

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the integrated management of coastal zones'**

(96/C 295/15)

On 29 January 1996, the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned communication.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 21 May 1996. The rapporteur was Mr J. Bento Gonçalves.

At its 337th Plenary Session (meeting of 11 July 1996), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by 98 votes, with one abstention.

**1. Introduction**

1.1. This is a subject of considerable interest. It concerns vast areas of the European Union, both coastal (maritime) areas and remote upstream areas (inland mountain, rural and other areas) spread out over a variety of regions and third countries.

In many cases, this calls for an analysis of trans-frontier implications of the impact of problems on coastal zones, particularly environmental conservation.

An integrated approach of this type should, however, be more comprehensive, in keeping with, *inter alia*, the guidelines set out in the Commission document 'Europe 2000+ — cooperation for European territorial development' <sup>(1)</sup>.

1.2. Economic growth in coastal zones should be on a sustainable basis. Difficulties appear mainly to be in defining and harmonizing sustainable growth models given the conflicting interests involved. When these models are being defined, economic objectives — although important — should not be given any greater priority than other objectives.

The Committee supports the integrated approach set out in the Commission communication, stressing the need to boost coordination in the various areas of action between the different levels of local and regional administration in the areas concerned.

1.3. Coastal zones represent the interface between land and sea. The socio-economic systems which evolve in these zones can have an impact which is either positive (sustainability of systems; conservation of the environment and the landscape; preservation or enrichment of fish stocks; and aquaculture development) or negative (damage to the environment; water pollution;

overpopulation in certain areas; seasonal fluctuations in employment; and floods). The effects of these should be investigated thoroughly.

1.3.1. Productive structures have been set up in coastal zones, and these should now be rationalized to promote sustained development. Such is the case with tourism structures; better social, environmental and even economic use should be made of these structures, gearing them to long-term, sustained activities which could contribute to the creation of more stable jobs.

Innovative initiatives in new technologies should also be encouraged, allowing economic activities to be redirected, leading to diversification into activities which create stable employment.

1.3.2. Environmental problems in coastal zones cannot be isolated from what is happening upstream, mainly in the most depressed mountain areas through which watercourses flow, where the land is no longer being worked and the population is moving away.

1.4. The fragile nature of the ecosystems in coastal areas is highly susceptible to the damaging effects of both internal and external factors. This affects the biodiversity in the areas concerned. The Section feels that another aspect to the problem is the specific protection of these eco-systems.

1.5. Coastal zones are highly heterogeneous geographical entities which cannot be defined simply by population or surface-area criteria.

In countries which experience torrential rain, the impact on land conservation of constructing river dams, dikes and breakwaters in these areas assumes key importance; such rain causes erosion which may well alter the outline of the coast, jeopardizing not only the local population's safety but also the sustainability of local development and employment models.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ No C 133, 31. 5. 1995, p. 2; OJ No C 301, 13. 11. 1995, p. 10.

1.5.1. In some coastal zones, erosion is causing the coastline to recede, placing established urban areas at risk. The effect of storms and other disasters on the equilibrium of coastal zones should also be taken into account.

1.5.2. Another effect which must also be examined is caused by the accumulation of sediment in wetlands and coastal areas which are endogenous producers of phytoplankton and major polluting agents. Such pollution jeopardizes the use of these areas and is leading to a situation where the land is increasingly being turned into polder-like areas, the future use of which will have to be carefully planned.

The demonstration programme should also look at waste treatment, protection of the land involved, decontamination, desalination and various economic uses for the sediments. Farming could find a use for these cleaned-up areas, producing quality products in such a way that the type of farming respects the quality of the land and its environment.

## 2. Comments on the diagnostic elements

2.1. The problems have been correctly identified. The communication recognizes that advocating conservation of natural resources and the environment is a priority on two levels: 1) for cultural and natural heritage and 2) for the support needed to ensure sustainable economic and social development in communities in Europe's coastal zones.

