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Foreword

THE ITALIAN MARINE ENVIRONMENT FUNDING PLAN 2

The Marine Environment Funding Plan (Cluster 10: Marine Environment), funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research, includes 14 projects: 11 devoted to the development of basic and applied aspects of marine research, and the remaining three dedicated to the implementation of infrastructures and instrumentation development in southern Italy marine research institutions. In the framework of this plan, the coordinators (I. Ferrari, University of Parma, and O. Ferretti, ENEA) together with the tutorial board of the project organized a scientific meeting that was held in Bari (Italy) on 26 November 2002. The aim of the meeting was to promote the activities of the project so as to create a scientific network in different fields of marine sciences and to provide elements for the development of new socio-economical services. In this second volume of *Chemistry and Ecology* dedicated to the highlights of the scientific meeting, five papers are presented. Six papers have been published in an earlier issue of *Chemistry and Ecology* (20:3). Papers included in the present issue deal with: rare elements distribution in the Mediterranean Sea, oceanographic features of the western Mediterranean, acoustic evaluation of small pelagic fishes biomass, remote census of benthic communities in a semi-enclosed sea and assessment of a new coastal monitoring platform.

The 11 papers published in two separate issues of *Chemistry and Ecology* provide new insights on different aspects of marine sciences, including oceanography, marine biology, ecotoxicology, applied marine ecology and development of new technologies for field research. The high standard of results presented is a clear demonstration of the growing effort paid by the Italian scientific community to improve basic knowledge and applied research in the field of Marine Sciences.

The tutorial board of the Cluster 10: Marine Environment

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