

**Own-initiative Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on EU maritime policy — a question of sustainable development for local and regional authorities**

(2006/C 81/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision of the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions, at its meeting on 25 January 2005, to instruct the Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE) to draw up an own-initiative opinion under Article 265 of the EC Treaty on *EU maritime policy — a question of sustainable development for local and regional authorities*;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the 2005 work programme <sup>(1)</sup> of the Committee of the Regions' Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE), which is to pay 'particular attention to the integrated, horizontal approach to EU maritime policy';

**HAVING REGARD TO** Articles I-13 and I-14 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe <sup>(2)</sup>, which refers to aspects of maritime policy;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 9 April 2003 on the Commission Communication *Towards a strategy to protect and conserve the marine environment*, COM(2002) 539 final <sup>(3)</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission Communication of 2 March 2005 *Towards a future EU maritime policy: a European vision for oceans and seas*;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission Communication of 26 January 2005 on *Strategic objectives 2005-2009* <sup>(4)</sup>, which refers to the particular need for 'an all-embracing maritime policy aimed at developing a thriving maritime economy and the full potential of sea-based activity in an environmentally sustainable manner';

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2002 concerning the implementation of integrated coastal zone management in Europe <sup>(5)</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the White Paper *European transport policy for 2010: time to decide* of 12 September 2001 <sup>(6)</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the draft opinion adopted on 28 June 2005 by the Commission for Sustainable Development (CdR 84/2005 rev. 1) (rapporteur: **Mr Döring**, Minister for Justice, Employment and European Affairs of Schleswig-Holstein, DE-PES);

Whereas:

1. the sea is fundamental to the physical and economic survival of the human race and the continent of Europe has been particularly influenced by the sea, as the European Union including the islands lying offshore has around 325 000 km of coastline and, if its outermost regions are taken into account, the EU has the largest maritime territory in the world, one-third of the EU's 450 million people live on or near the coast, and over 100 regions border directly on the sea;
2. the sea is of crucial importance to the lives of more than 14 million people in the European Union who live on islands and is the most significant factor in the socio-economic development of all island regions;
3. the seas, which cover around 1,4 billion km<sup>2</sup>, are the world's largest habitat;
4. the sea and the climate are closely interlinked, with 70 % of the oxygen we breathe being produced by marine flora;
5. the various maritime sectors of the economy, such as transport, energy and food will need to face the difficult task of boosting economic growth in a sustainable manner in line with the objective of preserving resources;

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 7/2005 rev. 1.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 310 of 16.12.2004, p. 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> CdR 24/2003 fin.

<sup>(4)</sup> COM(2005) 12 final.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ L 148 of 6.6.2002, p. 24.

<sup>(6)</sup> White Paper: European transport policy for 2010: time to decide, COM(2001) 370 final.

6. the preamble of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea states, inter alia, that 'issues relating to the law of the sea' are to be settled 'in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation', that 'the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole', that 'international communication' should be facilitated, and that an 'equitable and efficient utilisation of their resources' and 'the conservation of their living resources, and the ... protection and preservation of the marine environment' should be promoted;
7. regional and local authorities in coastal areas have a particular wealth of experience that ought to be used in developing future maritime policy;

**adopted the following opinion at its 61st plenary session, held on 12 and 13 October 2005 (meeting of 12 October):**

## 1. Views of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

### Introduction

1.1 **notes** that, for the first time, the sea as a whole is the subject of political focus in the European Union, and that the individual EU measures, some of which have been in operation for many years, can thus be brought together constructively, under a common approach that takes their synergies into account, to form a modern European maritime policy so that maximum benefit can be gained from them;

1.2 **expects** the European Commission to go beyond a mere stocktaking exercise and to introduce, during this term of office, initial measures for a European maritime policy and put forward relevant legislative proposals;

1.3 **welcomes** the European Commission's decision to draw up a Green Paper on maritime affairs with the aim of taking stock and establishing a basis for a sustainable European maritime economy as a key initiative for 2010;

1.4 **supports** the initiatives of individual regions and regional networks aimed at providing thorough-going support for this process;

1.5 **also welcomes** the Communication of 2 March 2005 entitled *Towards a Future EU Maritime Policy: A European Vision for Oceans and Seas* and the conclusions and aims concerning the EU maritime sector contained in that communication;

1.6 **stresses** the central importance of the European Commission's decision to carry out during the drafting of the Green Paper a wide-ranging consultation in which European regional and local authorities will have a pivotal role to play;

### Integrated approach as the overarching principle

1.7 **considers** that the aim must be to recognise and preserve the great potential of Europe's seas and to design an active maritime policy in such a way that future generations can also share in the economic, biological and cultural wealth of the sea;

1.8 **stresses** that a sustainable and effective European maritime policy must have as its *overarching principle* an integrated approach aimed at strategically merging various individual policies;

1.9 **points out** that there are already a number of examples of integrated maritime policy outside the European Union;

1.10 **hopes** that an integrated approach to European maritime policy will also facilitate an effective relaunch of the Barcelona process, taking account of the contribution that regional and local authorities can make here.

