



## Biggest ever assessment of Atlantic deep-sea ecosystems gets underway

**Press release:** June 2016

The European Commission's Horizon 2020 funding programme is supporting the largest and most ambitious assessment of deep-sea Atlantic ecosystems ever undertaken through the €9 million **ATLAS** (A trans-Atlantic assessment and deep-sea ecosystem-based spatial management plan for Europe) project, which kicked-off on 13-15 June 2016 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The launch of **ATLAS** marks the beginning of an exciting series of expeditions involving at least 25 research cruises and hundreds of scientists from 10 European countries, the USA and Canada, working collaboratively to explore the depths of the Atlantic Ocean over the next four years.

**ATLAS** Project Coordinator Professor J. Murray Roberts, from Heriot-Watt University, said: "The north Atlantic was the birthplace of deep-sea biology and the cradle of oceanography. It's the place we should know best, but it's only over the last 20 years that we've uncovered just how varied and vulnerable the Atlantic's deep-sea habitats really are."

**ATLAS** will strive to improve our understanding of the complexity of deep-sea ecosystems and to predict future shifts and vulnerabilities of these ecosystems and their associated species, including those that are new to science. To do this requires a multi-disciplinary team of scientists and an integrated approach to tackling the problem. Alongside traditional approaches, **ATLAS** scientists will explore modern molecular techniques, such as environmental DNA (eDNA) sequencing, to search water and sediment samples for known and undiscovered deep-sea species.

As well as carrying out pioneering research and discovery, a major goal of **ATLAS** is to develop a scientific knowledge base that can inform the development of appropriate international policies to ensure deep-sea Atlantic resources are managed effectively. This will contribute to the European Commission's long-term "Blue Growth" strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole. Seas and oceans are drivers for the European economy and have great potential for innovation and growth. The "blue" economy represents roughly 5.4 million jobs and generates a gross added value of almost €500 billion a year for Europe.

**ATLAS** also intends to carry out outreach activities to raise awareness of the importance and vulnerability of the Atlantic ecosystem and the impact humans are having on the ocean environment. This will contribute to a major international effort for "Ocean Literacy" to make all European citizens aware of the importance of the oceans on everyday life on Earth and what actions they can take to help protect them. Activities will include the development of deep sea education material, a travelling road show and a new interactive exhibition on the ocean at Dynamic Earth, a science centre in Edinburgh which receives over 220,000 visitors per year.

**ATLAS** is already catching the media and public's imagination and was covered on BBC One Breakfast TV on 17 June 2016. You can watch this news report at:  
[http://www.bbc.com/news/video\\_and\\_audio/headlines/36532758](http://www.bbc.com/news/video_and_audio/headlines/36532758)

For more information, please visit: [www.eu-atlas.org](http://www.eu-atlas.org). Twitter: [@atlas\\_eu](https://twitter.com/atlas_eu)

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**Caption:** *Members of the ATLAS consortium at the project's kick-off meeting in Edinburgh in June 2016*

**Notes for Editors**

**ATLAS** is a research and innovation action funded under the EU's new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, grant No. 678760. The project will run for four years from 2016 to 2020, with a total budget of €9.1 million.

The 25 strong multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary **ATLAS** consortium represents leading organisations in their respective fields of work. It is comprised of 12 universities, four national research institutes, five small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and four government agencies and spans across 10 European countries, the USA and Canada. The project is coordinated by Heriot-Watt University in the UK. AquaTT is the project dissemination partner.