

REPORT TO NSC STRATEGIC COMMITTEE

IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSULTANCY EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The Executive Committee agreed at their meeting in Cambridge on 2 November 2007 to commission a consultancy exercise examining the successes of the organisation and how to promote these. IDEAction and Vivid were jointly appointed to carry out this exercise. A series of interviews with past and present North Sea Commission members were carried out and the findings summarised in a report, "Promoting the Success of the North Sea Commission", which was presented to the NSC Annual Business Meeting in Herring on 13 June 2009. The report identified three main benefits of NSC membership: **Influencing, Projects and Learning.**

More detailed recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the NSC were set out in the accompanying "North Sea Commission: Ideas for Improvement," report which was also presented to the Annual Business Meeting. The Executive Committee met following the Annual Business Meeting and discussed how best to implement the recommendations set out in this report. The Committee decided that an implementation report should be prepared and submitted to the Strategic Committee for their consideration.

Over all aims and objectives

In order to put this work into a wider context, this paper should also state the over all aims and objectives which the "Promoting the Success of the North Sea Commission report" is intended to achieve, e.g:

- Raising the profile of the NSC
- Increasing the influence of the NSC towards the EU, national governments, the CPMR and other stakeholders
- Recruiting more members
- More active members

Purpose of Report

This report aims to put forward concrete actions to the Strategic Committee in order to implement the findings of the consultancy exercise. These are grouped around three main headings:

- 1) The North Sea Brand
- 2) Ways of Working
- 3) A Corporate/Strategic Approach

The Strategic Committee are asked to consider the recommendations of this report and take these forward to the Executive Committee.

1) The North Sea Brand

One of the core aims of the consultancy exercise was to establish means of promoting the success of the North Sea Commission. The “Promoting the Success of the North Sea Commission” report made five recommendations in this field. These recommendations are set out below, followed by more concrete proposals setting out how the NSC could implement the findings.

*a. Recognising the three main types of benefits provided by the NSC (influencing, projects and learning) and featuring these in a consistent way to **develop a “brand image” for the commission** and a framework for organising future work.*

Private organisations spend millions of euros developing successful brand images which portray their companies in a positive light to consumers. In recent years, many public sector organisations have set out to achieve the same results. For example, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire work together on a joint brand – Aberdeen City and Shire – with the aim of raising the profile of the area nationally and internationally.

In order for a successful North Sea Commission brand to be developed, professional marketing expertise is required. It may be possible to identify experts from within NSC Member Regions who can undertake this exercise on behalf of the NSC. Alternatively, external experts could be identified and commissioned to develop the NSC brand. The interview materials collated for the consultancy exercise could be made available as a resource to the marketing experts.

Recommendation 1: Professional marketing experts (internal or external) are identified and commissioned to develop the North Sea Commission brand.

*b. **Production of publicity material** making use of the interview responses gathered during this project, for use by members and the Secretariat to raise awareness of the benefits of NSC membership.*

Key components of a brand are recognisable symbols which convey simple, but effective messages about the organisation in question. Once the NSC brand is developed, it is important to publicise it at appropriate opportunities. As such, publicity material which promotes the NSC brand should be produced. This exercise could be undertaken either as part of or after the exercise set out in Recommendation 1. Potential examples of publicity materials could include:

i) Updated templates for NSC reports and presentations. In particular, it would be useful for a standard North Sea Commission presentation to be developed, which could be available to all members. This presentation could set out the key messages and benefits of the NSC and be adapted to suit different events and audiences. The presentation should also make use of quotes from the interviews made in conjunction with the report.

ii) The introduction of a regular North Sea Commission newsletter, similar to the CPMR's 'Tenor'. This could be done electronically and therefore be easily circulated among and beyond NSC participants, promoting the ongoing work and achievements of the organisation. This could perhaps be produced after each Executive Committee meeting and as far as feasible structured to convey different activities under 'influencing, projects and learning' headings.

iii) Updated banners and leaflets which convey the key messages of the NSC brand could be produced. These would then be available for use at NSC events and other promotional opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Publicity materials, including templates, presentations, banners, leaflets and a newsletter are updated/produced, based on the NSC brand.

*c. Making use of the material from the project in the **redevelopment of the NSC website** to give a fuller presentation of the benefits of membership.*

The Executive Committee has already agreed that the NSC website is updated in co-operation with the BSC. As such, now is a good opportunity to review the structure and contents of the website. A survey of NSC members, asking them about the strengths and weaknesses of the existing website, could be a good basis upon which to build the new website.