2.2. Environmental problems in coastal areas should be tackled in such a way as to a) take into account their impact on the sea/shore areas and b) identify the impact of economic activities in these areas and in the relevant upstream and maritime areas, on the biodiversity of ecosystems and landscapes.

2.3. It is difficult to determine and measure exactly how these areas — which cover both land and sea — are used. This must, however, be done so that integrated management and planning models can be set up. In fact, as the communication states: 'The natural coastal systems and the areas in which human activities involve the use of coastal resources may therefore extend well beyond the limit of territorial waters, and several kilometres inland.' Nevertheless, because there is considerable interaction between maritime products and resources on the one hand, and the way that man exploits land resources on the other, it will be important to establish lines of demarcation between the two, which correspond as far as possible to specific biological or landscape-management units.

2.3.1. The ways that coastal areas are exploited (fisheries, fisheries- and farming-associated industries, aquaculture, farming, tourism, marinas, urban develop-

ment, heavy industry normally located near ports, oil and gas extraction and processing, port activities, etc.) affect and determine to what extent the cultural identities of these areas and the resources associated with them are preserved or damaged. An integrated, non-sectoral approach should be adopted to study this.

2.3.2. Also to be noted is the often serious impact on the environment of a) the fact that there are not enough basic sewage-treatment plants in coastal zones and upstream, b) effluent from farms, and c) the construction next to rivers and wetlands of nuclear power stations and industries producing pollutant and even toxic waste.

2.4. The Commission communication sets out a number of relevant indicators on how far coastal zones extend and the size of their populations.

2.4.1. The criteria for assessing coastal zones based on population density only 'illustrate the "coastal" and "land" character of the Member States', but give no indication about the interaction between productive activities and the landscape of coastal regions.

Nevertheless they do provide interesting indicators on how to tackle the problem of damage to, or destruction of, landscapes, reduced biodiversity and water pollution. However, it should again be stressed that variations in these indicators are greatly influenced by the kind of productive activity carried out not only by the local community, but also by other economic agents involved, even if they are not located in the area, and by port-based operations.

2.4.2. When a particular effect is observed in a landscape or environment, it is not always directly linked to its cause and it is even less certain that the effects of certain activities will show up immediately. This is particularly true of the landscapes of coastal areas where the effects of river and sea transport cause considerable damage as a result of a number of factors. Thus, interactions can be established between human activities and associated models of sustained development.

2.4.3. Moreover there are considerable differences between the Member States in terms of landscapes, ecosystem and the impact on the biodiversity of coastal regions, particularly in the countries of northern Europe; this has not been properly taken into account in the Commission's approach.

2.4.4. It would therefore be valuable to study the evaluation criteria for coastal regions in greater depth, from the dual perspective of land and sea, in the sense that they are integral components.

The importance of coastal ecosystems, in both economic and purely biological terms, demonstrates the need to think carefully about which criteria to apply so as to ensure their conservation and improve their natural environment.

2.5. The Commission is right in its comments about seasonal variations in population pressure on ecosystems and on the landscapes of coastal zones, and in its reference to the negative effect of 'intensive tourism'.

The full extent of these effects should be investigated: employment, culture, intensive urbanization, damage to ecosystems, landscapes and economics.

### 3. Insufficient coordination and concertation

#### 3.1. *Identifying existing measures*

3.1.1. As mentioned in Annexes I and II of the Commission document, there are various legal, financial and planning instruments which directly or indirectly affect coastal zones; however, there is no integrated approach to the policies to be developed. The poor results obtained in work on a European coastal map confirm this conclusion.

#### 3.2. *Insufficient coordination*

3.2.1. Isolated measures have failed to achieve their objectives and the lack of coordination in implementing them accentuates how fragile are the many facets of socio-economic development in these zones.

