

## **Briefing Paper – North Sea Strategy**

### **Macro-regional strategy development**

The North Sea Strategy is an initiative which has been proposed by the North Sea Commission and the Committee of the Regions North Sea Intergroup in the context of the development of a number of macro-regional strategies at a European level. Macro-regional strategies can be considered as a new type of EU cooperation. The first strategy being the Baltic Sea Strategy adopted by the Commission in June 2008, followed closely by calls for the development of a Danube Basin and Mediterranean Sea strategies.

Such strategies provide the framework for an integrated approach to policy delivery and as such have a role to play in delivering a number of European, national and regional policies. Key European policies affected and central to macro-regional strategies include territorial cohesion (the interest of DG Regio) as well as the Maritime policy (the remit of DG Mare). Other policy areas which are central to macro-regional strategies include climate change, transport and energy. Macro-regional strategies have been described as “a major step forward for the EU’s regional policy” by Regional Policy Commissioner Pawel Samecki ahead of a Ministerial conference in Stockholm on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September 2009. At this meeting, the 27 member states came together to discuss the prospect of further macro-regional strategies following the Baltic lead and whether this could become a model for EU cooperation in other regions.

The development of Macro-regional strategies fits with the idea of place based policy making and has implications for the post 2013 budget of the European Union as well as in the way it might be delivered.

Macro regional strategies are essentially an initiative towards more effective policy making and more efficient use of existent resources rather than producing new funds and instruments. It is a means by which a dialogue and subsequent action plan is created around areas with common features about their challenges and opportunities and how these can most effectively be addressed in a coordinated way. The strategy is intended to facilitate not impose better ways of addressing policies.

### **What will a North Sea Strategy involve?**

Different strategies across Europe will have different objectives, it is recognised that different areas of Europe have different needs which would therefore result in quite different macro-regional strategy objectives. In some areas there will be specific and visible opportunities or problems which urgently require a joint approach in order to be more effective, this was particularly the case for example within the Baltic Sea Strategy in addressing environmental challenges. In other cases there may not be such an obvious issue or purpose for a strategy but regions may feel such a commonly produced strategy will leave them better equipped to compete in the global market place and address issues that may not otherwise be tackled effectively. Stakeholders across the North Sea are invited to collectively identify; in which areas and how by working together we might address key market failures or an indispensable need?

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region brings together eight Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland), who have joined forces to tackle specific challenges in the area, in particular environmental problems resulting from the high pollution levels in the Sea. Other aims include

strengthening the competitiveness of the regional economy, with a focus on research and innovation, developing energy and transport links, as well as improving the region's security, especially in the maritime field. The Strategy contains a detailed action plan, comprised of 80 flagship projects in 15 priority areas, each under the responsibility of a "lead country" or other partners (such as federations of farmers, Innovation Centres, Nordic Council of Ministers etc).

### **Why do we need a North Sea Strategy?**

It is of course necessary to identify where the benefits are in working collectively which outweigh any associated costs. Over all, coordination would only be suggested where we would collectively benefit from better results than those achieved by individual regional or national initiatives. New and innovative ways of working could potentially result in opportunities for specialisation, cooperation and greater efficiencies.

Stakeholders are invited to consider where the value may be in a North Sea Strategy looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which are common to this macro-region. An example that springs to mind which could benefit all our regions could be the creation of an integrated North Sea energy grid to transfer energy between areas located around the North Sea. Other obvious policy areas include addressing the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and flooding, more effectively protecting the environmental sustainability of our seas and ecosystems, ensuring we have comprehensive and coherent data available across member states to enable the most effective policy decisions (particularly in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy and Integrated Coastal Zone Management), ensuring Europe's sustainable energy supply and sustaining and developing Europe's competitive advantage in the world in the field of R&D and innovation.

An integrative approach is key to this macro-regional strategy concept; the key question is how can existing resources, legislation and structures be better used for the benefit of all within the North Sea Region? The fundamental purpose of these strategies is to add value by coordinating policies and funding in order to address challenges which can not be addressed at the level of the region or member state alone in the most effective way.

### **Which geographic area will the strategy cover?**

A macro-region does not have fixed boundaries but rather remains flexible allowing common action on specific identified common features or challenges. The common features or challenges is the important aspect which provides the consistency, this could be geographical, cultural, economic or other.

Within a European context a macro-region must be credible and will cover several regions in several countries. It is important to indicate different parts of Europe can be located within more than one macro-regions.

### **Resources required in the development and implementation of such a strategy?**

The strategy success relies on results. There will be a need to explain and justify the selection of actions and then go on to select and sequence actions. The strategic document would act as a catalyst for the leverage of additional resources within member states and regions. A successful strategy is dependant on commitment of

participating stakeholders which in turn is dependent on the value accorded to the process and actions prioritised. Time and effort will be required to identify and reach agreement on prioritised areas.

**What could the relation to strategy, policy and European funding mechanisms be?**

The development of a macro-regional approach forms part of a wider reflection on the future EU Cohesion Policy post-2013. The question of whether macro-regions could become an important medium for programming and delivering EU funding is a key issue. Cohesion policy funding could support macro-regional strategies and funding could be available on a competitive basis based on how well the action supports the strategy.

**Early thoughts on the areas in which macro-regional strategies could provide added value to policy delivery?**

- Climate change – coordinated action in relation to rising sea levels, increased precipitation, flooding and increased temperatures
- Development a North Sea Grid – supporting renewable energy production and security of energy supply
- Maritime research and data collection – consistent and comprehensive information on which to base policy decisions particularly in relation to the Common Fisheries Policy, maritime safety, ICZM
- Develop the economic potential of the North Sea Region through new industries and jobs – support the restructuring of economies and development of supply chains
- Support excellence in relation to renewable energy production, supply and technologies
- Safe use of our seas – As the busiest sea region there is a need to balance and manage the increased use of maritime space.
- Demographic change
- Enhanced digital infrastructure coverage to increase competitiveness

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