

FLANDERS BUILDS NEW RESEARCH VESSEL 'SIMON STEVIN'

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On 10 December 2007 Minister-President Kris Peeters and Minister Patricia Ceysens disclosed the plans of the Flemish Government to build a new research vessel to replace the current vessel RV Zeeleeuw. The Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) will be responsible for the scientific programme and management of the research equipment. DAB Vloot (MDK) will ensure the good operation of the new coastal vessel. The ship was named 'Simon Stevin' after a Flemish intellectual jack-of-all-trades (°1548, Bruges) with numerous maritime and hydraulic achievements.

By constructing this new research vessel Flanders not only undertakes to provide a successor for the oceanographic vessel RV Zeeleeuw but also wants to stress that it continues to invest in scientific and technological innovations as an engine for a sustainable society.

Since 2001 marine researchers have been able to board the Zeeleeuw to carry out scientific samplings in the North Sea and the Scheldt Estuary. Constructed in 1977, the Zeeleeuw was converted from a pilot vessel into a research vessel for this purpose in 2000. In recent years it has become clear how this investment has resulted in better and more multidisciplinary marine scientific top research in our region and to training opportunities for marine scientists.

A recent poll and feasibility study among the over 500 marine scientists in Flanders confirmed that there is a great need for logistic support of their research. Within this context priority needs to be given to a modern and well-equipped vessel with a shallow draught and swift access to the shallow coastal waters of the southern bight of the North Sea and the adjacent river estuaries.

By building this new vessel Minister Patricia Ceysens wants to continue along the path of innovation in the field of research and technology. The new ship will meet the established need to spend time on board within the scope of research of monitoring and will keep Flemish scientists in the European lead. The new research vessel will furthermore be able to actively contribute to international marine management obligations and to substantiating the Flemish policy on fishing and port accessibility. The ship will also be used for training and educational purposes and as a test platform for new maritime technologies.

In its capacity as multifunctional shipowner on behalf of the Flemish Government the DAB Vloot (Agency for Maritime and Coastal Services) will use its nautical and technical expertise to ensure good operation of the vessel. The Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) will be responsible for the scientific programme of the voyages and the management of the research equipment. As a result of this major step in the support of marine scientific

research the VLIZ will be able to fulfil its role as a facilitator of marine scientific knowledge development and as a marine focal point for the international community even better in the future.

Minister Ceysens also announced the purchase of additional land-based facilities. These facilities are located within walking distance of the VLIZ and are part of the InnovOcean site, the central site for oceanographic initiatives on the east bank in Ostend. Minister-President Peeters has undertaken to ensure that the vessel is manned and maintained by DAB Vloot and leaves port daily for research purposes.

Further information on <http://www.vliz.be/EN/INTRO&id=269>