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The European Commission's framework for research and innovation is opening up opportunities for regional ocean technology

BY AMANDA LESLIE

Before Silicon Valley became home to multibillion-dollar companies like Apple and Google, the peninsula southwest of San Francisco Bay was hardly unique. That is, until two Stanford University alumni launched Hewlett-Packard in their tiny Palo Alto garage. If you own a computer, it's safe to say that you probably know the rest of the story. But its enduring popularity emphasizes an important point: big things often have small beginnings.

Seventy-five years after the birth of Silicon Valley and more than 6,000 kilometres away, trade commissioners and energy experts began arriving from around the world this past November for the fifth International Conference on Ocean Energy (IOCE) in Halifax. It was the start of a three-day event that was focused on



MARINE RENEWABLES CANADA

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the industrial development of renewable marine energy, and it marked the first time the conference had taken place outside of Europe.

Many different countries attended, but five hold particular significance for the future growth of the ocean technology industry in Atlantic Canada: the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and France. To fully understand their potential impact, look no further than Horizon 2020, the European Commission’s framework program for research and innovation.

Launched in 2014, Horizon 2020 is the biggest program of its kind in Europe, with almost 80 billion euros in funding available over seven years. This flagship initiative is meant to secure Europe’s global competitiveness by driving sustainable economic growth and creating jobs. Horizon 2020 intends to deliver on those goals by

producing world-class science while removing barriers to innovation and making it easier for the public and private sectors to work together. Anyone can submit a proposal, and the program’s simple structure allows new projects to get up and running quickly.

While a range of research topics are listed, ocean technology companies will be most interested in a section of the program known as Blue Growth. It aims to unlock the potential of the seas and oceans and includes a detailed list of proposal topics, ranging from renewable energy to the preservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems. By 2020, the EU expects the number of jobs in the blue economy to grow to seven million, and the work program will serve as launching pad for many of those new initiatives.

Prior to Horizon 2020, the European Commission released its Maritime

Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area in 2011, which examined a range of challenges and opportunities. The area of impact is broad, but the report specifically mentioned five EU Member States with an Atlantic coastline, all of which were represented at the most recent IOCE conference in Halifax. Paired together, Horizon 2020 and the Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area provide a blueprint for future partnerships by outlining the specific areas of ocean technology that are seeking co-operation, not to mention the list of European countries that could benefit most by doing business with Atlantic Canadian companies.

“There is tremendous potential for collaboration,” says Nicolas Doire, the spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) in Canada. “Our government has listed ocean technol-

ogy as a priority economic sector under Canada's Global Markets Action Plan, and we're committed to supporting the success of the industry abroad to create jobs and prosperity in Canada."

Doire recommends that interested companies contact DFATD's regional offices, as well as trade commissioners in Canada's embassies and offices abroad. Another resource is the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), which promotes the regional ocean technology sector. Several ACOA programs may be able to assist Atlantic Canadian companies looking to get involved in these projects, including the Atlantic Innovation Fund, the Business Development Program, and the Canada-Atlantic Provinces Agreement on International Business Development.

As one of the five countries mentioned in the Maritime Strategy for the Development of the Atlantic Ocean Area, Portugal is aiming to become a European leader in the blue biotechnology sector, capitalizing on its competitive and unique advantages in marine resources. "Sectors like biotechnology, underwater robotics, defence, renew-

able offshore energy, and aquaculture stand to benefit significantly from a deeper collaboration with Atlantic Canada," says Eurico Nobre, a trade commissioner for the Canadian Embassy in Portugal.

Despite recent economic woes, the blue economy in the country remains profitable. In 2013 the Portuguese government launched the National Ocean Strategy, aimed at developing a new model for the Atlantic Ocean and coastal areas. This will allow Portugal to successfully meet the challenges of promotion, growth, and competitiveness of the maritime economy.

"The Canadian embassy in Lisbon stands ready to help Atlantic Canadian businesses pursue opportunities in Portugal and partner with our R&D institutions," says Nobre. "The Trade Commissioner Service is keen to proactively seek ways to promote Canadian technology." His comments are echoed by Isidro Garcia, the trade commissioner for the Canadian embassy in Spain. "The ocean is a wide area with lots of potential for Canadian firms seeking cooperation with other companies in dif-

ferent countries," he says. "In Madrid, we are reading with great interest about opportunities in Atlantic Canada."

By leveraging its research institutions and developing an ecosystem fuelled by innovation, Silicon Valley has become the technology capital of the world. The ocean sector in Atlantic Canada might appear small by comparison, but its marine resources, cutting-edge R&D, and ocean expertise are second to none. To make the region a global player in ocean technology, collaboration with the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and France is crucial.

However, the opportunities don't stop with those five countries. From Norway to Brazil, the interest in Canadian partnerships is growing. It's nearly impossible to think of the technology industry without the image of Silicon Valley coming to mind. Now is the time for Atlantic Canada to prove to the world that it can become equally synonymous with ocean innovation. 🌐

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