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• **EU researchers breed Bluefin Tuna without the use of hormones**

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A scientific consortium involving 13 partners from eight countries including Malta, achieved remarkable results as scientists managed to breed bluefin tuna in captivity and provide the basis for future ecologically sustainable aquaculture of this threatened species.

The bluefin tuna project started in the early 2000's when several scientists involved in bluefin tuna research met in Cartagena, Spain for the DOTT international conference (DOTT – Domestication of Bluefin tuna Thunnus thynnus). This was followed by the first partner project, called Repro-DOTT, that looked at the reproduction of bluefin tuna in the wild and in captivity.

The outstanding results achieved during this project prompted the consortium to apply for an EU grant to develop the Self-DOTT project (Self-sustaining aquaculture – Domestication of Thunnus thynnus). Locally, the Malta Aquaculture Research Centre (MAR), formerly known as the Malta Centre for Fisheries Sciences (MCFS), coordinated the Maltese experiments and the sampling of bluefin tuna from the wild, whereas MFF Ltd was responsible for holding broodstock for egg collection, a large-scale broodstock nutrition experiment, egg transportation trials, and larval rearing trials.

A spokesman for the consortium said that, "thanks to the EU grant, which amounted to almost €3 million, the consortium recruited specialists at all levels, including divers, and scientists, and developed new technologies and techniques that made it possible to manage the reproduction of this species and monitor fish in captivity."

Currently, the same partners are participating in a two-year EU 7th Framework Project, Trans-DOTT (Translation of domestication of Thunnus thynnus to a commercial application) to develop economically viable methodologies that provide sustainable tuna aquaculture.

The Malta Aquaculture Research Centre and MFF Ltd are among over 45 grant holders in Malta that have benefitted from EU research funding since 2007, collectively receiving over €6.5 million.

By the end of 2013, in the European Union as a whole, more than 15,000 SMEs will have been supported directly for an amount exceeding €5 billion.

At the start of the current EU research framework programme, the European Union set a target for SMEs to share 15 percent of funding available for cross-border cooperative research projects. At the last count in October the rate was 17.5 percent, with country performances ranging from 12 percent in Finland to 36 percent in Hungary and Slovakia.

In the next EU research programme, Horizon 2020, due to launch in January, the target will be higher – 20 percent of the budgets available for research on societal challenges and leading technologies – meaning almost €9 billion in grants over seven years will be available to small companies. Of this amount, €3 billion will be provided through a dedicated "SME instrument" to fund feasibility studies and demonstration projects to help speed ideas to the market. Part of the EU research budget will also be used to back loans to SMEs by public and private lenders.

Michael Jennings, spokesman for European Research, Innovation and Science, said, "the €9 billion should be seen as a minimum. SMEs are the backbone of the European economy and account for two thirds of total employment. We want as many SMEs as possible to benefit from EU research and innovation funding to generate new products, services and jobs. Full details of how they can get involved will be announced when we launch our first calls for proposals in December."