

PRESS RELEASE

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CANADIAN FIELD TEAM HELPS PUT SEAMONITOR PROJECT AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Field personnel from the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN) based at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada, are currently in the North West working with the team servicing critical animal tracking infrastructure in support of the EU INTERREG VA-funded SeaMonitor project.

Led by the Loughs Agency and supported by eight leading marine research institutions, SeaMonitor is delivering Europe's largest fish monitoring array with the deployment of large-scale technology to track the movements of some of the ocean's most vulnerable species including Atlantic salmon, flapper skate, basking sharks, seals and cetaceans. Data collected by researchers will be used to help inform marine policy and management frameworks, and support conservation measures.

OTN field personnel, Cassandra Hartery and Caitlin Bate, have been carrying out expert field work co-ordinated alongside Diego del Villar, Senior Scientific Officer for the SeaMonitor project at Loughs Agency, using large-scale acoustic telemetry equipment.

“OTN has once again come up trumps for the Agency and the SeaMonitor project by lending their expertise to help our team with the retrieval and redeployment of Europe's largest array. The ocean is a massive, dynamic and challenging environment to work in,” said Loughs Agency CEO, Sharon McMahon **“Our priority is to get the equipment safely out of the water and I am delighted at the excellent progress to deliver such significant and innovative marine research data that will ultimately help protect some of our most important and vulnerable marine species.”**

“The Agency's specialist team together with project partners are continuing to work hard to ensure project objectives are delivered whilst following COVID-19 protocols and the amazing work undertaken recently puts us well ahead of schedule.”

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.

Dr Fred Whoriskey, OTN Executive Director commented: “OTN is pleased to provide field support and tracking infrastructure to SeaMonitor, which is underpinning the conservation of Europe’s valued marine animals during this challenging and unprecedented time.”

Key support and expertise was also provided by the NI Department of Environment Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DEARA) whose vessel, The Queen of Ulster, was used to take the project scientists out for the retrievals last week. Other vital field work was carried out at Loughs Agency headquarters in Derry and in Lough Foyle.



Sharon McMahon, Loughs Agency CEO, pictured (right) at the Agency's headquarters in Derry~Londonderry with Cassandra Hartery and Caitlin Bate, field personnel from the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN) based at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Diego del Villar, Senior Scientific Officer for the SeaMonitor project at Loughs Agency. Included (left) is Ross McGill, Principal Project Officer for the EU INTERREG VA-funded SeaMonitor project.

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

All media enquiries to Gray's Communications. Email:
info@grayscommunications.com

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

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

3. Queen's 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. For more information on the SEUPB, please visit www.seupb.eu