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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European Vision for the Oceans and
Seas**

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In its Strategic Objectives for 2005-2009 the Commission pinpointed “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.” Based on a Communication of 2 March 2005, it decided that a Green Paper on a future EU Maritime Policy, to be adopted by the Commission in the first half of 2006, should constitute a first step towards the establishment of such an all-embracing EU Maritime Policy.

In line with these decisions the Commission has adopted a Green Paper. The Green Paper should be seen within the context of EU policy on sustainable development, of which it is one application. It seeks, in the wider maritime sphere, to stimulate growth and jobs under the Lisbon agenda in a sustainable manner that ensures the protection of the marine environment. In so doing it recognises the key role played by the oceans in enhancing the quality of life of the ever-growing numbers of EU citizens who live, work and take their holidays in coastal regions.

The link between these elements is the seas and oceans which surround our continent and our outermost regions, and which perform multiple functions. Besides having an intrinsic value of their own but they also provide the resource base for all maritime activities. The Green Paper is a response to the mandate given to the Maritime Affairs Task Force, under the direction of a Steering Group of Commissioners, to examine the economic activities of Europeans which are linked to, or impact on, the oceans and seas, and the policies dealing with them, with a view to finding better ways of enabling Europeans to derive more – and sustainable – benefit from the oceans.

The Green Paper is expected to stimulate a broad open debate amongst stakeholders and at all levels of governance. The Commission will encourage and help organise this debate.

Outline of the Green Paper

A general introduction sets out the current situation and the rationale behind the Paper. So far, our policies on maritime transport, industry, coastal regions, offshore energy, fisheries, marine environment, socio-economic cohesion and in other relevant areas have developed separately as no one was examining how these policies could be combined to reinforce each other. The time is therefore ripe to bring all these elements together and forge a new vision of how to manage our relations with the oceans.

The Green Paper aims therefore to launch a debate on a future Maritime Policy for the EU that treats the oceans and seas in a holistic way.

The introduction acknowledges that maritime policy should be anchored within the Lisbon strategy, whilst reflecting the principles of and ecosystem-based management, and emphasises that EU action is required only where it adds value to national and local action.

Chapter 2: Retaining Europe's Leadership in Sustainable Maritime Development

The second chapter looks at the economic importance of the maritime economy and its growth prospects and identifies the sources of its competitiveness. It looks at the assets available to it in terms of the marine environment itself, knowledge of the oceans, the creativity of companies and the expertise of those working in the various sectors, and asks how public authorities can help to maximise these assets. It then goes on to look at the interrelationships between economic sectors and at the regulatory framework.

The chapter identifies the need, in a rapidly globalising world, for maritime sectors to continue to base their growth on innovative products. In line with this, it refers to existing Community programmes designed to promote research and innovation, and suggests ideas for a more integrated approach involving Member State activities.

It emphasises the essential role of the Thematic Marine Strategy in ensuring environmental sustainability and of Maritime Safety legislation.

It analyses what can be done to reverse the current negative trend in the number of Europeans joining the maritime professions and to enhance the quality of jobs.

It also welcomes the development of a more integrated approach now being developed by the private sector (clustering), and suggests how the regulatory environment in the maritime sectors could be developed. This section calls for a discussion on simplification, based on stakeholders's reporting of cases where legislation developed for the needs and objectives of one policy may have unintended and contradictory impacts on other maritime goals. It also includes a discussion of the dilemmas surrounding possible EC action with respect to shipping registers and the setting up of an optional EU register.

The chapter refers to the need to take account of new challenges facing the maritime world, discusses the effects of global climate change, describes some promising developments in the energy field, and identifies the considerable potential of blue biotechnology.

Chapter 3: Maximising Quality of life in Coastal regions

This chapter examines the special role of coastal regions in maritime affairs. It discusses the importance of a healthy marine environment for the quality of life of increasing numbers of citizens. It examines the various threats to the coast and its inhabitants, how to deal with them and how to turn them into opportunities. It looks at the key role of maritime tourism in local economies and how best to ensure its continued health. Finally it addresses how best to manage the complex interrelationships between maritime activities and land-based activities, so that these can mutually reinforce each other.

Chapter 4: Providing the tools to manage our Relations with the Oceans

This chapter examines a number of important tools for enhancing the sustainable management of our relations with the oceans and seas.

It looks at the type of data which need to be made available, both on the oceans and seas themselves and on related human activities, and identifies the need for setting up a comprehensive EU network for marine data and to further integrate and develop the existing networks aiming to identify the movements of vessels on EU coastal waters.

It calls for spatial planning systems to regulate economic activities in coastal waters, building on the ecosystem-based management approach already proposed in the Thematic Marine Strategy. Finally it discusses the important role which can be played by EC financial support for coastal regions, mainly by the structural funds (ERDF; ESF) and the Cohesion Fund.

Chapter 5: Governance

Within the EU

A new understanding of the oceans and seas challenges traditional sectoral and geographically limited approaches and advocates a more integrated form of policy making based on the principle of subsidiarity. Technological developments, including advances relating to the monitoring and surveillance of the seas, have made it possible to integrate data services to an extent unheard of in the past. Technology-driven economies of scale are best realised through integrated policies. Law enforcement at sea is best organised through the coordinated use of the scarce and expensive resources available in Member States. This chapter spells out in more detail the implications of developing an integrated maritime policy, and sets out some general principles for maritime policy making. It also suggests the type of division of activity which could be envisaged between the EC and the Member States in the implementation of spatial planning.

Maritime governance should make use of the experience gained from regional policy in the areas of coordination among sectoral policies, cooperation on examples of good practice and partnership involving stakeholders.

This chapter also points to the low degree of integration of the various offshore activities of many Member States in coastal waters. It suggests that a move towards more coordination and commonality between functions and among Member States would be beneficial.

Mention is also made of extending the Common EU Maritime Space to additional activities, (including coastal shipping between Member States), as well as of the idea to set up an EU coastguard. The growth of various illegal activities, including trafficking in human beings and terrorism, is identified as one factor which is making the need for better coordination of existing national resources and the common procurement of new ones more urgent. The growing involvement of Member States' navies in civilian activities is underlined.

In the International Arena

This chapter argues that maritime policy must possess an external dimension, since the world's oceans are interconnected and rule-making is often global. Indeed, much of maritime policy, by its very nature, transcends the boundaries of Europe, and issues such as climate change, marine environment and biodiversity protection, shipping, and fisheries, are best regulated on the basis of international rules. So where the EU develops new ideas in maritime policy it will want to share these with the international community. Where it sees the need for new international rules it will wish to add its weight to their introduction by being party to their development. If however action at international level fails, the EU has to take up its responsibilities and consider its options for action under the Treaty. Where some third countries lack capacity or effective governance to apply internationally agreed rules it will want to use its external policy instruments to encourage improvement. Finally, the chapter states clearly that, although a European maritime policy needs a general framework, its implementation will need to take account of the realities and diversities of Europe's geographical situation.

Chapter 6: Reclaiming Europe's Maritime Heritage and Reaffirming Europe's Maritime Identity

This chapter examines how maritime heritage activities can be encouraged, linked to other maritime sectors, and how education can contribute to the growing development of a common vision of the role of the oceans in our lives. It can also lead to a more favourable image for maritime professions and help enhance the performance of maritime sectors.

Chapter 7: The Way Forward – The Consultation Process

This chapter underlines the Commission's commitment to listening to interested stakeholders during the consultation period up to the end of June 2007. Before the end of 2007 the Commission will address a Communication to the Council and Parliament summarising the results of the consultation process and proposing the way forward.