Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny T.D.

at the launch of the EU Atlantic Strategy Action Plan and the EU/Canada/USA Statement on Atlantic Ocean Co-operation at the Atlantic Ocean Conference,

Marine Institute, Galway,

24 May 2013

A Dhaoine Uaisle

In a warm Irish welcome may I say...

Fearaim céad míle fáilte romhaibh uilig chuig an institiúid iontach seo, Foras na Mara, in áit aoibhinn cosí farraige, in larthar na hÉireann agus in larthar na hEorpa, ar ocáid stairiúil i scéal an cheangail idir an tAigéan Atlantach agus na daoine agus na tíortha atá in aice leis.

Commissioner Damanaki, Commissioner Geoghegan Quinn, Senator Well, Dr Jones, Minister Coveney, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's wonderful to share with you this particular episode of the long, fascinating story of the peoples who inhabit the shores and islands of the great Atlantic ocean.

As you know, our tales and sagas vivify not just the imagination... but the literature of our peoples.
Today, the Atlantic itself is not just a source of literary and artistic inspiration, but one of scientific, conservation and economic opportunity.

Across the world, awareness grows of the role ocean systems play in sustaining life on this planet.

Our oceans’ potential to drive economic recovery and innovation – and to do it sustainably - is inescapable.

It is that awareness and potential... bring us here today in international conference.

In recent years, my Government has been developing Ireland’s first-ever, integrated Marine Plan.

We launched *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth* just last year.

Minister Coveney is leading the implementation of this plan as Chairman of our Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group.

It has three key concerns:
- a thriving maritime economy;
- healthy ecosystems; and
- increasing Ireland’s engagement with the sea and our awareness of the benefits...... both market and non-market......that can be derived from it.

We aim to increase, significantly, the turnover of Ireland’s “Blue Economy” to over €6.4 billion by 2020.
We plan to double its GDP contribution by 2030.... to 2.4%.

Equally.... Blue Growth is one of the priority areas in Ireland’s EU Presidency programme.

Developing an Action Plan for the Atlantic Strategy is key.

So too are budgets.

We have prioritised the finalising of the EU’s budget for 2014-2020.....

It is a critical element in firing Europe’s economic recovery, our growth and social cohesion in the years ahead.

We work closely and in parallel with the European Parliament and Member States both on the budget-allocations for the many programmes supported by EU funding and on implementing legislation that will give effect to the EU budget itself.

This includes those initiatives such as Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds that can support Blue Growth.

Today I want to congratulate Commissioners Maria Damanaki and Maire Geoghegan Quinn on their excellent and integrated approach to generating the Action Plan for the Atlantic Strategy.

Ireland is an enthusiastic supporter of the Strategy.
We do so in close partnership with our European Atlantic neighbours France, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

As Presidency of the EU, we have worked very closely with Commissioner Damanaki and her team to bring the preparation of the Action Plan to a successful conclusion during our Presidency.

I look forward to her remarks this afternoon in that regard.

I have no doubt that the EU’s maritime sector can spur significant growth and generate a significant number of jobs.

The opportunities are myriad and exciting:

Fishing, tourism, shipping, marine renewable-energy, oil & gas, marine biotechnology for the pharma and medical-device applications, right to new sensor technology and ocean-observation systems in the ICT sector.

Research and innovation are crucial to our understanding how the ocean systems work.

As an island nation, we see clearly, the need to bill research and innovation high both in our National Research Prioritisation Exercise, and in Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth.

Given that research and innovation are critical to building and sustaining competitive advantage, we are making sure to prioritise them so we can increase and accelerate the returns for our economy and our society.

They are also critical to growth and jobs. For example, in marine renewable energy, sustainable food, medical devices, therapeutics and indeed ICT.
The Action Plan for the Atlantic and in the Horizon 2020 programme take full
cognizance of this potential and importance and I look forward to hearing more on this
from Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Maire Geoghegan Quinn.

The key research-and-innovation priority during the Irish Presidency is to achieve
political agreement on the Horizon 2020 Programme.

We have been working hard...very hard... with the Member States, the European
Commission and the European Parliament to finalise such agreement and this work will
continue right to the end of June.

It is a complex process... reconciling the interests of all the parties involved.

But we are all absolutely *ad idem* in our commitment to advancing these negotiations.

We are anxious to show the citizens of our Union that they can rely on us to represent
their interests efficiently and effectively.

Progress is essential, to ensure sufficient time for the necessary legislative procedures
to implement Horizon 2020 from the start of 2014.

**Trans-Atlantic Dimension**

I have mentioned already our collaboration with our Atlantic neighbours on the EU shore
of this ocean. One of the most famous landmarks in the city of Galway nearby is the
Spanish Arch, a sign of the centuries of seafaring and trading traditions among Europe’s
Atlantic nations.

For centuries fishermen from Portugal, Spain, France, the UK and Ireland have
ventured to the cod grounds of the Grand Banks and Flemish Cap off Newfoundland
and Labrador in Canada. Indeed, in the Irish language, Newfoundland is called “Talamh
an Éisc, and is the only place outside the island of Ireland to have a true Irish language translation of its name.

As I speak, our Irish research vessel the *Celtic Explorer* is voyaging back to Galway from Newfoundland where she has undertaken major oceanographic and fisheries research surveys, with a team of Canadian and Irish scientists... searching for indications of the slow recovery of cod stocks.

How apt that in the ship’s home port of Galway we are today about to witness a Statement on enhanced co-operation on the mighty Atlantic Ocean signed by the representatives of Canada, the European Commission and the USA.

Our ties with the United States of America are also very well known and they will be recalled again shortly when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy’s visit to Ireland. However, I can’t resist giving one small but significant example. Last year, in Washington, I presented Certificates of Irish Heritage to a number of people. One of them was a lady called Dr Kerri-Ann Jones, US Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

This year in Washington, incidentally, the Irish delegation for St. Patrick’s Day was careful to take the opportunity to ensure that our US colleagues were very well informed of the importance of transatlantic co-operation in relation to the Atlantic Ocean.

It is worth mentioning on the wider EU Canada and EU-US relationship that Ireland and the EU look forward to concluding Trade Agreements with both. We maintain very close economic ties with our transatlantic partners in the US and Canada.

Ireland and the EU are committed to enhancing this relationship and we see the trade agreements with Canada and the US as central to our long term objective of strengthening trade-and-investment opportunities for our companies and entrepreneurs.
So today we are in the presence of friends from both sides of the Atlantic – our EU partners from Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the European Commission, and our Atlantic research co-operators from Canada and the United States.

As Taoiseach, and on behalf of the Irish Presidency, I welcome this Action Plan and this Statement of Co-operation.

I congratulate and thank... all those who worked to bring them about.

I ask them now to work with others to ensure that these documents achieve the objective at which they are aimed.

Better lives, brighter futures for our Atlantic peoples.

Thank you.