

INFOMAR - Ireland's National Seabed Mapping Programme: An Evolving Project

Fergal McGrath
Ireland (fergal.mcgrath@marine.ie)

INFOMAR is Ireland's national seabed mapping programme and is a key action in the national integrated marine plan, Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth. It comprises a multi-platform approach to delivering marine integrated mapping in 2 phases, over a projected 20 year timeline (2006-2026). The programme has three work strands; Data Acquisition, Data Exchange and Integration, and Value Added Exploitation.

The Data Acquisition strand includes collection of hydrographic, oceanographic, geological, habitat and heritage datasets that will underpin future sustainable development and management of Ireland's marine resource.

INFOMAR outputs are delivered through the Data Exchange and Integration strand. Uses of these outputs are wide ranging and multipurpose, from management plans for fisheries, aquaculture and coastal protection works, to environmental impact assessments, ocean renewable development and integrated coastal zone management. There is an increased emphasis on transfer of knowledge across the science-society interface within the project. This has required development of different strategies to facilitate optimum implementation and impact.

In order to address the evolution and diversification of maritime user requirements, the programme has realigned and developed outputs and new products, in part, through an innovative research funding initiative. Development is also fostered through the Value Added Exploitation strand. INFOMAR project management has evolved to incorporate 'best practice' through involvement with large EU funded projects. Involvement in these international projects has allowed a transfer of knowledge between partners in different jurisdictions and required adoption of alternative project management methods.

INFOMAR outputs and products serve to underpin delivery of Ireland's statutory obligations and enhance compliance with EU and national legislation. This is achieved through co-operation with the agencies responsible for supporting Ireland's international obligations and for the implementation of marine spatial planning. Co-operation with agencies in other jurisdictions is increasingly required, especially in discharge of statutory obligations in an EU context.

A strategic national seabed mapping programme such as INFOMAR, provides a critical baseline dataset which underpins development of the marine economy, and improves our understanding of the response of marine systems to pressures, and the effect of cumulative impacts.

This paper will focus on the evolution and scope of INFOMAR, and look at examples of how management within the project has involved, specifically management of the data exchange and value added exploitation strands. It will look at the processes implemented by INFOMAR in partnering with EU partners in large scale mapping projects and assess the transferability of these. It is hoped that the project management methodologies used to implement the broadening scope of INFOMAR will serve as an output of the project.