

A Project Board will be established with a representative from each organisation and chaired by the CEO of the LA. A project team will be appointed by the Loughs Agency (LA), this will be led by a Principal Investigator who will have overall responsibility for the delivery of science and administration. They will be supported by an administrative and scientific team.

Output: Models developed to support conservation of habitats and species

SeaMonitor will deliver 5 models: 1. Seal spatial usage of the Irish east coast (Carlingford/Dundrum/Dundalk) region; 2. Common skate spatial movement N Antrim coast (including population structuring and Loch Sunart to Jura MPA); 3. Cetacean spatial usage of the area; 4. Salmonid marine migration pathway model for Foyle, R Bush and Clyde.; 5. Basking shark spatial usage of Malin/Islay area.

Output : Marine management plans for designated protected areas

The 6 Management Plans are: 1. Loch Sunart to Jura MPA for Common skate; 2. Foyle Area Marine Management Plan for Atlantic salmon; 3. Clyde area Marine Management Plan for Atlantic salmon.

Output: Establish a network of telemetry buoys for monitoring high value mobile species

A network of buoys with acoustic receivers will be extended to the north coast of the Island of Ireland and a line established between Malin Head and Islay. These will provide data to develop models and management plans e.g. common skate, salmonids, basking sharks, etc.

While the Implementation WP will be led by the LA, each of the Activities will be led by a partner with a particular area of expertise, e.g. GMIT will lead on the cetacean spatial modelling, UCC on seals, while the MI will lead on Data and Technical Support providing a lot of the baseline information for the development of the models and management plans with habitat mapping, and data handling, etc.

A Communication WP will be lead by the LA and a Communications Plan has been developed and is attached. A minimum of 3 press releases will be issued over the lifetime of the project and at least 2 newsletters/eazines will be issued annually to key stakeholders with progress updates on key findings and events. A website will be developed and will be regularly updated, various social media platforms will also be investigated as a means of publicity. All publicity and project documentation shall adhere to INTERREG guidelines with regard to logos, straplines, etc. A project launch event will be held at the start and two Knowledge Transfer conferences will be held in Period 7 and Period 18 to highlight the work and the positive benefits of the project to the programme area. SEUPB and the Accountable Departments will be invited to all SeaMonitor events with at least 3 weeks notice. A CPD course will also be undertaken to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise from our North American partners, OTN and UC Davis to those from Europe. At the end of the project, a project report will be produced which will summarise the findings and will be made widely available with some hard copy but also in pdf form.

The role of MASTS PEER funding support

MASTS PEER support was invaluable in developing the above, now successful, application. With a large number of partners, an inevitably complex budget and a very lengthy application process, there was the need for multiple meetings of all or some of the partners on multiple occasions. There were also several meetings between the applicants and Scotland Europa and between the partners and the fund managers, the Special European Union Programmes Body. MASTS funding was used to cover travel expenses to some of these meetings and to part pay for some technical support to write some aspects of the application. Without this funding it is very likely that this application would not have been possible.