

Dr. Joe BORG

Member of the European Commission
Responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs

The Goals and State of Progress of the Green Paper on an EU Maritime Policy

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Seminar on Europe of the Sea organised by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions: "The Regions, Legitimate Stakeholders in an Ambitious EU Maritime Policy"

Brest – Brittany, 17 February 2006

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues,

Friends of the Seas,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here at this seminar on Europe of the Sea organised by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions. As you all know we are in the final stages of drafting the Green Paper on a Maritime Policy for the European Union and my presence here today, provides me with a welcome opportunity to illustrate to you just how the Green Paper will contribute to the regions.

The subheading of today's seminar, "Regions at the heart of the Green Paper", is clearly appropriate. This is due to the fact that the proposed Maritime Policy, with its dual Lisbon goals to stimulate growth and jobs, is clearly of direct interest to our maritime regions.

However before I delve any further into that, I would first like to thank the CPMR for their, already-extensive, contribution to the process. We have received a number of suggestions from the CPMR at this early stage, many of which have proved invaluable for the purposes of the Green Paper. I much appreciate the support and involvement you have shown. I also augur that the emergence of a coherent Maritime Strategy for the Union, for long a goal of the CPMR, will meet with your expectations. I am convinced that my team and I can rely on your continued contribution.

We have in the last few months made considerable progress in the drafting of the Green Paper which is scheduled for adoption in the coming months. Once this is done, a one year consultation period will start.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The regions serve many of the economic interests that are connected with a maritime strategy: fisheries, ports, tourism, aquaculture, offshore wind and wave energy, shipbuilding and maritime transport. The list is long and could be made even longer, but what is clear is that the potential for economic growth and job creation that the sea and coastal areas represent is tremendous. The adoption of the Green Paper on Maritime Affairs is an invitation to all stakeholders, including yourselves, to seek out new ways to increase the economic and social benefits the seas have to offer. It is not about merely maintaining the status quo but enhancing ever further our gains from the oceans and seas while simultaneously respecting their fragility.

Allow me to turn now to the Green Paper itself. The regions that you represent have a particular interest in the formulation of this maritime policy, both at an individual level and collectively. I would like to now address the three main objectives of the CPMR, namely: 1) promoting Europe's maritime dimension, 2) tackling the disadvantages encountered by Europe's periphery and 3) exploiting the benefits of being close to the European citizen. I hope to be able to clarify what the Green Paper can do with regards to each of these three.

I will start by addressing your first objective of promoting Europe's maritime dimension and in so doing, will also look at the state of play of Europe's maritime economy as it stands today.

Europe has strong maritime traditions and we are very competitive in a vast range of areas, let me give you some examples.

Firstly, the EU merchant fleet is the world leader, both in terms of tonnage controlled and by flag. Four out of the five largest container shipping firms hail from Europe. In terms of shipbuilding we are leaders in innovative, efficient and ecological vessels.

Secondly, Europe's 68,000 kilometres of coastline are, among other things, home to some of the most attractive tourist destinations. This sector produces around 5% of the EU's GDP and has an annual growth rate of 3%.

Thirdly, there are around 1,200 ports in Europe, some of them ranking among the largest in the world, which provide ship-owners and seafarers with high quality ancillary services.

This, however, is not enough. The European Commission's Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs requires us to do more in order to realise our full potential. It is worth remembering that the Lisbon strategy does not blindly advocate growth and jobs alone, but also calls for actions to be taken within a sustainable context.

Hence, in drafting the Green Paper we have been confronted with the challenge of finding the balance between economic growth and the exploitation of our seas on the one hand, and preservation of the ocean environment on the other. Without a healthy and sustainable marine environment, any economic benefits we can derive from the oceans will be short-lived. It is therefore crucial that we preserve this resource-base and improve the EU's long term competitiveness in a sustainable way. Not only will this preserve our industries that rely on the seas, it will also enable future generations to enjoy the seas to the extent we have.

Two important steps, taken by the Commission, in securing the long term viability of the oceans are: the Maritime Security Package and the Thematic Strategy for the Marine Environment. The former is directly aimed at preventing accidental pollution, whereas the latter introduces the principle of ecosystem-based spatial planning. Some of its elements are: the designation of marine protected areas, the transition to sustainable levels of fishing and the restoration over time of the ecological health of our seas. Decisions to be taken will have to be based on the best scientific knowledge available.

As to the second of your three objectives; which is addressing the disadvantages encountered by Europe's periphery, the Green Paper will seek to stimulate discussion on ways to overcome these obstacles.

We know that close to half of the EU's population live within 50 km of the coast, yet the GDP per capita in many of these regions, is still only about 75% of the EU average. Coastal regions have huge potential for growth and my belief is that by concentrating on the Lisbon goals of growth and jobs, we have a very good chance to bring that percentage up.