The benefits of membership could be highlighted more clearly on the website through a more detailed overview of the NSC on the homepage (conveying the key messages of the NSC brand). This could be supported by a separate section on the outcomes of the consultancy exercise and a link to the standard North Sea Commission presentation set out in Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 3: A members' survey of the current website is undertaken to guide the development of the revised NSC website.

Recommendation 4: The NSC brand should be supported through the website through strengthening the homepage and developing separate sections on the outcomes of the consultancy exercise and a link to the NSC corporate presentation.

*d. Drawing on the interview material to give **on-line profiles of the Executive Committee members and thematic advisers, incl., their responsibilities and experience.***

Again, as part of the redevelopment of the NSC website, it may be appropriate to include profiles on NSC Executive Committee members. This would have a number of benefits. Firstly, it would give less active or non-members a greater insight into the work and structures of the NSC. Secondly, it would help less active members to get to know the Executive Committee members better. Thirdly, this section could assist Executive Committee members in promoting their involvement in the NSC within their own authorities, demonstrating the value of participation and membership. Finally, this section could help demonstrate the diversity of the Executive Committee through highlighting the different areas of expertise and interests of each member.

It should also be considered to give on-lines profiles of thematic group chairs and vice-chairs not being regular members of the Executive, as well as of the thematic advisers. This also due to the important role of the advisers in producing the “learning” and “project” benefits.

Recommendation 5: A section of profiles on NSC Executive Committee members is included in the revised website.

*e. Ensuring that the opportunities for local publicity presented by NSC meetings are maximised by **inviting local politicians and, where appropriate, community representatives and the media, to meet the NSC group.***

NSC meetings can provide a useful focus for publicity of the work of the organisation, both internally and externally. Highlighting the work of the NSC to local politicians, groups and the media can be achieved through adapting meeting agendas to include time for networking within the host area.

At a wider level, a more strategic approach to publicising the NSC’s work could be beneficial. Again, this could be based around existing meeting structures through the development of an NSC Communications Strategy. This Strategy should set out rules and procedures for publicising the work of the NSC, as well as providing background materials which convey the key messages of the NSC brand.

For example, guidelines on press releases could be established which specify that press releases are issued as a matter of course following each NSC meeting. These could be issued centrally by the NSC Secretariat to a mailing list of press contacts in the North Sea area. This mailing list could be regularly updated by NSC members sending their own contacts to the Secretariat. These press releases could also be issued to appropriate organisations and contacts in the EU institutions to raise the profile of the organisation’s work.

Recommendation 6: The structure of NSC meetings should be examined to identify means of incorporating networking sessions with local Politicians, groups and media contacts in the hosting regions.

Recommendation 7: A North Sea Commission Communications Strategy, setting out protocols for publicising the organisation, is developed.

2) Ways of Working

i) Reviewing the ways of working to see what steps could be taken to make it easier for politicians to take part, including those whose English is not so strong.

Facilitating political participation would be a task for the thematic advisers as well as for assisting officers in the various regions. Several ways of facilitating political participation could be conceived:

- Promotion of NSC activities – making the NSC more known among regional politicians

Integrating local and regional politicians in NSC events (e.g ExComs, thematic meetings etc). Representatives of hosting regions should be invited to and make presentations at NSC events as a matter of routine. In this way the “locals” would learn more about the NSC, and the Ex Com members, Chairs and Advisers would learn more about the situation on the ground in NSC member regions

National members of the Executive should organise road shows promoting the NSC towards potential new member regions & other stakeholders in their country.

- Joint organisation of thematic meetings

The Executive has on numerous occasions called for more political involvement in the thematic groups, and the groups have been encouraged to facilitate such involvement through being more focused and politically oriented in their activities. One practical way of achieving this would be to introduce a routine whereby all thematic groups Chairs, Vice-chairs and Advisers meet at the same time and place in conjunction with Executive meetings, for instance in the afternoon of the day before. The meetings should be concluded by a joint session to discuss joint activities and to sort out issues to avoid double work. . Such an arrangement would enable the Executive members without any positions in the groups to follow the work of the groups. This model is thus likely to improve the thematic basis for the subsequent Executive meeting, and would also facilitate a more holistic approach to NSC policy making as required by the Lisbon, Gothenburg and Maritime policy agendas.

At the Advisers meeting 8-9 September 2008 the Secretariat and Advisers proposes for all thematic groups to meet on the Tuesday before the Annual Conference starts at the venue for the conference, to be able to strengthen the NSC family feeling of the groups and to be able to discuss joint issues.

