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Progress towards a European portal on marine species observations

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Two years ago, the EU Commission initiated the development of a European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet), which is one of the steps in Europe’s integrated maritime policy action plan. The biology part is currently being worked out by a consortium of European government agencies and research institutions and one US partner, and is spearheaded by the Flanders Marine Institute, who is also host of the European Ocean Biogeographic Information System (EurOBIS) and the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS).

The biology portal (<http://bio.emodnet.eu/portal>) already contains over 14 million species observations from 281 datasets (from small-scale research projects to long-term monitoring campaigns). According to our inventory, this represents 60% of existing datasets. Not less than 21 thousand species are recorded. According to the European Register of Marine Species (ERMS), this represents 63% of our marine biodiversity. Some groups (e.g. fish, birds ...) and some parts (e.g. English Channel, North Sea...) are better covered than others.

The system is a network of distributed data systems, is OGC-compliant, contains standardized data and integrates data with different levels of accessibility. The portal includes different functionalities, such as an online data catalogue, a data querying service, a taxonomic ontology, a data mapping interface, a data downloading service, a helpdesk and feedback function. Both observation and monitoring data and data products can be integrated, visualized and redistributed through the portal.

This system will also provide essential information on descriptors for Good Environmental Status (GES), currently under development by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.