3.2.1.1. The success of an integrated approach to environmental problems depends on the implementation of preventative and development instruments, entailing in particular:

- better integration of environmental problems in the Structural Funds;
- mandatory assessment of the environmental impact of plans and programmes;
- adoption of more comprehensive economic assessment instruments which take into account the environment and natural resources;
- coordination of Community and national policies, taking account of spatial planning strategies designed to secure and implement sustainable development;
- achievement of partnership and coordination by mobilizing, educating and informing the public;
- involvement of the scientific community.

If these instruments are to be more effective, there must be maximum coordination and concertation between the policies and agents responsible for their application and innovative legal forms must be devised, allowing structures for permanent dialogue to be set up and encouraging consensus-based solutions to potential conflicts.

The Economic and Social Committee feels that non-Member States as well as the local and regional authorities concerned should also be involved in the study on the integrated management of coastal zones. Account should be taken of this concern in EU support programmes for non-Member States, as long as they comply with EU standards.

### 4. Demonstration programme on the integrated management of coastal zones

4.1. This programme constitutes an initial step towards applying previous Resolutions<sup>(1)</sup> and reflects a positive trend in this connection.

In addition, the demonstration programme is likely to help define integrated management strategies for coastal zones; account should be taken of the guidelines set out in point 3.2.1.1.

The poor results obtained in previous initiatives on the environment and natural resources in coastal zones warrant the importance of the programme proposed by the Commission.

4.1.1. This Opinion demonstrates that there are three key reasons which sum up and justify the EU's interest in solving the problems of coastal zones:

- a) it is impossible for each Member State, acting in isolation, to solve existing problems (natural and cultural heritage, transfer of pollutants and sediments, tourism flows, safety at sea, employment and unstructured urban growth);
- b) some EU and Member State major policy approaches and actions upset the equilibrium of coastal zones, with less coordination and thus conflict between regional, agricultural, transport, aquaculture, fisheries, energy, environmental, industry, tourism and port policies;
- c) there has to be an exchange of experience and know-how in these policy areas;
- d) the objectives have to be more comprehensive, taking account of ecological, archaeological and biological research work, thus involving the scientific community in these programmes.

<sup>(1)</sup> Resolution of 25. 2. 1992, OJ No C 59 of 6. 3. 1992 and OJ No C 135 of 18. 5. 1994.

4.1.2. The programme should ensure that the local populations are involved through their local agents and the authorities, port authorities and maritime safety authorities, as suggested by Figure 8 in the Commission document on the schematic content of the demonstration programme.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1. The Commission will have to clarify the demonstration programme more objectively with a view to defining who can carry the programme out and in which regions it is to be implemented. From the outset, all coastal regions, as identified by the Commission, should have the same opportunities for applying.

5.2. Clear selection criteria should also be established for the coastal zones eligible for the demonstration programme.

5.2.1. The ESC feels that the programme will have to cover coastal areas with diverse characteristics.

5.2.2. Experience gained in implementing projects including the 'Rance Bay agreement' will also provide relevant data, both positive and negative — including the most stubborn obstacles — for the Commission's proposals, covering:

- coordination and management;
- impact on different areas of work and projects already implemented;
- contributions from and involvement of the scientific community;
- extent of the general public's and representatives bodies' involvement;
- contributions from local, regional and central authorities;
- action by and contributions from regional business and trade unions;
- economic analysis of the cost of actions and the impact of projects on creating new business and job opportunities.

5.3. The programme should contain guidelines on publicity/information campaigns and their objectives so as to build up synergy for motivating the local populations involved.

5.4. The demonstration programme will have to provide for the development of innovative approaches to a) inter-regional cooperation involving both Member and non-Member States and b) spatial planning and urban development policy.

5.4.1. The programme should also help the European coastal zone policy to be more coherent, transparent and objective without, however, becoming less effective. It should be based on the principle of dealing with the

cause of damage to the environment and on the polluter-pays principle, integrating coastal zone environmental policies in other regional development policies.