- Good and timely preparation of meetings

Papers for each meeting should be issued at least two weeks' in advance so that politicians can be fully briefed and obtain specialist advice. This would enable greater consideration to be given to important political papers by politicians.

Long & complicated papers should always be accompanied by good summaries and comments. Such summaries would help to bring focus to the main points of each report both before and during the meeting. Additional background information to support the findings of the reports would be available in the main report.

- More focussed thematic group work plans

The Executive Committee must give the thematic groups clear political priorities, and the thematic groups must find how they can help to meet the political priorities in their work plans.

The thematic groups have long since been requested to concentrate on fewer issues, preferably focusing more on policy issues. This would in itself facilitate participation from politicians without any position or office in the NSC.

- Educational activities (language and substance)

Each national member of the Ex Com (in non English-speaking countries) should organise a survey among "NSC-relevant" politicians in their respective countries to map the need for language training in relation to NSC activities, and to the degree necessary organise tailored language training courses in EU- and regional development-related English style.

It could also be considered to draft an introductory package for new politicians in the NSC, informing about the organisation, activities and relevant EU institutions and policies.

ii) Using the new NSC website as a "knowledge exchange" for the NSC including a system of alerts, sharing of tools, techniques and reference materials etc.

Much more realtime information on what's important at the

moment and issues the organisation should deal with should be provided. As the NSC Executive only meets 3 or 4 times such a method of “knowledge exchange” could be a way boosting momentum and general “preparedness” in the organisation.

- Wiki/blog aspects for the new NSC website should be investigated in the revamp of the website. This would enable NSC members to communicate with each other more readily between meetings. It could also help members who do not participate in the Ex Com or Thematic Groups to get to know other, more active, members

iii) Adopting the “Benefits Delivery System” model as a tool for assessing the performance of the NSC.

- Follow through work to its conclusion

This could be achieved in part through identifying outputs to be achieved by NSC actions, assigning responsibility for their achievement and monitor this. Responsibility for undertaking these actions could be assigned to an appointed person or the Strategic/Executive Committee. The aim of this suggestion is to encourage individuals to take greater ownership of pieces of NSC work and would also help to demonstrate the benefits of NSC membership by following work to its conclusion and demonstrating concrete outputs.

- Communications Strategy

The implementation of a Communications strategy to improve publicity of NSC work should be investigated as well. This strategy would set out procedures and guidance for communicating with the media on NSC activities. The resultant press coverage could then be monitored through appropriate subscription services

iv) Agreeing arrangements to review the structure and the remit of the thematic groups.

Such arrangements could be defined in terms of:

- A review schedule - that a review should be carried out as a routine once a year irrespective of the items below
- Performance indicators (both attendance, activities and results). If the performance drops on one or several indicators the Executive should initiate a review
- Changes in "external" environments such as in the CPMR, the North Sea Programme and in EU policy. A review should be initiated if important changes take place in one of these environments.

The debate about the shape of the Thematic Groups and Ad Hoc Groups has taken up a lot of discussion at the NSC over the past couple of years. Changes were made in 2006 to reduce the number of Thematic Groups to five and keep the option of Ad Hoc Groups to work on important subjects such as the Maritime Policy. According to the consultancy report from Vivid, the Groups are producing good work, but there are still many interviewees who feel that the structure is not working as well as it should.

Despite of the re-structuring implemented in 2006, there are still many interfaces, overlaps and grey zones between the groups. This is probably more or less unavoidable but the challenge is to manage the situation in a manner avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts, and at the same time exploiting synergies and mutual learning as far as possible.

We believe that the thematic group structure and remit should be reviewed continuously in light of “internal” (membership, resources, available personnel etc) and external developments (e.g EU policy agenda of relevance for the NSC).

The following main options and approaches are considered to be relevant in this respect:

- Closer coordination of thematic group Work Plans

This could take the form of implementing the same overall work plan adopted by the Executive Committee (see Corporate approach), working parallel on some major policy themes such as maritime policy, energy & climate change, innovation and cohesion.

Try to establish joint project(s) to meet the challenges of the ExCom?

- Joint meetings and seminars

See proposal for organising joint thematic meetings in conjunction with Executive meetings.

The group could also cooperate on organising major conferences on the overall policy themes mentioned under the first bullet.

