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Wissenschaftsrat recommends construction of new deep-sea research vessel (successor of RV “Sonne”)

The Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities) recommends the construction of a multidisciplinary, technically highly advanced, globally operating deep-sea research vessel to facilitate international and interdisciplinary scientific expeditions. As the successor of the deep-sea research vessel RV “Sonne”, whose scheduled service life is due to end in 2010, the new craft will be, for the foreseeable future, the only European research vessel on permanent and regular deployment in the Indian and Pacific Oceans to perform marine research. Therefore, it is not only of outstanding importance for German basic marine research but also of far wider relevance for marine research on the European and global level. The new research platform is planned to be delivered to the scientific community in 2013.

The new research vessel will be deployed in scientific fields where RV “Sonne” is already active with great success. These fields – climate change, marine resources and deep-sea biodiversity as well as geodynamics and geo risks – show considerable scientific potential, which are expected to be exploited by the wide spectrum of possible applications of the – as yet nameless – research platform with its open and flexible concept. Two topics of general societal relevance deserve particular emphasis: First of all, the service period of the vessel will coincide with a time of major climate changes, resulting in an increased demand for research into the role of the oceans within the climate system. Apart from that, research concerning marine resources will be another focus area as gas hydrates, mineral and oil deposits are of immense importance in the context of future energy supplies. Also, deep-sea microorganisms, still largely unexplored and unexploited, are an object of great expectations in the field of “blue technology”.

The estimated construction budget for the research vessel is € 110 million, jointly financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (90 percent) and the federal states of Lower Saxony (5 percent), Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Bremen (5 percent combined). The states agreed to make Wilhelmshaven the port of registry of the new research vessel.

The Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities) advises the Federal Government and the state (Länder) governments on issues pertaining to the topical and structural development of universities, science and research.

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On request of the Federal Government, the Wissenschaftsrat is preparing a comprehensive statement on the development of the German research fleet in the European and international context. RV "Sonne" is the first of four German research vessels for basic marine research to be retired and replaced in the short to medium term. Apart from the "Sonne", the research vessels "Poseidon", "Polarstern" and "Meteor" will also be decommissioned within the next ten years. To ensure the timely replacement of RV "Sonne" by 2013, a separate statement was completed in advance. In all, the German research fleet comprises seven ocean-going research vessels.

Note: The full [German] text ("Stellungnahme zu einer umfangreichen Forschungsinfrastruktur für die Grundlagenforschung: Tiefseeforschungsschiff (Nachfolge Forschungsschiff ‚Sonne‘)", Drs. 9204-09) of the statement is available as a PDF download (www.wissenschaftsrat.de). Alternatively, it can be ordered by e-mail to post@wissenschaftsrat.de from the Wissenschaftsrat Head Office in Cologne.