

North Sea test capacity expanding

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Innovative economic development in coastal area gets a boost

Recently, two POM West Flanders projects for innovation on the coast received a Flemish subsidy of almost 1.3 million euros. Both of the approved projects are located on the coast: Test@Sea, in which Sirris also participates, will continue to work on expanding the ‘blue economy’, and Vertiports is putting West Flanders even more firmly on the map of the burgeoning drone industry.

With **Test@Sea**, West Flanders is further committed to the development of the blue economy. A consortium comprising the POM West Flanders development agency, the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), De Blauwe Cluster, Sirris, Ghent University and the (Dutch language) Free University of

Brussels (VUB) is jointly setting up technologies in the North Sea with this new project. This testing capacity needs to be expanded to meet growing market needs. Many significant applications can mature there, such as offshore energy production and the protection of critical infrastructure at sea. The project also provides materials testing in the harsh, saline and sometimes rough marine environment as well as testing with drones above, on and under the water. This investment will initially take place in Blue Accelerator - the marine test and demonstration platform just off the coast at the port of Ostend. Secondly, there will be a floating expansion of the testing capacity that can be put deeper in the sea.

Vertiports aims to stimulate research and concrete applications for the creation of air bridges with drones for sustainable, continuous and structural transport over longer distances via ‘vertiports’ (vertical take-off and landing platforms). The Drone Dock Innovation Centre in Ostend will be supplied with additional research and testing equipment for this. The investments include a wind-and-rain simulator to simulate and test outdoor flying in harsh weather conditions. The initial focus will be on the operation and maintenance of offshore wind farms. This is why POM West Flanders has set up a partnership with VIVES University of Applied Sciences, the Howest colleges, Ghent University and the university KU Leuven.

Investing in the future

Test@Sea and Vertiports represent more than 5.7 million euros in investments. The Flemish Government is contributing to this with almost 1.3 million euros in co-financing. Previously, VLAIO (Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship) approved European regional development fund support of almost 2.3 million euros. More than 1.5 million euros will also be made available for these projects from the provincial government. Both projects were part of a call for innovative projects that was launched as the first call under the aegis of the GTI (Integrated Territorial Investment) West Flanders.

Would you like to know more? Read the press release.

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