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Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union

Why look at the need for a maritime policy?

The range of our economic and recreational activities related to the seas, oceans and coasts is increasing fast. These activities include, among others, maritime transport, fishing, aquaculture, oil and gas extraction, use of wind and tidal power, shipbuilding, tourism and marine research.

In the future, it is likely that we will exploit additional marine resources such as non-living seabed resources (minerals, gas hydrates), and living ones in relation to biotechnologies.

Ocean and seas also play an essential part in our social and cultural life.

The very scale of the oceans and seas has traditionally led people to perceive them as an inexhaustible source of wealth. Our exploitation of the oceans has in general been limited only by the degree of technological development and the force of the natural elements.

However, huge strides in technology and the growing coastal population have combined to create added pressures on available resources, particularly in relation to fishing, transport, recreational navigation and exploitation of oil and gas as well as the marine environment itself.

Measures are in place to manage individual maritime activities. This fragmentation among the different policy areas makes it difficult to apprehend the potential impact of one set of activities on other sets or potential conflict among them. There is scope therefore in looking at replacing a fragmented approach to oceans and seas management with a collaborative, integrated approach. This integrated approach is at the heart of any future maritime policy.

Where could such an integrated approach bring benefits?

If we look at the coastal areas, for example, we see increasing competition, sometimes conflict, for space. All activities have an impact on others. Let us take the building or extending of ports and marinas, the mooring of fish or shellfish cages or installations or the creation of wind parks, all of them have an impact on, for example, fisheries resources when fish nurseries are destroyed or when the quality of the water around them is adversely affected. Fishing activities may also be displaced, resulting in a shifting of fishing effort to other, sometimes more vulnerable areas. These developments may also reduce the space available for recreational activities which in turn has an economic and social impact on the region concerned.

Offshore drilling or shipping accidents, particularly in the case of oil tankers, can lead to pollution at sea or on the coasts, affecting fauna and flora for many years afterwards.

The fact that over 80% of ocean pollution results from land-based human activities clearly shows that ocean problems can no longer be viewed in isolation from those on land and in the atmosphere.

All this militate in favour of looking at all sea-related activities in an integrated manner.

Why should the European Union be involved in a such a policy?

There are many reasons why the EU is concerned by such a policy. Thus:

- The EU is surrounded by four seas and two oceans. Just as environmental, transport or security problems cross administrative borders on land, so do they at sea. These problems therefore also have to be tackled at EU level;
- Policies that impact on sea activities (fisheries, environment, transport, maritime safety and security, research, industrial policy, etc) have a strong legal base in EU Treaties and have been substantially developed in recent years;
- The protection of marine ecosystems and fisheries resources in European waters cannot be tackled by Member States individually, since fish, ecosystems and pollution ignores administrative borders;
- Maritime transport is a key link in the trade chain that is Europe's lifeblood. Recognition of the environmental costs of road transport has further raised the importance of maritime transport. This, together with the relocation of manufacturing activities outside Europe, poses a major challenge to the European economy, our ports and the maritime transport sector;
- Considerable resources are needed to develop marine science and research as well as new technologies for improved sustainable uses of the seas. Increased efforts at all EU levels are required in order to create synergies among all the players concerned;

Here are a few facts that may help to understand the importance of the sea to the Union:

- Twenty Member States are coastal States. When Romania and Bulgaria join the Union, EU borders will extend to the Black Sea.
- The EU has a coastline seven times longer than that of the US and four times that of Russia.
- The Maritime Regions of Europe account today for almost half of the EU population and Gross Domestic Product.
- The maritime surface areas under the jurisdiction of the Member States are larger than their terrestrial territory. Including the outermost regions, the maritime territory of the European Union is the world's largest.

With this in mind, the Commission, in its Strategic Objectives for 2005-2009, noted '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'.

How would a maritime policy impact on the competence of the Member States?

As in any EU policy, the principle of subsidiarity would apply. Subsidiarity means that the EU should only do what can be done better together than by Member States individually.

What is the Task Force going to do?

The Task Force will seek to identify the potential for beneficial synergies between sea-related sectoral policies as well as to examine how these could help improve competitiveness, encourage growth and boost employment in an economic, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. It will seek expertise from those with experience in the relevant areas to address this in preparing a consultation paper, or Green Paper.

When will stakeholders be involved in the process?

This exercise would be meaningless without involving stakeholders. This will be done in two steps.

The parties to be consulted in the preparation of the consultation or Green Paper, on a maritime policy will include public authorities and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with relevant expertise and elected and other representative organisations in order to identify the key issues and the various options available for dealing with them.

Following the launch of the consultation or Green Paper, consultation will be intensified and broadened to ensure the optimum involvement of stakeholders and the public at large in identifying preferred options. The result of this consultation will play an important part in mapping out the way ahead.

See also [IP/05/231](#).