### Individual policies

1.11 **points out** that European maritime policy affects a large number of sectoral policy areas, some of which are regulated at European level but have not as yet been brought together in an integrated approach;

1.12 **lists** the following important individual policies that an active maritime policy must cover:

Trade, transport, shipbuilding and port industries

1.13 **stresses** the vital interest of the European Union's regions in the competitiveness of shipping, shipbuilding, and port industries. The development of inland waterway and shipping routes is indispensable, given the geographical circumstances, Europe's heavily export-based economy, and the increase in traffic volumes. The transfer of land-based traffic to sea routes offers part of the solution to the rise in traffic levels. In addition, a European maritime policy needs to create circumstances that ensure fair opportunities for economic players in European shipping, shipbuilding and port industries. At the same time, not only must there be clear, binding safety regulations governing globalised sea traffic and safety at sea, but these regulations must also be enforced;

1.14 **notes** that Europe has a strategic advantage to gain by retaining a competitive commercial fleet and a thriving shipbuilding industry; this would require developing an active industrial policy based on innovation, research and scientific knowledge;

1.15 **stresses** that the infrastructure for repairing and maintaining ships must be developed in European ports and the safety standards raised, in order to help strengthen this sector;

1.16 **suggests** that thought be given to ways of disposing of shipping waste in an environmentally sensitive manner such as the introduction of a specific port tax;

#### Fisheries and mariculture

1.17 **notes** that despite the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), traditional fishing — whilst it is a resource for some operating businesses — has been brought to the brink by over-fishing, although the EU has the largest market in the world for processed fish products. Unless the CFP is implemented with determination and, where necessary, is supported by further specific measures for individual European seas, the collapse of large parts of European fish stocks and, as a result, the economic ruin of many fisheries businesses appears inevitable;

1.18 **stresses** that, alongside traditional fishing, the development of mariculture for highly-priced fish, crustaceans and algae at sea and on land, as well as the harvesting and cultivation of natural products in the seas through the use of 'blue' biotechnology could, if carried out sustainably, make a significant contribution to economic growth;

#### Energy, marine minerals, marine technology

1.19 **notes** that, in the area of offshore energy, alongside oil and gas extraction, wind energy in particular is gaining in economic significance as a form of renewable energy. In the context of the European Union's increasing dependence on energy imports, the development of this sea-based energy should also be promoted;

1.20 **notes** that marine minerals are very extensive and that their exploitation is in some cases just beginning and must take place in a way that does not destroy the long-term ecological balance;

1.21 **stresses** the innovative potential of a many-faceted marine technology with a wide range of applications, such as the whole sea transport sector including ship maintenance, port industries and shipyards, equipment for offshore activities, hydrography, mariculture and the environment. Environmental technology, too, opens up significant economic opportunities. Marine technology, with its high innovative potential, is thus both an important economic factor and a powerful engine for research and development;

#### Marine environment

1.22 **stresses** that the sea's physical, chemical and biological makeup is influenced by outside factors such as increasing pollution, including the build-up of persistent pollutants and the inappropriate exploitation of some of the sea's biological and non-biological raw materials and climate change, which are threatening the future of the sea as a source of biodiversity and a vital economic resource for millions of people throughout the EU, and thus urgently require appropriate corrective measures. Examples of this are the EU Water Framework Directive and the efforts that have been made over many years to improve the state of the Baltic Sea, which has recently almost become a sea within the EU;

#### Tourism

1.23 **notes** that sporting and healthcare facilities, high-quality bathing water, clean beaches, unspoilt coastlines, restrictions on urban development, and culture and leisure facilities influence holidaymakers' choice of coastal resort for their holidays. The further development of the European maritime tourist industry, including marinas for sail and motor craft, remains a key precondition for this. The promotion of coastal areas as places in which to invest with their high employment rates must be given proper consideration in any European maritime policy;

#### Coastal protection

1.24 **recalls** that rising sea levels and coastal erosion call for direct structural measures to protect coastlines and that, at the same time, the potential consequences of climate change must be investigated and assessed in economic terms in order to ensure the further development of coastal protection; in this context, it would seem vital to foster exchange of best practice on integrated coastal zone management in order to establish procedures which meet the requirements of coastal areas, thus ensuring that both the quality of these areas and maritime regional identity are preserved. Similarly, it is vital to draw up measures to protect the natural resources of coastal areas, which are the most productive marine environments;

