

## Discovery of new marine worm species as part of Horizon 2020 project, ASSEMBLE Plus

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Researchers from the Swedish Museum of Natural History have identified a new species of marine worm living in the Basque region of Spain. Named *Faerlea assembli*, the worm is just 0.8mm long and was discovered as part of research conducted at [Plentzia Marine Station](#).

The new species belongs to an important group of worms known as the *Acoelomorpha*. These small, soft-bodied worms are abundant throughout many different types of marine sediment. They form a key part of marine food chains and studying their populations offers a way for scientists to monitor the overall health of different environments. Acoelomorphs are particularly sensitive to human impact and their diversity is reduced in areas such as beaches that are visited by many tourists.

The new species, *Faerlea assembli* belongs to the Mecynostomidae family of acoelomorphs. This group is most abundant in shallow, sandy sediments and therefore they are particularly vulnerable to impacts by human activities. It is a fragile species with limited, localised distributions.

Professor Ulf Jondelius led the research team that identified the new species. Commenting on the significance of the finding, he said

*“When it comes to understanding the diversity of marine life, we are still only scratching the surface. Small marine species such as this are often over-looked yet they play crucial roles in marine ecosystems. Identifying new species, such as Faerlea assembli, provides a first step in gathering the data needed for wider population studies to monitor environmental status.”*

The project was conducted as part of a visit Professor Jondelius made to the Plentzia Marine Station supported by the European-funded, Horizon 2020 project, **ASSEMBLE Plus** and the new species was named to reflect this support.

The [ASSEMBLE Plus Transnational Access Programme](#) provides funding for researchers to carry out their own projects using resources not available in their home institutes. With access to over 30 marine biological stations and installations, the initiative helps participants to enhance their skills, create new collaborations and contribute to scientific understanding.

Details about the new species are published in the Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society (October 2021). Atherton, S. and Jondelius, U. (2021). Phylogenetic assessment and systematic revision of the acoel family Isodiametridae. *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*, zlab050. <https://doi.org/10.1093/zoolinnea/zlab050>

### Notes for Editors

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which may be made of the information contained therein. The project began in October 2017 and will run until September 2022. The project is coordinated by Sorbonne Université.

**About ASSEMBLE Plus**

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Picture of the newly identified *Faerlea assembli* worm species (image credit Ulf Jondelius)