

A Strategy for the North Sea



Version 1 October 2009

Introduction

The North Sea region is a major economic entity in Europe which has great potential to contribute to the achievement of the European Union's Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas. In order to develop this potential, the 54 regions of the North Sea Commission (NSC) would like the European Union to launch a strategy for our region – the North Sea Region.

Europe needs a North Sea Strategy!

A **North Sea Strategy** is needed because a better co-ordination of the programmes, initiatives and EU Directives will lead to more efficient co-operation and harmonised policies, as well as stimulating the sustainable development of the North Sea Region. There is a need for consensus when it comes to managing shared space, such as the North Sea. Greater co-ordination of activities and further investment into the North Sea Region could help solve challenges for the entire European Union such as climate change and the global economic crisis. The process of developing a Baltic Sea Strategy has illustrated how efficient and transparent regional co-operation can help to support balanced regional development. Learning from this example, but focusing on our own challenges, it is anticipated that a North Sea Strategy could make a real difference to the North Sea Region.

Key Challenges

1) Managing Maritime Space

The North Sea is a **very complex and open marine ecosystem**, providing a nursery for fish and a migratory and wintering area for many species of birds. It is also one of the most heavily-used seas, supporting fishing, shipping, trade, energy, sand mining, defence and recreation. Increasing economic activity in the sea, such as growing shipping traffic and the development of offshore wind farms, is leading to more and more competition between users of the sea.

The need for **Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and comprehensive resource management** is therefore urgent. Harmonised policies would lead to more effective use of space and the available resources. The challenge for the North Sea is to fully exploit the sea without affecting the fragile ecosystem, while also preserving the economic and socio-economic importance of fisheries to our region. Moreover, the revision of the Common Fisheries Policy offers a real possibility to include MSP in the sustainable management of the maritime resources in the North Sea.

2) Increasing Accessibility and Attractiveness

As one of the busiest sea basins of the world with some 260,000 ship movements per year (and estimated to grow by 14-31% in the coming years), the North Sea is a prime location for maritime pilot projects with global implications to improve **environmental and safety standards of maritime transport and the promotion of Short Sea Shipping**. Particular concerns exist regarding the impacts of offshore energy infrastructure, such as cables, pipelines, wind and CO2 sites, on safe shipping and the ecosystem. The North Sea, with its network of ports and commercial shipping, as well as public agencies operating in national contexts, is an ideal testing ground for solutions which can be applied world-wide through collaboration with shipping institutes such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO). More understanding of the risks and an improvement of safety in the North Sea will become more and more important given the increasing pressure on space. Moreover, the full implementation of the European Maritime Space without Barriers and the Maritime Transport Strategy for 2018 can make the 'Motorways of the Sea' a reality and exploit the potential of intra-European Short Sea Shipping.

North Sea ports are important hubs for the export/import of goods and provide access to business locations and Europe's hinterland, stimulating **economic development** in our region. Further

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globalisation of the economy and an increase in the global population is likely to increase traffic. It is essential to ensure free passage in the North Sea and a good flow to the hinterland. As such, improvements must be made to multi-modal logistics chains to facilitate more and better trans-European movement of people and goods. It is also important that shipping becomes more sustainable and environmentally-friendly so that it remains a reliable and cost effective mode of transport.

The North Sea Region must be equipped to respond to the **global economic crisis** to allow our industries and communities to prosper. The fisheries and shipping sectors have been affected by decreasing demand for goods and services, putting jobs at risk. It is important that these sectors can emerge from the crisis stronger and more resilient than before. The potential of emerging sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, research and innovation should also be nurtured through a North Sea Strategy. Through increasing the diversity and knowledge-base of our economy, the North Sea Region can better compete globally.

3) Tackling Climate Change

One of the main challenges facing the North Sea Region is **climate change**, with adaptation and mitigation measures required. Increased precipitation and flooding in the North, coupled with increased temperatures and aridity in the South will cause significant changes to both physical and human geography in Europe. Exhaustion of fossil fuels and the resulting increase in fuel prices will be another challenge for the region. With challenges come opportunities, and a North Sea Strategy can position the North Sea Region to adapt to a new climate and build industries around this. The North Sea Region could be an invaluable asset to Europe as a whole through contributing strongly to securing domestic energy supply and recreational tourism activities.

Taking advantage of a natural shift towards **renewable energy** as fossil resources become depleted, the North Sea region is ideal for large-scale wind, wave and tidal energy projects given its natural assets and technological expertise. The region could therefore substantially contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases and other pollutants. Depleted oil and gas fields may also have the potential to be used to store greenhouse gases. A co-ordinated approach in the North Sea Region in response to the growth and demand for renewable energy could lead to economies of scale, making renewable energy more accessible to all of Europe. The cost of renewable energy technologies remains high and a joint strategy could boost their development and competitiveness. A joined-up and cross-sectoral approach could help to ensure that developments such as wind parks can complement and enhance, rather than threaten other maritime activities.

How are we going to achieve this?

The foreseen participants in the development of a North Sea Strategy are a wide range of stakeholders, co-ordinated by the **North Sea Commission** in the first instance. The North Sea Commission was founded in 1989 to facilitate and enhance partnerships between regions which manage the challenges and opportunities presented by the North Sea. Furthermore, to promote the North Sea Basin as a major economic entity within Europe, by encouraging joint development initiatives and political lobbying at the European level. The North Sea Commission plans to support the development of the strategy by co-ordinating stakeholder input and setting out principles for a European Union strategy.

Timeline