Other proposals for improving the way of working

- Organise Road shows in selected regions to promote the work of the NSC

Based on the “streamlined” marketing material mentioned under section 1 of this paper, one should consider to embark on “road shows” presenting the NSC in less active member countries (e.g Germany and France) and regions. The road show teams should be composed according to the special characteristics of the destination in question, and according to availability of relevant personnel. The purpose of such an exercise would be to boost recruitment of new members and the level of commitment on the part of existing members.

- Assign national members of the Executive with specific responsibilities

Today, national members of the Executive don't have any specific responsibilities in the organisation, unless they are also Chairs or Vice Chairs in the thematic groups.

It is suggested that the national members should be assigned with a responsibility of reporting regularly about NSC-relevant developments in their respective countries. This would also serve to improve the knowledge base about our own members.

Besides, it would also be a natural task for the national members to build awareness of the NSC and strengthen relations with the national governments of their respective countries. This task should naturally be a part of their reporting back to the Executive.

Furthermore, national members of the Executive could also be assigned with a responsibility of leading ad hoc-groups and coordinating various investigations and studies, for instance on organisational matters.

National members could report on current NSC related issues to the ExCom at each meeting, to let the other members know what is happening in each country and to exchange views on current issues.

- Long term rotation system for filling NSC positions and offices

It is a fact that it's sometimes difficult to fill the positions of political chairman and vice chairs, and thematic advisers. In order to facilitate smooth transition and recruitment one could set up a kind of long term rotation system so that each country knows in that particular year they have to provide political chairs and advisers for this and that group.

- The home region of the Vice-Presidents allocate some resources to the NSC Secretariat

The operation of the NSC Secretariat is a demanding task which is requiring a lot of resources from the hosting region. The challenge and magnitude of this task could also “deter” candidates from smaller regions to run for the Presidency. In order to strengthen the resource base for the NSC Secretariat, one could establish an arrangement whereby the home regions of the Vice Presidents are allocating a dedicated “resource” (either in terms of personnel or cash) to assist in the operation of the NSC Secretariat. Such an arrangement would also serve to integrate the home regions of the Vice Presidents more strongly in the work of the organisation, and eventually facilitate a take over of the Presidency.

3) Corporate/Strategic Approach

i) Developing more of a corporate business approach for the NSC with a sounder basis for resourcing the work of the thematic groups.

- Greater co-ordination of thematic group work by Strategic and Executive Committees

The Executive Committee should consider to adopt a corporate plan to be implemented by the thematic groups in their respective policy fields. This plan should contain a limited number of policy areas, such as maritime policy, energy & climate change, innovation and cohesion & structural funds policy.

- Consider participating in an INTERREG project on maritime governance, with cross-sectoral working across the Thematic Groups

Given the interest of the NSC and its thematic groups in the EU Maritime Policy, and its cross-sectoral nature, the development of an NSC Maritime Policy project would be worth exploring. This could support joint-working across the Thematic Groups and also secure additional funding for the NSC (albeit temporarily). A report on how this could work in practice is due to be submitted to the Executive Committee in Shetland.

ii) Seeking discussions with the INTERREG IVB North Sea Programme Secretariat on ways of strengthening the links between the NSC and the Programme.

The objective should be to obtain a more institutionalised role for the NSC as the “political branch” of the NSP, and as a tool for project development, partnership building and dissemination of results, preferably also including some kind of funding. As a concrete means to

the latter end, one should consider to institutionalise the cooperation between the thematic Advisers and the NSP Secretariat organising joint meetings and seminars on a regular basis (e.g. corresponding to the thematic / project development seminars currently being organised under the programme) .

- Arrange a meeting with the NSP Secretariat to agree on common priorities and operational “modalities”
- Strengthened links with the NSP could also be supported through participation in a joint (NSC) maritime governance project (see above) or through individual projects.

iii) Ensuring that opportunities for strengthening and resourcing of the NSC are pursued as part of the current review of the CPMR.

- Ensure that this point is clearly made through the NSC response to the CPMR review .

Clear messages were identified in the Political Seminar at this year’s General Assembly. It is important that the present opportunity to reshape the CPMR structure is taken advantage of to promote the interests of the NSC.

- Exploit possibilities for CPMR funding of conferences and projects more systematically

The NSC should more systematically consider how the CPMR could fund activities related to conferences and projects, as was done in 2005 with the Ringkøbing conference and sustainable transport conference in Kristiansand. It would also be natural for the CPMR to contribute to a common NSC-initiated maritime project.