#### Island dimension

1.25 **considers** that European maritime policy must take account of the specific characteristics of islands and must be able to help them to overcome the natural handicaps they suffer and which give rise to additional structural costs that place them at a disadvantage when competing with continental Europe;

1.26 **is of the view** that, because island economies depend heavily on maritime transport, EU maritime policy should be a useful mechanism for helping island markets to operate in the single market on an equal footing with regions in continental Europe;

#### Marine resources in the foreign policy dimension and in the neighbourhood policy

1.27 **believes** that it is clearly in the interests of the EU, as a global player, to use marine resources in a way that is fair to all countries and also takes global sustainability into consideration; in this context, the applicable international conventions and in particular International Maritime Organisation (IMO) legislation must be considered;

#### *Instruments of an integrated maritime policy*

#### Research and education

1.28 **notes** that marine research must become not only an integral part of European research policy, but also one of its priorities;

1.29 **supports** the Galway Declaration of European maritime research institutes of 13 May 2004 in favour of support for marine science and technology in the seventh research framework programme; and **stresses** that, alongside sectoral technical areas such as materials and technology research, health and food research, climate and marine biological research and non-technical areas such as trade and tourism, there is an urgent need to support overarching international research institutions that can collect comprehensive data on horizontal issues;

1.30 **approves** the promotion of a training system for the maritime professions in the Member States and regions, based on the needs of all of Europe's labour markets.

#### Spatial planning and monitoring

1.31 **considers** that spatial planning instruments are an important part of an integrated maritime policy. Appropriate monitoring systems and their evaluation could produce important data for the development over time of the various marine parameters and their use. The management of the territorial waters and of the exclusive economic zone of the EU could be optimised within an integrated approach. This is in Europe's common interest, not least because of the high infrastructure costs involved;

1.32 **supports** in this context the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2002 concerning the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe. The ICZM covers: a holistic approach to land, coast and open sea; balancing the various interests within and between the economy, the environment, social policy and security; and the involvement of politicians, administrations and social groups in order to recognise and resolve conflicts at an early stage;

#### *Public awareness*

1.33 **regrets** that it took spectacular shipping disasters involving ships that did not meet EU standards, such as the *Erika* and the *Prestige*, for the public to become aware throughout Europe of the sea's existence as a resource. It will only be possible to successfully implement a European maritime policy if, through the use of appropriate instruments, the people affected on the ground are involved in its formulation and implementation at local and regional level. The many examples of best practice in Europe's regions should be taken into consideration here;

#### *Inland dimension*

1.34 **considers** that the inland dimension plays an important role in maritime policy, as inland activities have significant effects on coastal areas and the seas.

## 2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

### The Committee of the Regions

2.1 **supports** the active inclusion of a European maritime policy in the overarching aims of the Lisbon strategy;

2.2 **requests** the Commission to recognise the positive and multifaceted contribution of local and regional authorities to managing maritime resources and to ensure that this role is built into the future Maritime Policy;

2.3 **recommends** that the Commission should take account of three key themes: a) building the Capacity and facility construction of Coastal Areas for businesses and communities — including support for innovation, skills and enterprise, especially for new maritime technology development including adequate resourcing for such facilities and development of required human resources; b) using the Sea and our Coasts to Support Economic Development including support for coastal regeneration, and countryside based activities where there are social and economic outputs, c) assisting Coastal Settlements and Hinterlands by supporting improved access with wider rural areas, as well as to regional towns and cities;

2.4 **recommends** that an overview of existing laws and regulations with maritime aspects be drawn up, and that Regional Policy instruments, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Regulation, the lifelong learning fund regulations, and the 7th Community Framework Programme for Research & Development be checked as to whether they give adequate consideration to those maritime aspects;

2.5 **wishes** to see the maritime dimension of the Union taken into account in future competitiveness and cooperation objectives, especially as regards the transnational and cross-border aspects of the combating of pollution, the enhancement of safety at sea, and the management of airport systems and waterways in the 2007-2013 regional policy programming period and **recommends** that existing EU financial instruments be checked and coordinated with respect to maritime affairs;

2.6 **calls on** the Commission to do everything possible to collect data on the economic and environmental value of individual marine resources and to evaluate the current and planned use of marine resources and, if appropriate, deduce what changes may be necessary;

2.7 **calls on** the Commission to indicate the various sectors of the maritime economy's current and future potential for wealth and job creation and to put forward proposals as to how that potential might be realised;

2.8 **encourages** the Commission to continue to work together with Member States to strengthen, improve and develop shipping routes and to ensure that they are given proper consideration as part of the trans-European networks;

