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Press release: Marine litter and deep sea mining featured as high priorities at the G7 Science Ministers meeting

Johanna Wanka, German Minister of Education and Research welcomed the Ministers from the G7 countries in Berlin to further discuss common priorities.

The four priorities which were being discussed are: poverty-related infectious diseases, clean energy, research infrastructure and the future of the seas. With regards to the latter the G7 countries are specifically discussing marine litter and the potential impact of deep-sea mining. The ministers agreed upon a joint research approach towards reducing the growing amounts of plastic litter in the oceans. The Ministers furthermore agreed to draw national public attention to the problem of plastic litter and to launch joint education programmes. They committed to continue discussions and develop a proposal for international cooperation amongst the G7 ahead of the next science Ministers meeting in Japan 2016.

The meeting follows after the summit of the heads of state and government of the G7 countries in June. The Leader's Declaration of this Summit acknowledged the global risks posed by marine litter, particularly plastics, to marine and coastal life, ecosystems and potentially human health.

The G7 also took note of the growing interest in deep-sea mining beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. The statement calls on the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to involve relevant stakeholders and develop a clear, effective and transparent code for sustainable deep-sea mining. The participants emphasise a commitment to the precautionary approach to these activities, supporting legislation with environmental impact assessments and scientific research.

Both issues are high priorities within JPI Oceans which is currently conducting two separate Pilot Actions in these areas. The first, Ecological Aspects of Microplastics, has recently launched a €7.5 million call for proposals to increase the knowledge about microplastics in the marine environment organised by Project Management Jülich (PtJ) in Germany.

Based on the evaluations by an expert panel, the ten member countries selected four proposals for funding from December 2015 subject to completion of national arrangements and conclusion of grant

agreements:

- **BASEMAN** - Defining the baselines and standards for microplastics analyses in European waters
- **EPHEMARE** - Ecotoxicological effects of microplastics in marine ecosystems
- **PLASTOX** - Direct and indirect ecotoxicological impacts of microplastics on marine organisms
- **WEATHER-MIC** - How microplastic weathering changes its transport, fate and toxicity in the marine environment

The second Pilot Action, Ecological Aspects of Deep-Sea Mining, aims to assess the ecological impacts which could arise from commercial mining activities in the deep-sea. In this action, an international team of researchers from eleven member countries embarked on a cruise aboard Germany's newest research vessel SONNE. The results of this Pilot Action will be used to inform policy developments within the International Seabed Authority.

JPI Oceans welcomes the recognition of these two areas by the G7 and the issues they raise. Kathrine Angell-Hansen, Director of the JPI Oceans secretariat, says "It is encouraging that the G7 Science Ministers consider marine litter and the impact of deep-sea mining as priorities. Our current activities are helping to build a scientific knowledge base on both issues and we look forward to further cooperation within Europe and beyond."

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