- Consider to post a NSC representative in the CPMR Secretariat on a permanent basis

The CPMR Secretariat in Rennes is playing an important role in preparing and following-up CPMR’s activities. At the same time, the NSC is often not in a position to influence the daily work in the CPMR Secretariat. As a way of strengthening the NSC perspective and in general relations with the CPMR, one should consider to post a NSC representative in the CPMR Secretariat on a permanent basis (this has also been done by other Geographical Commissions), monitoring and reporting about current developments, and feeding in NSC concerns. In order to make such a posting practically feasible, the staff of the CPMR Secretariat should adopt English as the working language. Provided that other member Commissions took up a similar practice, this would serve to make the Secretariat less French, and more representative and accessible for the whole organisation.

IV) Strengthen monitoring of EU agenda, relations with EU institutions

A large part of NSC activities are geared towards the EU. At the same time the organisation is not having a permanent representation in Brussels. This could constitute a handicap.

One should therefore explore the feasibility of establishing a permanent NSC “mission” in Brussels through one of the offices of the member regions, preferably one of the offices of the bigger member regions such as Schleswig Holstein, East of England, West Sweden (Västra Götaland) or Nord Holland.

By establishing a permanent mission in Brussels, the NSC is likely to improve the ability to monitor and respond to the EU agenda.

Annex 1 - Alternative models of Thematic group organisation

Although the Thematic group structure is not supposed to be fully reviewed in the context of the follow-up of the Consultancy report, we nevertheless find it useful to list some alternative models provided by Jon Halvard Eide in the preparation of this paper. It is emphasised that neither of these models have been endorsed by the Secretariat and the Advisors meeting of 8 -9 September 2008.

- Merging of existing thematic groups

The rationale behind such a merger would be the benefits of combining and exploiting available resources more efficiently, as well as obtain a more holistic perspective on the NSC activities. In order to strengthen the combined NSC resources the number of thematic advisers should be maintained.

One could for instance imagine a merger of:

- Sustainable development and transport
- Innovation & education and Culture & Tourism

- Re-organisation of thematic groups according to other principles or concepts

Today's organisation is largely based on thematic or sectorial principles (e.g. transport, tourism, fisheries etc). However the Innovation & Education and Sustainable Development groups are organised along broad cross-cutting themes, not limited to certain sectorial policies. The Marine resources group is also organised according to a very broad theme – maritime policy – encompassing the remits of all other thematic groups.

Alternative principles of organisation

- Adapt the organisation to the North Sea Programme priorities

The purpose behind such a move would be to facilitate a closer cooperation with the North Sea Programme (NSP), so that the organisation of the NSC would be tailor made to the NSP, probably making the NSC into a more attractive cooperation partner.

NSP priorities:

- Priority 1 - Building on our Capacity for Innovation (I&E – all groups)
- Priority 2 - Promoting the Sustainable Management of our Environment (SD, MR, more or less all groups)
- Priority 3 - Improving the Accessibility of Places in the NSR (Transport, MR, SD)

Priority 4 - Promoting Sustainable and Competitive Communities (I&E, C&T, Transport, MR)

The existing groups are mentioned in brackets. As we can see, such a structure would split up the current group structure.

- Organisation according to the main “benefits”

The consultancy report suggests that the three benefits of *Influence, Projects and Learning* can help to structure the work, making the most of the different strengths of the NSC and recognising the challenges that lie ahead.

This would entail a more *functional* organisation of today's thematic groups into:

-Policy development group (influence)

Responsible for monitoring relevant policy developments, for drafting resolutions and initiating policy actions on the whole spectre of NSC policy areas, needless to say – cutting across the existing thematic groups.

-Project group (project, learning)

This group should be responsible to initiative and develop projects for the Interreg North Sea Programme and other relevant EU programmes, feeding professional input into the policy group to strengthen the basis for political initiatives, and at the same time receiving & processing political input from the policy group.

-Dissemination and conference group

This group should be responsible for the planning and organisation of different NSC events. Such events could be of a more political nature, exploring and coordinating policy positions, or designed to disseminate findings from NSC (or other relevant) projects.

There would also need to be coordinating mechanisms between such groups, for instance some kind of working group coordination committee.

The backside of introducing such a functional organisation in the short term could be a loss of thematic expertise as more sector-oriented officers / politicians are assumed to feel less “at home” in this kind of organisation. On the other hand, it is likely that the organisation would become more efficient (also due to specialisation of tasks) and coherent (all policy areas seen in combination) under such a functional model.