

CSA MarineBiotech, the European Coordination and Support Action for marine biotechnology, is finishing after 18 months work to prepare the ground for a new trans-European coordination action for marine biotechnology research, development and innovation, an ERA-NET in marine biotechnology (ERA-MBT). To celebrate, CSA MarineBiotech held a final conference in Brussels, Belgium, on 11-12 March 2013, not only recording the achievements of the CSA, but also providing a forum for bringing together the interested community for updating with new knowledge and networking for future activities and partnerships.

The event was organized by CSA MarineBiotech, with the consortium partners the EMB (the European Marine Board) and VLIZ (Flanders Marine Institute) in charge of the planning. Despite snowstorms which caused massive traffic and travel disruptions, 150 delegates from industry, academic institutions, policy bodies and funding agencies attended. The EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan Quinn, addressed the conference through a video message that recognised the role of marine biotechnology in supporting the further development of the 2 trillion euros bio-economy. She counted on the conference results to feed into the research agendas of a new ERA-NET in marine biotechnology, to help unlock the potential of blue growth in a coordinated and sustainable way.

The coordinator from the Research Council of Norway and the WP3 leader from the EMB, outlined the background to the CSA MarineBiotech and the work achieved, notably the mapping of marine biotechnology activities across Europe and internationally; the establishment of the portal [www.marinebiotech.eu](http://www.marinebiotech.eu) by VLIZ, to serve as a long-term website with contact database and a Wiki knowledge system for marine biotechnology; and the bringing together of European funding agencies dedicated to moving forward on the ERA-MBT.

The keynote speaker, former Research Director of Ifremer, Joel Querellou, provided an overview of marine biotechnology opportunities and challenges, historically and for the future.

Over the day-and-a-half of the conference, in the splendid surroundings of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts, speakers and panel sessions tackled important questions for the future of coordinated research and development and their impacts on society and economy, including:

- Perspectives from the scientific community;
- Aligning and linking national research efforts with European research collaborations, to address common challenges;
- Academic-industry collaborations and lessons for the future;
- Marine Biotechnology Science Policy and Coordination, its status and challenges for Europe;
- How to move towards a coherent pan-European science policy and coordination for Marine Biotechnology Research and value creation for society;
- How to strengthen pan-European science policy and coordination for Marine Biotechnology Research and Development.

All sessions were followed by panel discussions allowing additional speakers and the audience to contribute on policy-related issues arising from the session themes.

The closing remarks and formal thanks to the organisers and attendees were given by Dermot Hurst of the Marine Institute, Ireland. He summarised the main highlights and key messages, and noted that during the conference, delegates were treated to thorough insights into the current European marine biotechnology landscape. The calibre of and contributions by speakers and panellists confirmed the excellence of scientific leadership that Europe can draw upon. More importantly though, in the context of the future development of European marine biotechnology, the conference's poster session confirmed the emergence of the next generation of scientific excellence and trans-European initiatives.

He wound up with a positive outlook: "In Europe, we have every reason to be optimistic regarding the ability of Europe's marine biotech scientific community to continue to demonstrate creativity in what they do and in their ability to deliver the kind of innovation that is expected of them. We can clearly see there is a strong connectivity between the EC-vision for marine biotechnology and the demonstrated capabilities of the marine biotechnology community. Significant progress is being achieved, though there are areas where performance can be improved upon. We should be confident that the ERA-NET and any follow-on activity will continue to allow marine biotechnology innovations to be deployed for the betterment of Europe's citizens."

The conference brought together decision makers from the academic, industry and policy sectors in addition to scientists and industrial stakeholders. It provided a forum that fostered productive discussions and generated insights into scientific, economic and societal impacts of marine biotechnology. In this respect, the conference, just like the other CSA stakeholder events, has shaped a future ERA-NET that will support the creation and translation of innovative ideas into high-impact benefits.

The CSA MarineBiotech has fulfilled all its objectives and achieved the main target: the establishment of funding agencies dedicated to develop a future ERA-NET. From a core of 3 funding agencies and a similar number of nominated institutions, the CSA brought together a consortium of 20 eligible funding agencies from 14 countries to respond to the FP7 call published in July 2012. In addition, an important Stakeholder Group has been created, including committed industry, academic and policy representatives, who will form the advisors for the future ERA-NET. The CSA MarineBiotech's communication activities have contributed significantly to raising the profile of marine biotechnology in Europe as a contributor to KBBE and the Grand Challenges. For further information on the CSA MarineBiotech and marine biotechnology, including summaries of strategies and programmes in Europe and internationally, and to add your own contact information to the MarineBiotech registers, visit [www.marinebiotech.eu](http://www.marinebiotech.eu). The programme, presentations, pictures, abstract book and key highlights of the conference are available online on [www.marinebiotech.eu/conference](http://www.marinebiotech.eu/conference).

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