Abstract

In the last fifteen years, Ireland has taken a number of significant steps towards recognition of itself as an island nation and the development of its own ocean economy.

This paper outlines the advances made by Ireland and, in particular by Ireland’s Marine Institute, since its foundation under the Marine Institute Act in 1991. It also details the contributions made by Ireland to European thinking on the marine, with particular reference to the “Galway Declaration” of 2004.

Over 70% of our planet is covered by the oceans. As well as providing the main moderating force for our climate and the largest single ecosystem on the planet, the oceans are also an enormous source of industry. In a recent study commissioned by the Marine Institute (1) the global market for maritime industries in the five years between 2005 and 2009 is estimated at around €4,363 billion. Of this, 56% will be contributed by services such as shipping, 30% from natural resources, 12% from manufacturing, and 1% from education and research.

While 70% of our planet lies beneath the waves, 50% of Europe (in terms of physical territory) is also underwater. The sea provides Europe not only with a huge economic area, but also a vast natural heritage to be protected. It is a social and cultural space, an interface between the regions, a laboratory for basic and applied research and a challenge for innovative technology development. According to one estimate (2), the European

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1 Chief Executive, Marine Institute, Ireland. The author’s PowerPoint presentation can be viewed on the accompanying CD.
maritime economy between 2005 – 2009 will be worth €1,443 billion, which is a very significant 32% of the global maritime economy.

Already, between 3-5% of European GDP is generated by maritime industries. 90% of all EU external trade and 40% of internal trade is transported by sea. The European coastline is three times longer than that of the United States and twice as long as that of Russia, while 50% of the European population live within 50km of the ocean.

In 2004 the “Galway Declaration” (2), endorsed by some 550 of Europe’s leading marine scientists, policy-makers and industry representatives at the EU EurOCEAN conference in Galway, during Ireland’s presidency of the European Union, drew attention to:

- The crucial role of the oceans in moderating climate, in the carbon cycle and, ultimately, in supporting life on earth;
- The major contribution that the maritime sector can make to the Lisbon Agenda on the environment;
- The supporting role of marine science and technology in generating the knowledge needed to fuel this economic development;
- The key role of science and technology in supporting the sustainable management of marine resources ( according to the Gothenburg Agenda (3)) and ocean governance; and
- The critical role the European Research Area / EU and Member State Marine Research Programmes play in supporting world-class excellence in marine science and technology.

In spite of all these benefits, until now ocean governance was restricted by our inability to “see” the ocean in the same way that we can readily view the terrestrial environment. However, modern technology, including underwater video and acoustic imagery has enabled us to view, map, and explore our territories below the seas, to survey the terrain in three dimensions, to create