

PRESS RELEASE

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## REGIONAL MARINE RESEARCH PROJECT STAYS ON TRACK DESPITE PANDEMIC

Important research that will help advance the management of our seas around Ireland, Western Scotland and Northern Ireland has not totally ceased during the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU INTERREG VA-funded SeaMonitor project, which is led by the Loughs Agency and supported by another eight leading marine research institutions, was able to deploy some of its innovative species tracking technology to better understand and protect vulnerable marine life in our oceans.

Since April, scientists from across the partnership have managed to safely tag and release over 250 fish from 5 rivers in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The technology, called acoustic telemetry, involves deploying a series of listening stations from Malin Head, Ireland to the island of Islay in Scotland that will record transmissions from a variety of marine species tagged by the project's scientists. The data, which is due to be downloaded from the receivers in the autumn, will be used to support the conservation of a variety of vulnerable species such as salmon, basking sharks, skate, dolphins, whales and seals.

Loughs Agency Designated Officer, Sharon McMahon, explained: **“Loughs Agency are proud to be leading the way alongside expert colleagues to deliver such significant and innovative marine research infrastructure that will ultimately help protect some of our most important and vulnerable marine species. The Agency’s team together with project partners are continuing to work hard to ensure project objectives are delivered during these unprecedented times, while maintaining the appropriate social distancing and health and safety protocols for field work.”**

Funding for the SeaMonitor project has been provided under the environment objective of the European Union’s INTERREG VA Programme, which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), to the tune of €4.7m. Match-funding for this project has been provided by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in Ireland.

Welcoming the deployment Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body, said: **“I’m delighted to see such significant achievements for the Sea Monitor project given the significant challenges faced by all involved. This is a much-needed step forward for the conservation of a number of vulnerable species within our shared oceans. It only serves to highlight the benefits that are created through strong, mutually beneficial cross-border partnerships in the management of marine protected areas and species. Well done to all involved for advancing our understanding of our seas,”** she continued.



For more information about the project visit: [www.loughs-agency.org/seamonitor](http://www.loughs-agency.org/seamonitor) or follow the project on Twitter (@SeaMonitor1)

All media enquiries to Loughs Agency +44 (0) 28 7134 2100.

The SeaMonitor Partnership

### **1. Loughs Agency (Lead Partner)**

An agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC), established as one of the cross-border bodies under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between the UK and Ireland. The Agency aims to provide sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits through the effective conservation, management, promotion and development of the fisheries and marine resources of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. In its role as lead partner the Agency will co-ordinate the delivery of the five species models and the three management plans. The Agency will also lead in the salmon fieldwork and research for the River and Lough Foyle area. [www.loughs-agency.org](http://www.loughs-agency.org)

### **2. Marine Institute**

The Marine Institute is the Irish national agency for marine research, technology, development and innovation, promoting sustainable development of marine resources. The Institute's main role in SeaMonitor is to provide technical support for the deployment and maintenance of acoustic receivers and other monitoring equipment, data acquisition and data analyses. The Marine Institute will contribute towards the objective of strengthening current information and filling in crucial information gaps on specific areas and habitats of interest across jurisdictions and identify the relative importance of these habitats at the different stages of migration of highly mobile marine species. [www.marine.ie](http://www.marine.ie)

### **3. Queens University Belfast**

Queen's University Belfast is one of the leading universities in the UK and Ireland and is a member of the Russell Group of UK research intensive universities. The main role of Queen's University Belfast in SeaMonitor will be to lead in the fieldwork and research of basking shark and flapper skate in the seas off Ireland, Western Scotland and Northern Ireland. [www.qub.ac.uk](http://www.qub.ac.uk)

### **4. Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)**

AFBI carries out high technology R&D, statutory, analytical & diagnostic testing and consultancy work for government and commercial companies globally. Fisheries and Aquatic

Ecosystems Branch provides research, monitoring and technology transfer in support of evidence-based sustainable management of freshwater fisheries and marine resources in Northern Ireland. AFBI is a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. AFBI's main role in SeaMonitor will be to lead on the salmon fieldwork and research in the River Bush area of Northern Ireland.

[www.afbni.gov.uk](http://www.afbni.gov.uk)

## **5. University of Glasgow**

Founded in 1451, the University of Glasgow is the fourth oldest university in the English-speaking world and is a member of the prestigious Russell Group of leading UK research universities. As the SeaMonitor's only Scottish partner, the University's role in SeaMonitor is to provide a lead role in the salmon research elements in the River Clyde area of Western Scotland. [www.gla.ac.uk](http://www.gla.ac.uk)

## **6. University College Cork**

University College Cork is a constituent university of the National University of Ireland and is located in the city of Cork. UCC's main role in SeaMonitor is to provide a lead role in the seal fieldwork and research elements. [www.ucc.ie](http://www.ucc.ie)

## **7. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology**

Founded in 1972 as the Regional Technical College in Galway, the Institute has expanded to five locations in the west of Ireland. The Marine and Freshwater Research Centre (MFRC) at the Institute is a dynamic group working to enhance the management of marine and freshwater ecosystems worldwide. As part of the SeaMonitor project the Institute will carry out acoustic monitoring for cetaceans [www.gmit.ie](http://www.gmit.ie)

## **8. Ocean Tracking Network – Dalhousie University**

OTN's mission is to inform the sustainable management and stewardship of aquatic animals by providing knowledge on their movements, habitats and survival in the face of changing global environments. As part of the SeaMonitor Project the OTN are providing invaluable technical advice, equipment and support in setting up and testing the array.

[www.oceantrackingnetwork.org](http://www.oceantrackingnetwork.org)

## **9. University of California Davis**

UC Davis is a public institution, land-grant university and pioneer in interdisciplinary problem-solving. Its four colleges, five professional schools, more than 100 academic majors and 86 graduate programs make it the most comprehensive of all the University of California campuses. UC Davis is providing invaluable technical advice, equipment and research assistance in setting up and testing the array. [www.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ucdavis.edu)



For more information on the SeaMonitor project please visit [www.loughs-agency.org/seamonitor](http://www.loughs-agency.org/seamonitor)

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Match-funding for the project has been provided by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in Ireland.

### **Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)**

The SEUPB is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for manage two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.

The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.

The INTERREG VA Programme has a value of €283 million and aims to address he economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. For more information on the SEUPB, please visit [www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)