

## **€4million project uses cutting edge technology to enhance the habitats of key fish species**

Monday 08 March 2021

A cross-Channel partnership will use innovative underwater acoustic tracking technology to identify the environmental conditions a range of important marine species need in order to thrive.

The €4million FISH INTEL project, supported by €2.8million from the European Regional Development Fund via the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, will focus on a series of sites along the coastlines of southern England, northern France and Belgium.

Through a combination of fish tracking and underwater video surveys, the project will establish a comprehensive picture of fish movements and the habitats individual species prefer.

It will also contribute to a growing amount of data assessing the impact of fishing, climate change and other human activities – such as the development of offshore renewable energy sites and offshore mariculture – on the Channel/Manche region.

The FISH INTEL project involves research organisations across the UK, France and Belgium who will work directly with fishers, regulators and industry representatives in the three countries.

Across seven sites, the project will monitor marine species including European bass, pollack, crawfish and bluefin tuna, which are considered commercially important for the region.

The resulting data about their movements, and the habitats they occupy, will then be shared with other key stakeholders, enforcement bodies and policy makers.

Ultimately, it is hoped the research will enable authorities across the region to implement Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) programmes with the aim of enhancing the condition and water quality in these habitats, as well as enabling activities – such as fishing, civil engineering projects and extract industries – to function in a sustainable way.

It is also designed to bring about greater collaboration and communication between a range of different partners with a common interest in the Channel/Manche region.

Dr Emma Sheehan, Associate Professor of Marine Ecology at the University of Plymouth, is the project's Principal Investigator. She has previously coordinated a number of projects using cutting edge technology to advance conservation policies that benefit both the fishing industry and the environment.

She said: *“There are increasing demands and stresses being placed on the marine environment. And over the coming years, the impact of factors such as human activity and climate change has the potential to grow exponentially. This is an exciting and far-reaching project and all the partners have a*

*shared aim to protect the way of life in our coastal habitats and communities. But if we are to develop solutions which preserve our coasts, and the species that rely on them, we first need to understand which habitats we are trying to protect.”*

Carolyn Reid, Programme Manager, Interreg France (Channel) England programme, said: *“The Channel area is home to many fishery-dependent communities, with significant importance for local economies and employment. We were impressed by the ambition of FISH INTEL in using innovative new technology and bringing together a wide range of cross-border stakeholders, in order to improve the sustainable management of marine resources. As a result, the project is expected to significantly enhance the ecological status of our coastal waters while ensuring they remain commercially sustainable.”*

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

The FISH INTEL project has a total budget of €4m, of which €2.8m is funded by the European Regional Development Fund via the Interreg France (Channel) England Programme.

The partner organisations involved in the project are:

- UK: University of Plymouth; University of Exeter; Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS); Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA); Marine Conservation Society.
- France: Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer); France Energies Marines; Université de Bretagne Occidentale; Comité départemental des Pêches et des élevages marins du Finistère; Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux/Sept Iles; Comité régional des pêches maritimes et des élevages marins de Normandie.
- Belgium: Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee (VLIZ).

For more information about this news release, contact University of Plymouth Media & Communications Officer Alan Williams on 01752 588004 or email [alan.williams@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:alan.williams@plymouth.ac.uk).

### **About the University of Plymouth**

The University of Plymouth is renowned for high quality, internationally-leading education, research and innovation.

With a mission to Advance Knowledge and Transform Lives, Plymouth is a \*top 50 research university with clusters of world class research across a wide range of disciplines including marine science and engineering, medicine, cybersecurity and psychology. A three-time winner of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education, most recently in 2020 in respect of its pioneering research on microplastics pollution in the oceans and its impact on the environment and changing behaviour, the University continues to grow in stature and reputation.

It has a strong track record for teaching and learning excellence, and has one of the highest numbers of National Teaching Fellows of any UK university. With over 19,000 students, and a further 9,500 studying for a Plymouth degree at partner institutions in the UK and around the world, and over 135,000 alumni pursuing their chosen careers globally, it has a growing global presence.

<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk>

\* Research Fortnight Research Power League Table 2014.

### **About the Interreg FCE program**

Interreg France (Channel) England (FCE) is an EU programme set up to foster economic development in the south of the UK and north of France by funding innovative projects which have a sustainable and economic benefit.

It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies.

More information: [www.channelmanche.com](http://www.channelmanche.com)