

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Blue growth: opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth'

(2013/C 62/10)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- draws attention to the fact that the maritime economy in the broad sense is not limited to regions and entities with direct access to seas and oceans. To a large extent, the maritime economy is also relevant to regions situated far from coasts and ports on account of the fact that, among other things, they manufacture marine equipment and are engaged in activities in the transport and logistics and research and development sectors;
- urges that in developing the blue economy the regional features of Europe's sea-basins be used and taken into account for the purpose of implementation;
- notes the need to support aquaculture financially using EU funds whilst rejecting proposals for genetically modified aquatic organisms which are aimed at creating new species more resistant to diseases or environmental pollution;
- draws attention to military material leftover from the world wars and the cold war and radioactive waste dumped at sea in the past and believe it essential to draw up a methodology at European level and provide funds to make these dangerous materials safe;
- calls for the Committee of the Regions, as the representative of local and regional authorities, to be asked systematically to take part in any further work on the concept of Blue Growth including on the development and establishment of the Sea Basin Strategies, which it considers to be an important tool to implement key aspects of Blue Growth.

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Opinion of the Committee of the Regions – Blue Growth Opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. stresses that the concept of blue growth is based on the assumption that seas, coasts and oceans can play a key role in overcoming many current challenges and should be underpinned by the principles of sustainable development and "smart specialisation";

2. draws attention to the fact that the maritime economy in the broad sense is not limited to regions and entities with direct access to seas and oceans. To a large extent, the maritime economy is also relevant to regions situated far from coasts and ports on account of the fact that, among other things, they manufacture marine equipment and are engaged in activities in the transport and logistics and research and development sectors;

3. stresses the importance of growth in the blue economy, which can help make the EU more competitive in the international arena;

4. believes that blue growth must be based on protecting biodiversity and the marine environment and its ecosystems, which will strengthen the natural roles that healthy and resilient marine and coastal ecosystems play;

5. welcomes the EU's current initiatives and those planned for the 2014-2020 period, aimed at supporting the activities of Member States and local and regional authorities and geared towards growth in the blue economy;

6. supports efforts to establish an agreed system for Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) across the European Union, which will be an important tool to balance the interests of different sectors of the blue economy and help ensure an efficient and sustainable use of precious marine resources;

7. believes that Europe does not have a unified maritime policy. The Committee also notes that the communication does not take account of several areas of the maritime economy, such as maritime transport and the shipbuilding industry;

Blue energy

8. agrees that the marine renewable energy industry in the broad sense is a strong economic sector providing access to electricity, which has a marginal impact on the environment and can drive the development of a given region;

9. stresses that EU funds are an important instrument which act as a driving force behind this branch of the economy. The funds are used to finance investments in this area, research and development work and human resources training;

10. points out that special attention should be given to the environmental impact of structures associated with the generation of renewable energy;

11. draws attention to the fact that development of the marine renewable energy industry may provide a positive impetus for the development of smaller maritime ports, which will be able to meet the logistical needs of that branch of the maritime economy;

12. believes that representatives of maritime administrations, port authorities and local and regional authorities should be invited to engage in further discussions on the future of the marine renewable energy industry;

13. notes the special role which the public sector will have to play in supporting future initiatives in this area;

Aquaculture and fisheries

14. notes that development of aquaculture, together with growth in production based on respect for the environment, ecological balance and biodiversity, will have a positive impact on the growth in consumption of fish and other aquatic organisms. It will help improve public health, support economic operators associated with aquaculture, reduce the proportion of fish protein substitutes and boost employment in that part of the blue economy;

15. notes the need to support aquaculture financially using EU funds. This will strengthen the importance of the fishing sector and fishing activities for coastal regions;

16. rejects proposals for genetically modified aquatic organisms which are aimed at creating new species more resistant to diseases or environmental pollution;

17. supports the replacement of fishing vessel engines and the market introduction of new energy-efficient fishing vessels to carry out selective fishing and to improve vessel security and comfort;

18. reiterates its own position put forward in the opinion on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, which recognised the need to set up an advisory council for aquaculture, bringing together representatives from the production sector;

19. underlines the role of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) as a scientific body supporting the European Commission's work to ensure sustainable management of fisheries;

Maritime, coastal and cruise tourism

20. notes that for many people living in the EU, a seaside holiday in an EU country is becoming increasingly attractive. Moreover, what makes such a holiday more attractive is the increasing quality of services provided in that sector of the economy;

21. supports the strategic approach to the infrastructure associated with maritime ports, berthing capacity and transport in the wider sense and stresses the role played by financial support for those investment activities through funds from the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;

22. believes that initiatives which bring together activities linked to coastal protection and ecofriendly tourism should be supported and promoted in the new financial perspective for the 2014-2020 period;

23. highlights the role played by Marine Protected Areas in the conservation and protection of marine ecosystems and in the development of sustainable diving-based tourism, as a strategic tool for acquiring knowledge of the marine environment and for raising public awareness about it;

24. supports the current involvement of local and regional authorities in supporting, promoting and publicising environmental protection, initiatives to develop tourism infrastructure as well as in the training of highly skilled workers in this sector of the economy;

25. notes the importance of maritime universities and academic training centres which provide skilled workers with

both higher education degrees and good job-specific qualifications for the maritime economy. It is also essential to support the activities of the platform for cooperation of universities for maritime workers;

Marine mineral resources

26. agrees that the growing need for raw materials may lead to greater interest in acquiring them from the sea and ocean floor, and that this can have a substantial impact on the balance of marine ecosystems, some of which we know very little about, seriously disturbing the region and the natural and manmade environment (subsidence, erosion, sea water ingress, etc.) when seabed excavations are close to the coast; therefore, as the Committee has pointed out in its opinions on sustainable development, priority should be given to re-using and recycling these raw materials in order to reduce this economic pressure;

27. believes that resources supporting research and development work, the financing of academic centres, studies, scientific programmes and scholarships can drive the development of this area of the economy;

28. stresses the importance of supporting the specialist ship-building sector and manufacture of equipment for ships and other sea vessels (including mining vessels), which contribute to the exploitation of offshore deposits while respecting high environmental standards;

29. draws attention to an issue which may be of particular importance for each of the proposals to develop the blue economy, namely military material leftover from the world wars and the cold war and radioactive waste dumped at sea in the past. For this reason, it is essential to draw up a methodology at European level and provide funds to make these dangerous materials safe;

Blue biotechnology

30. agrees that at present the entire area of biotechnology based on aquatic resources is poorly developed. The examples of good practice provided in the communication, namely medicines developed on the basis of aquatic organisms, provide hope that research carried out in this area may turn out to be very forward-looking;

31. believes that monitoring scientific research may contribute to the introduction of new innovative technologies which, when implemented on an industrial scale, could provide a significant boost to the economy;

Conclusions

32. stresses that development of the blue economy must be based on respect for the environment and the principles of sustainable development. However, it is also very important to ensure that environmental protection issues are taken into account in such development;

33. believes that development of key infrastructure, especially maritime ports, berthing capacity and transport networks, plays a very important role in matters relating to blue growth. Therefore, each form of support and particularly research and development programmes should be emphasised and treated strategically;

34. urges that in developing the blue economy the regional features of Europe's sea-basins be used and taken into account for the purpose of implementation;

35. calls for the Committee of the Regions, as the representative of local and regional authorities, to be asked systematically to take part in any further work on the concept of Blue Growth including on the development and establishment of the Sea Basin Strategies, which it considers to be an important tool to implement key aspects of Blue Growth.

Brussels, 31 January 2013.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Ramón Luis VALCÁRCEL SISO
