

Brussels, 16 November 2005

European Commission President Barroso to open international conference on challenges and opportunities of a new integrated Maritime Policy in the European Union

European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Joe Borg, and Commissioner for Energy, Andris Piebalgs will take part in a one-day conference on the challenges and opportunities of an integrated Maritime Policy, tomorrow in Brussels. Over 250 participants, including four ministers, will look at the issues at stake in an all-embracing EU maritime policy from the perspective of the Member States, maritime industry and non governmental organisations in economic, scientific, environmental and social terms. This is one of the first major international events organised in the run up to the publication, next spring, of a Green Paper designed to launch an extensive EU-wide debate on how best to optimise the synergies between sea-based activities and boost their economic and social potential while safeguarding the marine environment. Extensive involvement of stakeholders has been placed at the heart of this new policy as outlined in the Commission Communication entitled "Towards a future maritime policy for the Union: a European vision for the oceans and the sea", tabled last March (See [IP/05/231](#))

Outlining the need for an integrated maritime policy, President Barroso said : "I have created a portfolio on Maritime Policy in my Commission and I have asked Commissioner Borg to come forward with an integrated Maritime Policy. Ocean governance and the role of the oceans for mankind are crucial and our various sea-related policies should not conflict. We need to have greater co-operation, co-ordination and consistency. This is exactly what a Maritime Policy can deliver."

In his address Commissioner Borg will underline the opportunities offered by a strong maritime policy. He said: "We want to ensure that a Maritime Policy puts in place a decision-making process that conciliates conflicting interests in marine and coastal areas so as to create a climate that encourages financial investments and the development of sustainable economic activities. Discussions such as those that will take place tomorrow enable us to make progress in this direction."

A Maritime Policy would optimise the potential of the energy derived from the seas, Commissioner Piebalgs said. "Energy plays an important economic and social role in the maritime sector and therefore deserves specific attention".

Under the leadership of President Barroso, attention is being focused on the potential of the seas and oceans for sustainable growth in the European Union. To tap this potential, the move towards a new integrated maritime policy has become one of the strategic objectives of the Commission for 2005-2009. The first step in this direction is the preparation of a Green Paper by a Task Force of Commissioners responsible for sectoral sea-related activities and chaired by Commissioner Borg as the launch pad for extensive consultations with stakeholders on a future Maritime Policy for the Union.

In its March Communication, the Commission explained that the contribution from the sea to our livelihood and well-being is already substantial as is the potential for economic growth. The challenge is to optimise our current and future maritime activities in a sustainable manner. A holistic and integrated Maritime Policy would help release the considerable growth potential that exists while ensuring the protection of the marine environment. These objectives are fully in line with the Lisbon strategy on sustainable growth and jobs.

The move towards a holistic approach to the sea, a trend which is growing throughout the world, is, however, a new departure for the Commission. This is why it has already engaged in consultation with stakeholders from far and wide to prepare its Green Paper in a very transparent way. The cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach is crucial to the success of the process, as is the international dimension since the sustainability of all maritime activities depends on international adherence to agreed measures.

A first discussion in the Inter Group for Sustainable Development already took place at the European Parliament last September. A Member States Expert Group on Maritime Affairs, which had also its first meeting last September, has been set up. More meetings of these Groups will follow.

In addition to Joe Borg, the members of the Task Force are the Commissioners responsible for: Industry – Vice-President Verheugen; Transport - Vice-President Barrot; Environment - Commissioner Dimas; Regional Policy, Commissioner Hübner; Energy - Commissioner Piebalgs; and Research - Commissioner Potóćnik.

The sea is very important to the Union. Twenty Member States have coasts stretching to almost 70,000 km. Almost half of the EU population lives less than 50 km from the coast. The EU maritime regions of the 15 Member States already accounted for over 40% of the EU Gross National Product.

Further information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/maritime/index_en.htm

Tomorrow's Conference:

http://www.mareforum.com/new_european_maritime_policy.htm