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Thank you for your joint letter of 26 January 2018 calling for further strengthening the role of marine/ocean science and research to addressing the multiple challenges the planet faces in the decades to come. I fully agree that education and science can make a significant contribution to reversing the current dramatic trends resulting from unsustainable environmental pressures.

In your letter you highlight the importance of further integrating scientific knowledge through multidisciplinary approaches to marine research. Your views are consistent with the European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research¹ and with our objective of bridging the gap between science and technology, between scientific disciplines, including terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and industrial sectors. By all means our shared goal is to promote multidisciplinary and multisectoral research and innovation. On a general note, although we have seen significant progress in this direction, especially under Horizon 2020, we also recognise the need to go a step further on knowledge & research integration under the next Framework Programme.

Let me highlight some ongoing relevant developments on knowledge & research integration and the promotion of ocean literacy at EU level. The COST action network on ocean governance represents a good example of transdisciplinary integration of ocean science and research. Last year a call for proposals aimed at accelerating the development of the blue

¹ COM(2008)534 final.

economy in the Mediterranean through closer cooperation between public and private maritime stakeholders was launched². In relation to improving ocean literacy several initiatives are underway including (i) a pilot project to boost ocean literacy in Europe, comprising actions such as the creation of a European coalition for the seas and oceans (to be launched soon), (ii) targeted publications (2018) on best practices on ocean literacy, industry-education cooperation and lifelong learning and mobility and (iii) a call for proposals (2018) to boost cooperation between industry and education by looking at innovative practices such as hybrid teaching and pooling and sharing of resources. Moreover, the Commission is already mobilising efforts to ensure meaningful contribution to the preparatory process leading to the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) proclaimed by the UN.

We are well aware of the importance of further consolidating the European marine research infrastructure through enhanced transnational cooperation on ocean observation and data collection, which could possibly lead to an integrated European Ocean Observing System. A conference on this issue, involving all relevant stakeholders and experts, is planned to take place in Brussels on 21-23 November 2018.

I fully agree with the need to focus on sustainable approaches to harvesting more food from the oceans. Having this in mind I specifically asked the Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) to look into this important issue in relation to which you have made a substantial contribution through the SAPEA consortium. The SAM recommendations of November 2017 point to, *inter alia*, the need to fill in knowledge gaps allowing informed decisions on the sustainable exploitation of this largely unexploited biomass. In the same context mariculture is seen as the most promising seafood production sector. I am confident that we are making significant progress in improving our knowledge of both lower trophic organisms and ecologically efficient aquaculture. Take for example the topics 'Sustainable harvesting of marine biological resources' and 'Sustainable European aquaculture 4.0: nutrition and breeding' under the Blue Growth Call of the work programme 2018-2020 under Societal Challenge 2 of Horizon 2020. Furthermore, aquaculture research & innovation is also advancing in three important fronts: aquaponics, integrated multitrophic aquaculture and recirculating aquaculture systems.

Let me reassure you that overall we agree with your views on deepening our scientific knowledge of the seas and oceans. The Commission counts on your support to help shaping and strengthening marine science.

Yours sincerely,



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² <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/sustainable-blue-economy>