

**North Sea Commission
Annual Seminar for Politicians
Zuiderduin Hotel, Egmond aan Zee, The Netherlands
Wednesday 24th June**

Do we need a new Strategic Vision for the North Sea?

The Annual Seminar was well attended by politicians and strategy officers from around the North Sea.

The event comprised a combination of discussion group and feedback sessions, with presentations on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (by Anders Carlberg, Region Västra Götaland) and the current North Sea strategic context (by Carsten Westerholt, Interreg North Sea Programme). The seminar was hosted by Audrey Findlay and Viv Collie.

The seminar was constructed in two parts. The first part required an assessment of existing strategic documents for the North Sea Region. The second part of the seminar addressed recent and future changes in the Region, and whether a new strategic vision was required for the area.

Key outcomes from the discussions included:

**Question 1: Is NorVision still valid?
Should anything be added or removed?**

The majority of discussion groups agreed that NorVision (produced in 2000) still has value and could be seen as the baseline for a strategy, but it needs to be updated and rebalanced. NorVision was seen to reflect an old perspective of our way of life. The document now needs to reflect current trends and new challenges.

Suggestions for change included:

- The need to change the differentiations made between urban and rural areas
- The need for the term 'sustainability' to be explained and described
- The need for more integration between the various priorities
- The need for NorVision to reflect the thematic areas and cross sectoral working of the Interreg Programme
- The need to focus on the area's human resources – its knowledge, skills and research
- The need for more focussed goals and concrete activities
- The for the use of clearer and more contemporary language

There was discussion on the use of the term 'spatial planning' for previous land-based strategies and, more recently, for marine areas. It was agreed that 'spatial planning' could still be useful as a tool.

Question 2: Is the Interreg IIIB North Sea Programme Synthesis Report still valid? Should anything be added or removed?

The discussion groups were almost evenly divided on whether the Synthesis Report (produced in 2005) is still valid.

The groups stated that:

- Some key current topics were missing (eg entrepreneurship, employment, migration), and some existing topics could be reconsidered (eg 'Coastal Water Management' should be 'Water Management' related to the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive – and linked to the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive)
- There needed to be more clarity on environmental and marine issues
- There was a need to identify future strategic actions requiring shared (and courageous) political positions around the North Sea
- There was a need to identify resources and actions required for implementation

The groups discussed and agreed that Interreg should be a strategy tool – not the force that determines future strategy. A North Sea Strategy should influence future Interreg programmes.

Question 3: Do we need a new Strategic Vision for the North Sea Region?

The discussion groups were in favour of developing a new vision and strategy for the North Sea Region. It was recognised that it is not easy to develop a long term vision. It was important, however, that the North Sea Commission could help create the vision ('paint the picture'), and develop the strategy required to achieve it.

A new North Sea strategy would help achieve:

- Greater visibility for the region in Europe
- Strategic consensus for the area
- Focus on key issues
- Clear responsibilities
- Commitment on implementation
- Possible influence on the re-distribution of Regional and Structural funds after 2013

A new North Sea strategy could use some elements of NorVision and develop them to cover the period 2013–2030. Any new document, however, must be:

- Professional
- Comprehensive
- Convincing
- Concise
- Deliverable – with a rolling programme for implementation

The discussion groups agreed that:

- Now is the time for action (eg there is a need to influence future Interreg Programmes, the future review of the Lisbon Strategy, energy security issues, climate change issues, the economic recession)
- NorVision could be used as a baseline for developing a new vision and strategy for the North Sea
- The North Sea Commission should play a lead role in the process of creating a new strategy
- The NSC should use its existing links and assist the Committee of the Regions on the work it has started on a North Sea Strategy as part of this process
- Initial research is required to develop ideas and further justification for a new North Sea strategy
- There would be benefits for the North Sea Commission if a paper on the need for a North Sea Strategy could be taken to the Europe Commission for support
- There is a need to lobby for EU, national, regional and stakeholder support to implement a future North Sea Strategy
- There should be a 'bottom up' approach to developing a new strategy. Consideration should be given to developing a North Sea stakeholder conference and Forum – based on the recent Baltic Sea experience
- Consideration should be given to the possibility of developing an Interreg project that could help support the strategic development process
- A small group of North Sea Commission politicians (with practitioner assistance) should consider the most appropriate way of progressing this project – and report its recommendations to the North Sea Commission Executive Committee meeting later this year

Conclusion:

The North Sea Region is a mature macro-region with active co-operation and trade links. It needs a relevant coherent strategy to influence and implement change in the future.

It was agreed that the initial steps in the process of developing a new North Sea Strategy would be discussed and agreed at the North Sea Commission Executive Committee meeting on Friday the 26th of June 2009.

Viv Collie
June 2009