

## Malta's maritime resources



An oil rig near Filfla. The European Commission's Blue Growth initiative must contend with sustainability issues in fragile coastal and marine ecosystems.

The organisation of the sixth European Maritime Day (EMD) in Malta last week drew some welcome limelight on Malta's maritime credentials, which are so often discarded, despite the archipelago's firmly anchored maritime ethos.

For instance, Malta's territorial waters are 14 times bigger than its land area, while the island's 25-nautical-mile Fisheries Management Zone is almost 40 times the same land area. According to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, Malta's coastal zone includes almost 20 per cent of the island's surface area, with the archipelago's total coastline extending for 273 kilometres. This is more than half the length of the coastline of Poland, which in turn is roughly 1,000 times the size of the Maltese archipelago.

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According to the Net.Mari.Med project, the marine and maritime sectors are thought to contribute to 14.7 per cent of the local GDP, which figure is projected to increase to 18 per cent by 2039. Aquaculture has an annual turnover of €128 million, constituting 4.6 per cent of the islands' exports and one per cent and 0.5 per cent of the local GDP and employment, respectively.

Almost 25 per cent of the local workforce (almost 40,000 people) are employed in the coastal tourism, water sports, shipping and fisheries sectors. Over 1,500 merchant ships fly the Maltese flag, with the Maltese register ranking as one of the largest in Europe and in the world. The combined area of the six local bunkering areas extends over 1.5 per cent of the islands' territorial waters, which is testimony to the sector's economic importance.

The EMD in Malta also showcased Blue Growth, which the European Commission is promoting as a possible way of assisting ailing European economies, especially along the continent's southern shores. For instance, an estimated 5.4 million Europeans work in established and in emerging maritime sectors through the implementation of Blue Growth policies, and this figure could swell to seven million by 2020.

According to EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki, "Europe's Blue Economy can mean growth, employment opportunities and competitiveness. Through Blue Growth, we are unlocking the wealth that exists in the coastal and marine environment." Under the Blue Growth drive, maritime sectors identified as the most promising in terms of future

growth include ocean renewable energy, aquaculture, coastal and cruise tourism, marine mineral resources and blue biotechnology.

For instance, offshore wind power generation is expanding rapidly, at least in the North and Baltic Seas, and could meet four per cent of Europe's energy demand by 2020, and 14 per cent by 2030, swelling employment figures for the sector from the current 35,000 to 170,000 in 2020 and to 300,000 in 2030.

Tourism across the EU is the single largest maritime economic sector, employing an estimated 2.5 million people, or 1.1 per cent of the total EU workforce. Cruise tourism has an annual turnover of €14.5 billion, generating nearly 150,000 jobs. In 2010, 5.2 million passengers embarked in Europe. Almost 90 per cent of the EU external freight trade is seaborne, with 3.7 billion tons of freight being transported by sea internally within the EU.

Sustainability should be entrenched as a cornerstone of the projected growth in coastal and maritime industries. As Damanaki underscored in her opening speech, 60 per cent of all Europeans choose to spend their holidays near the sea – but 70 per cent of these tourists take their holidays in summer, thereby exacerbating the implications of seasonality, which is especially felt in the Mediterranean.

Despite the economic importance of coastal tourism, an estimated 50 per cent of all marine litter in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas originates from tourism. Despite the ever-growing maritime transport sector, the distribution of activity within this sector among the various ports is uneven. For instance, about 20 per cent of the gross weight of goods transported via EU ports passed through just three ports – Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg. So it is no surprise that the Commission has identified 319 different EU ports, including four Maltese ones, as possible beneficiaries of funds aimed to upgrade port operations so as to relieve part of the burden and congestion from Europe's three busiest ports.

The Ballast Water Management Convention, steered through by the International Maritime Organisation, will come into force 12 months after the date on which at least 30 states with combined merchant fleets of not less than 35 per cent of the world's merchant shipping have signed it without reservation – up until April the figure of endorsement stood at around 29 per cent.

When it comes into force the convention will oblige more than 60,000 vessels worldwide to install ballast water treatment systems on board using either filtration, UV, ozonation or electrochlorination, since ballast water is a major avenue for the introduction of non-indigenous marine species. There are around 90 suppliers of such systems worldwide.

EU citizens consume an increasing quantity of seafood each year (currently at around 22.1kg per person), and the fisheries sector supports around 350,000 jobs around Europe. But the percentage of fish stocks in the Mediterranean considered to be beyond 'safe biological limits' ranges between 44 per cent and 78 per cent, and the total number of fishing vessels around Europe has fallen from around 90,000 in 2002 to less than 86,000 in 2009.

The themes of the various workshops held on the second day of the EMD were very interesting and topical. For instance, one workshop explored the prospects of striking a balance between Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the boating industry, especially yacht marinas, in the Mediterranean. The seemingly daunting theme brought together biologists advocating further expansion of existing MPA networks and yacht marina operators.

An interesting statistic which emerged from the workshop was that 48 million EU citizens enjoy water sports – of these, 32 million own a boat, of which only 6.3 million are actually berthed. There are about 4,000 marinas around Europe, which constitute a €13 billion industry.

Other workshops focused on: the promotion of marine tourism in Europe through the sustainable exploitation of maritime and coastal heritage; different strategies for the removal of marine litter from Europe's four regional seas; how to deal with oil pollution in Europe's coastal areas; the promotion of sustainable shipping, and on how to harness natural capital to deliver blue growth.

The keynote speeches and workshop presentations delivered during the EMD may be downloaded from [http://ec.europa.eu/maritime\\_affairs/maritimeday/conference/programme\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/maritime_affairs/maritimeday/conference/programme_en.htm).

The seventh EMD will be commemorated in Bremen, Germany, on May 20, 2014.

The intricate juxtaposition of different marine and maritime issues will be addressed in a multi-disciplinary full-time oceanographic Masters course (Masters in Applied Oceanography) which will be offered by the International Ocean Institute-Malta Operational Centre at the University of Malta as from next October.

Those interested to apply should visit [www.capemalta.net/msc/applied\\_oceanography](http://www.capemalta.net/msc/applied_oceanography)) as well as [www.facebook.com/uom.ioimoc](http://www.facebook.com/uom.ioimoc).

This course is eligible for a Master It grant, applications for which close on June 14.

[www.alandeidun.eu](http://www.alandeidun.eu)