5.4.2. In addition, the programme should boost research and innovation, bringing in new technologies, innovative activities and creating new areas of work, leading to new types of stable work.

5.4.3. In response to the multiplicity and specific nature of the activities to be carried out, which are particular to coastal zones, the programme should schedule training action at all levels: in schools and universities and at the workplace.

5.4.4. The demonstration programme may ensure that more detailed information is obtained about management and coordination, enabling national, regional and supranational data banks to be set up to provide back-up for the definition of strategies on sustainable land planning policies in coastal zones.

5.5. Finance for these actions is based on various legal instruments and financial programmes for solving coastal zone problems.

5.5.1. It is most important that these initiatives succeed, and this justifies the Council either creating a new horizontal type of financial instrument or making the legal framework for implementing the current financial instruments more flexible.

5.5.2. The Economic and Social Committee recognizes the importance of problems in EU coastal areas and also the need to adopt an innovative approach to inter-regional and cross-frontier actions. Solving the problems involves establishing a clear framework of standards, adopting a horizontal approach to financial and legal aspects.

— Greater coordination between the Commission's own services is deemed essential to the initiative's success. Setting up an *ad hoc* group might offer a valid solution.

— In order to clarify the above issues and to adapt the legal framework for deploying financial resources, it is recommended that consideration be given to publishing a regulation or directive on this specific subject.

5.6. The Economic and Social Committee welcomes and endorses the proposal set out in the Commission's communication and hopes that this initiative will be allocated adequate financial means for it to be a success.

On the basis of information provided by the implementation of the demonstration programme, the Commission should present specific proposals allowing integrated management strategies to be defined for coastal zones.

5.7. The Commission communication is however neither very ambitious nor innovative in terms of its objectives and the financial resources to be allocated thereto. The ESC urges the Commission to study its intentions in greater depth and to integrate these aims into a strategic proposal for land planning in and

management of coastal zones, also involving up-stream areas and sea areas.

Heed should be given to the benefits of cooperation with neighbouring countries which share sea areas.

Done at Brussels, 11 July 1996.

*The President  
of the Economic and Social Committee*  
Carlos FERRER

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'World Food Summit in Rome,  
13-17 November 1996'**

(96/C 295/16)

On 9 July 1996, the Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 23(3) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an Opinion on the World Food Summit in Rome, 13-17 November 1996.

The Economic and Social Committee decided to appoint Mr Kallio as Rapporteur-General for its Opinion.

At its 337th Plenary Session (meeting of 11 July 1996), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion with 95 votes in favour, no dissenting votes and seven abstentions.

Availability of food is the key issue for the future of mankind. Conditions for the production of food vary greatly in different parts of the world. The least developed countries, in particular, have experienced continuing problems in organizing food production on a sustainable basis.

On the other hand, overproduction in the industrialized countries has given a distorted picture of the global food situation. Export subsidies have enabled countries with high production costs to operate on international markets. Up to now, food security has not received enough attention. Agricultural policy has focused on short-term solutions which do not take adequate account of the need for long-term planning of food supplies or global food policy. The countries in the most difficult situation have had to rely on food aid.

With the rapid dwindling of world food stocks, global food security and its implications for the future of our planet and mankind has become a leading international political issue. The uncontrollability of population growth, together with global environmental problems,

has raised the fundamental question of how mankind can be fed in the longer term. The Economic and Social Committee considers it very important that issues related to food security will be discussed by heads of government at the World Food Summit to be held in Rome on 13-17 November 1996.

In the run-up to the Summit, the Economic and Social Committee wishes to draw attention to the following points:

1. The international community should see to it that the necessary conditions exist for maintaining global food production resources, taking due account of the suitability of different areas for different types of farming.
2. The world's arable farming resources should be managed in such a way that they retain their productive capacity, taking into account, inter alia, erosion, air and water quality and controlled land use.
3. There should be recognition in agricultural policy of the right of each country to a sufficient level of food security.