2.9 **requests that**, in order to improve transport links with the islands and their access to continental markets, development of secondary networks be stepped up and islands should be fully connected to the 'motorways of the sea';

2.10 **calls for** sound spatial planning, for example by implementing ICZM and distribution or reservation of areas that might be required for different uses;

2.11 **supports** the EU shipbuilding industry's LeaderSHIP 2015 initiative, and calls on the Commission to support the competitiveness of high-quality European shipbuilding;

2.12 **calls on** the Commission to make the avoidance of shipping accidents on the high seas, in coastal areas and in ports one of the priorities of the European Union and to increase security levels already established in international conventions that are binding under public international law, such as the IMO's SOLAS and MARPOL conventions, by means of EU initiatives, speed up the ratification of these conventions and improve their implementation and monitoring; in this context thought should be given to the extent to which the Structural Funds could be used for risk management;

2.13 **calls for** increased efforts to expand the capacity and/ or develop infrastructure for land access to port facilities, construction of logistical distribution networks and new infra-

structure and, to diversify existing infrastructure in ports, paying particular attention to the port infrastructure of islands, while complying with measures to protect the natural resources of coastal areas;

2.14 **calls for** greater consideration to be paid to social facilities in ports, for example accommodation for crews;

2.15 **urges** that safety strategies and measures in port installations and their immediate surroundings be adapted to the new threat of terrorism without further delay;

2.16 **calls on** the Commission to continue its reform of fisheries policy, in order to safeguard fish stocks in European waters and the livelihoods of fishermen in the long term;

2.17 **asks** the Commission and the Council that the relaunch of Euromed policy gives a central role to the common fisheries policy, inter alia in view of the creation by 2010 of the Mediterranean free trade area;

2.18 **appeals to** the Commission to facilitate the further development of wind farms in the EU. The potential of other renewable energy sources, such as tidal flows, should be looked into more carefully and, if appropriate, included in support measures;

2.19 **requests** the Commission to ensure environmentally-friendly underwater oil and gas extraction in the EU's waters;

2.20 **calls on** the Commission to develop scenarios for coastal protection measures that may be necessary, based on the various forecasts for the rise in sea levels;

2.21 **calls for** the development for the maritime sector of an instrument similar to the INSPIRE spatial information infrastructure, thereby enabling the various user interests to be weighed against each other on the basis of sound data;

2.22 **recommends** more targeted support for shipbuilding and marine technology, such as the introduction of double-hulled tankers or the forthcoming dismantling over the next few years of around 200 offshore oil and gas platforms;

2.23 **calls on** the Commission to promote the creation of national strategic plans and support trans-regional and trans-national ICZM approaches;

2.24 **calls on** the Commission to boost funding for marine research and to focus it on promoting new technologies, such as polar technology, and to harmonise conditions across the EU, for example for mariculture, and to involve business therein at an early stage;

2.25 **requests** the Commission, for the purpose of improving public awareness, to develop a systematic strategy for a modern maritime policy in order to have it firmly embedded at grassroots level and to ensure that it actually gets implemented;

2.26 **requests** the Commission to take into consideration the inland dimension and the interactions between inland areas, coastal areas and the sea, so that all regions — not only those immediately next to the sea — are involved in maritime policy;

2.27 **requests** the Commission to take into consideration broader regional approaches, particularly those that already exist in the four large European maritime areas of the North East Atlantic, the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;

2.28 **recommends** that the Commission should specifically take account of cultural interests and local knowledge in maritime communities and incorporate this into planning, management and related policy development. Further, it is imperative to encourage continued cultural contact between coastal communities and the sea especially where the sea contribute to the sustainability of communities. This will add value to the tourism product;

2.29 **calls on** the Commission to ensure that the regional and local dimension is included in the formulation and implementation of European maritime policy and that the wide-ranging expertise existing at regional level is taken into consideration when drafting the Green Paper. In particular, examples of best practice and also model maritime regions could be very significant for the introduction of integrated policies. Further the highly successful LEADER model should be considered to ensure a local dimension in delivery;

2.30 **recommends** that over the course of the broad consultation on the Green Paper and until its publication, various regional conferences be held in coastal regions in order, on the one hand, to bring regional and local expertise to bear, and, on the other, to help raise public awareness of maritime issues. Conferences should be balanced between those regions with large industrial ports and those with smaller artisanal ports;

2.31 **offers** to play a significant partnering role in the consultations that are to accompany the drafting of the Green Paper on maritime policy; and **recommends** a long-term publicity campaign involving local and regional authorities.

Brussels, 12 October 2005.

The President  
of the Committee of the Regions  
Peter STRAUB

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