Until recently, the littoral zone was predominantly occupied by communities who made their living from the seas. However, social and economic conditions have changed to such an extent that a large percentage of the EU's population currently residing in coastal areas, is there for reasons other than economic ones. These reasons may revolve around well-being or retirement, or simply for a change from city life. Whatever the reason, this is a relatively new phenomenon that has to be taken into account when assessing the regions' demographic shifts and consequent potential in terms of growth, safety and environmental protection.

Like a knife, this challenge can cut both ways. On the one hand, it creates new sources of income. On the other hand it increases the physical pressure on the coastal regions, often under-dimensioned in terms of physical and administrative infrastructure. One important strategy to be considered in this area therefore is Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

However aside from management, important decisions will also have to be made as to how the EU structural funds can be best utilised. Until now, the funds allocated to coastal regions have been considerable and have already had significant effects. For example, the European Regional Development Fund alone has provided 2

billion euros for port development in the period 2000-2006. The Green Paper will encourage the consultation between Member States on how community funds are distributed among different maritime projects. Accordingly the EIB's role might also be revised. It is possible that the maritime policy, as suggested in the Green Paper, will enable the continuation of funding at, and possibly beyond, current levels.

Coastal tourism is of great importance to the regions in terms of job creation. The Green Paper pays due attention to this subject. In line with the topographical developments I mentioned earlier, the same development goes for tourism. We can see a trend in the changing, or I should say, diversified, way that tourism is developing, from the traditional 'sea and sun' concept, to other more demanding and varied types of recreation. The relationship between the traditional use of the sea, and the new uses that are emerging, is also addressed in the Green Paper. An example of this is the relationship between anglers and fishermen.

Talking about funds and maritime tourism gives you an idea of what we aim to achieve with the Green Paper in terms of benefiting Europe's periphery, but this will however not be made possible without the support from you at a regional level, you will take centre stage in bringing this project safely to harbour. You will yourselves take many decisions, and will implement many of the decisions taken at other levels. With regards to implementation, I know that your track record is second to none, therefore I feel confident when saying that in developing an integrated maritime policy, I can count on you.

Not long ago President Barroso said: "we often speak of the importance of innovation on the private sector, but innovation in government has become equally important if we are to deliver on our goals". We have tried to bear this in mind throughout the drafting of the Green Paper, and are confident that the innovative approach we have chosen, as well as the proposals we make, will enable and help the business community to seize and exploit the prospects arising within the maritime sphere.

This is essentially the question of governance, and in particular local governance. The Green Paper will seek to stimulate a discussion on the sensitive and difficult questions we face in this regard, namely about the correct level of implementation, the responsibilities of the different strata of decision-making and finally the question of who should take the lead.

Now I will turn to your third and final objective, that of exploring the benefits of being close to the European citizen. The CPMR and other similar organisations are already well-placed to reach coastal communities directly. This will become evermore crucial in the consultation phase following the publication of the Green Paper.

The Green Paper will focus on governance and decision-making at a Community level as well as at an international and Member State level.

This cannot be done in a vacuum and therefore, our formulation of a maritime policy for the EU will require the cooperation of other international bodies such as the United Nations, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). At a Member States level, the co-ordination of coastal activities will also be necessary and we have identified the need to increase communication among Member States especially with regards to the following activities; fisheries inspection, pollution control, search and rescue, spatial control such as shipping routes and border control with respect to illegal immigration, smuggling and trafficking. This will obviously have an impact which will be felt in the maritime regions of Europe and it is here that your close involvement in this process becomes ever more crucial.

Despite the many similarities in the maritime regions with regards to the formulation of our maritime policy, we are not aiming for a “one size fits all” approach, as the solutions are clearly not the same for all coastal areas. This brings me to the oft-quoted principle of subsidiarity, which means that as many decisions as possible will be taken at local level, leaving action to the European level only where it can add value. I would also like to encourage other EU institutions such as the Council and the European Parliament to consider taking a similar inter-sectoral approach, before taking decisions relating to the sea.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have briefly touched upon several of the issues before us. As you can see, the future Green paper seeks to stimulate a discussion on a variety of subjects which hold much promise for a significant contribution from the regions.

Given that our maritime heritage is deeply rooted in our traditions, values and culture, it is in our interest at each and every level of society to seek to understand, and then to develop this tradition. Failing that, Europe’s maritime identity could well fade and disappear altogether. We have a duty to educate and inform Europeans, and especially those *not* living in the maritime regions, of the vital role the seas play in our economy and our future.

In your case, this is even more so. I am certain that your engagement and dedication will make an enormous difference to our efforts to strengthening a vision of Europe of the Sea.

I look forward to keeping in close contact with you and to engaging in a frank exchange of ideas, both today and in the future.

Thank you.