

EQUIMAR LAUNCH

PRESS RELEASE



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For immediate use

Europe's largest Marine Energy research project launched in Glasgow

Marine Energy has a vast potential to contribute eco-friendly energy but has only 10 years to prove itself as a viable technology, or risk being eclipsed by other energy sources. This is the message from Scottish based scientist, Dr. David Ingram, at the launch of EquiMar, Europe's largest ocean energy research programme, at the WREC conference in Glasgow.

Dr Ingram will tell delegates to the World Renewable Energy Congress that time could be running out for marine solutions to the world's energy crisis and that scientists, developers and environmentalists must work together to accelerate progress. This is probably the first multi-disciplinary ocean energy EU project to include environmentalists in the research team.

Dr David Ingram is the Edinburgh based coordinator of the European Commission funded EquiMar project, a €5.5 million programme linking European top research centres and leading device developers to examine the potential of a marine energy industry. The project has been given three years support by the European Commission to come up with templates to identify viable wave and tidal energy devices and optimal locations so marine energy can be developed commercially to help meet the ambitious supply targets set by governments for renewable energy.

According to Dr Ingram,

“Every day scientists, inventors and keen amateurs are applying for grants to test their prototypes. Some are promising but many will never work outside the limited small scale test environment or advance to sea trials. Governments need yardsticks by which they can measure the likely success of marine energy systems before backing them. At present we know more about the surface of the moon than parts of the sea bed – both environments demand scientific precision and the toughest possible equipment.

“Improved national and European funding will help resolve these problems and support pioneering developers to progress from testing devices to placing them in the open ocean environment. Good policies are as important as good science at this stage of Ocean Energy development.”

Dr Ingram is coordinating the EquiMar project from a base at Edinburgh University beside the wave tanks where the Pelamis wave power machine started life and the pioneering work of Prof Stephen Salter was begun in the early 1970's.

EquiMar is harnessing the work of 62 scientists from eleven countries including wave and tidal power developers (Pelamis Wave Power, Wave Dragon and Teamwork Technology) all of whom have experience of deploying devices in the sea.

EquiMar's primary aim is to deliver guidelines so funding agencies, policy makers and investors can fairly judge different technologies and sites.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead said:

"I welcome the balance the EquiMar project strikes between technology and environmental issues. Scotland's seas are special and that is why we are committed to introducing Scotland's first Marine Bill that aims to balance conservation and economic growth. We are proposing to introduce a new marine planning system and a streamlined licensing system to encourage economic investment in areas such as renewable energy."

Cameron Johnstone, Director of Strathclyde University's Institute of Energy Systems Research Unit is a member of EquiMar and the team organising this week's WREC conference;

"It's a measure of Scotland's pivotal role in the development of marine technology that EquiMar is being coordinated from Edinburgh and is being launched at the first World Renewable Energy Congress to be held in Scotland. The British and Scottish governments have nailed their colours to the mast with admirably ambitious targets for renewable energy. But these targets will be unworkable without ocean energy – an industry still in its infancy. EquiMar's job is to focus international scientific expertise so we can speed up development of marine energy by testing locations, turbines, energy production systems and compatibility with sea mammals. Other energy sectors like oil and wind got a helping hand from EU commissioned scientists in the 80s and 90s. In many ways the development of Ocean Energy is following a similar path -- except it's starting with a 20 year time lag and with governments which want marine technology to be commercially viable within 10 years. The challenge for all involved is to speed up the development of ocean energy so 20 years is reduced to just 10.

"With rising oil prices and rising energy demand and the threat of global warming -- there's virtually no time left now for us to get this wrong."

Marine biologists from the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St Andrews and the Oban-based Scottish Association of Marine Sciences are also EquiMar members -- advising how marine devices can minimise contact with sea mammals. It's thought to be the first time conservationists have been involved in an international marine energy study.

Bob Batty of the Scottish Association of Marine Sciences said;

"We're aiming to get energy from the sea in ways that will minimise the impact on the marine environment. It's a tall order but far better to have all interests working together from the start."

Dr Jennifer Norris of the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney said;

"It is vital that marine energy devices are deployed in an effective and sensitive way to harmonise with environmental legislation, marine wildlife and other sea users. Investigating how energy devices might impact on the environment should involve as wide an interest base as possible so that planners, policy makers and utilities have as much information as possible to help them choose the best solutions and locations."

Notes to Editors

1. EquiMar -- "Equitable Testing and Evaluation of Marine Energy Devices in terms of Performance, Cost and Environmental Impact" project is one of two projects funded in the first round of Framework Programme 7, by the European Commission. EquiMar is a €5.5M project, involving 23 partners from 11 different countries, coordinated by the University of Edinburgh including major developers, universities, test sites, research laboratories, a certification agency, a utility and a journalist, bringing together international expertise across a wide range of disciplines. The project will run for three years from mid April 2008.
2. Leading developers are currently involved in demonstration projects, placing devices into the ocean and seeking funding to commercialise their work. EquiMar will deliver protocols to allow funding agencies, policy makers and investors to judge different technologies, and deployment sites fairly. The EquiMar guidelines will suggest the best sites to use for marine energy and the best means of assessing the engineering, environmental and financial strength of new devices. EquiMar will provide a way to evaluate devices from their earliest laboratory tests to full scale deployment, and will help match the best technologies to the best development sites as the first multi-megawatt "arrays" or wave and tidal farms are deployed.
3. There are 23 organisations from 11 countries involved in EquiMar (UK, Spain, France, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden) and the group covers the full range of the marine energy sector including major developers (Pelamis Wave Power, Wave Dragon, Teamwork Technology), Universities (Edinburgh, Strathclyde, Exeter, Cork, Manchester, Southampton, St Andrews, Uppsala and Aalborg), Research laboratories (Robotiker Tecnalia, IFREMER, CNR-ISMAR, SAMS), a certification organisation, (DNV), a test centre (EMEC), a not-for-profit research centre (The Wave Energy Centre), a utility (EDF) and, a trade association (EU-OEA). This unprecedented degree of cooperation and breadth of experience will help EquiMar fairly consider the engineering, financial and environmental potential of wave and tidal power devices.
4. EquiMar has strong links with the International standardisation process in Ocean energy led by the International Electrical Commission (IEC) The World Renewable Energy Congress is a biennial gathering of researchers, developers, policy makers, government agencies, and funders with an interest in renewable energy. The 10th Congress, WREC X, is the first to come to Scotland while the next, WREC XI, will take place in 2010 in Abu Dhabi. Further information can be found at <http://www.wrenuk.co.uk/congresses.html>
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