



**Paper for the
17th NSC Annual Business
Meeting,
13th June 2008**

Item 5

NORTH SEA COMMISSION: IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1 Introduction

The report on “Promoting the Success of the North Sea Commission” focused mainly on the benefits of membership of the organisation, from the perspective of 24 people who have actively participated in the Executive Committee and thematic groups. They showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the North Sea Commission (NSC), although they all had suggestions as to how it could become even more effective. A summary of these “Ideas for Improvement” was included in that report.

The summary included ideas about the way the work of the NSC is organised, how the benefits are publicised, and which policy areas the organisation should focus on in the future. There were suggestions for developing the relationships with the CPMR, Interreg and national governments. Some people favoured more focus on project activity, whilst others felt that the political influencing role was more important.

This linked report concentrates on these ideas, setting them out in more detail and looking at whether they indicate a clear direction for the future development of the Commission.

2 Summary

Many excellent ideas and thoughtful comments were offered during the interviews. A number of these are presented in the opening section to provide background for the analysis which follows.

Having illustrated the range of opinions and suggestions provided, the report looks at them in two ways.

Firstly, a model has been drafted which suggests there is a “virtuous circle”, or perhaps a “NSC Benefits Delivery System”. This model enables the work of the NSC to be examined in a joined-up way. This would ensure that the priorities for further improving the effectiveness and benefits of the NSC can be identified.

Secondly, the content of the work is considered, together with the way it is organised through thematic groups and other arrangements. Perhaps 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.

The report concludes by suggesting a number of priorities for action .

3 Comments and Suggestions from the Interviews

Although the interviews were mostly concerned with the benefits coming from involvement in the NSC, many interviewees took the opportunity to raise issues affecting the work of the Commission. They were all asked to give up to three suggestions for further improving or developing the NSC, or for areas which it should be working on. Taken together, these produced a large number of comments and suggestions.

The suggested improvements have been grouped under a number of headings:

Times mentioned	Suggested Improvements - Process
9	Get more politicians involved. More senior politicians
6	Organise the work better for politicians so it's easier to take it on
3	Get more involvement from all around the North Sea
7	Develop the capacity of the organisation. Get more funding
13	Change the thematic groups' structure, remit, focus of work, way of working
1	Clarify the division between politicians and officers
	Build awareness & better relationship:
4	a. with National Govts
7	b. within Councils
1	c. with the public
1	d. with the media
6	Improve communication of the benefits
5	Develop relationship with Interreg Programme
10	Develop the relationship with CPMR
4	Improve relationship & contacts with EU institutions & politicians
2	Better integration of NSC work with regional & local work
2	More integration across the North Sea
5	Develop relationship with Baltic
2	Other

Given the nature of the interviews, some suggestions could fall under more than one of these headings, but the "times mentioned" gives an indication of the importance people attached to certain areas. Some comments and suggestions under these headings are given below:

Involving more politicians, more involvement from all around the North Sea

A number of interviewees had pointed out how difficult it is for part-time politicians to find the time to attend international meetings as well as those in their own region. However, the need for more politicians to become involved was emphasised by many people:

"Getting more politicians from more regions involved, by being more effective in promoting ourselves and telling them what we are doing. There are many regions which are members but few are sending politicians, and we need them to make it legitimate."
(Henrik Ringbaek Madsen)

"It is important that there are some influential politicians who are elected to the NSC. I can see that sometimes there is a risk that the people who are elected to the NSC are people who have not got their first wish in their own region, and they get appointed to the NSC as their second wish. But this is not good for the NSC." (NSC politician)

“I think the politicians would benefit from getting involved at the level of practical activities that are happening around the North Sea under the NSC. There are political things but there are some practical things as well there.” (*Ann Brown*)

Just two people referred to the need to encourage more involvement from under-represented countries and regions. One argued that responsibilities should not be concentrated too much in one or two regions as this would discourage others from becoming involved.

Organising the work better

One of the main barriers for politicians, especially those who are part-time, is the amount of time required to attend meetings. New ways of organising the work could be tried to make it easier for politicians, as well as ensuring that they have enough support from officials.

“It is sometimes difficult to fill the positions of political chairman and vice chairs, and advisers. So maybe we should 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.” (*Jon Halvard Eide*)

“Face to face meetings are best but realistically councils have less money and tight budgets so use of video conferencing, electronic communication would be something which would have to be developed.” (*Kathleen Matheson*)

“Involve more officers and councillors to try to have them take responsibility for something within the organisation” (*Erik Lindboe*)

“More competence raising activities for politicians. ... Politicians get “eye openers” and were inspired to take North Sea issues home to their own regions.” (*Per Horberg*)

“Exchange information on the website by means of alerts about EU proposals, and ad hoc development of activity. Much more realtime information on what’s important at the moment and issues we should deal with. We only meet 3 or 4 times a year and need momentum, alerts could be a way to do this.” (*Rinske Kruisinga*)

There were also comments about the use of English as the working language, which helps to promote good discussion and informality, but may be a barrier for some participants. Some people may need more time to absorb what is being said and to understand the arguments. Officers sometimes provide assistance to politicians, but there may be a need for other steps to enable politicians to take a full part in the debates even if their English is not so strong.

Develop the capacity of the organisation

This was recognised as an important area by many people. Both the Secretariat and the support for the Thematic Groups depend on individual regions volunteering resources.

“I think if you had it designed much more as a kind of corporate business arrangement, and these thematic groups with at least a full-time secretariat and so on, it would be more effective...At the moment, as far as we can see, some thematic groups seem to do much better than others.” (*Sandy Cluness*)

“More concrete projects – and more money would be a good idea. I think the theme groups are active as far as they can be – but for lack of money.” (*Geir Sør-Reime*)

Three people mentioned the importance of getting more professional and specialist support for the organisation to increase its influence, including the President:

“I think we should try to move from this level to another level, bring in more professional expertise to making all these papers, because you have to be very good when you want to influence policy in Europe...but that’s expensive.” (*Gunn Marit Helgesen*)

Both she and Kevan Lim drew a link with the CPMR (covered below) which they thought might help to fund policy work.

Change the thematic groups’ structure, remit etc

Judging from the number and variety of comments made, there are still different opinions on this subject following the changes made two years ago.

“Agreeing inside the organisation which group is doing what. We probably need less groups, working with wider issues and we need the ExCom to give the groups tasks, not as we do today, asking the ExCom to work with certain issues.” (*Andreas Lervik*)

“Better harmonising and simplifying of the work plans and strategic documents from both the thematic groups and the Executive Committee, so that they all match up. At the moment it is very difficult to get an overview.” (*Gisle Handeland*)

Some of the comments were about the need for the thematic groups to focus their work more on a smaller number of actions. However, some felt that there was a need to develop more projects and sharing of knowledge, whilst others felt that the priority was to influence policy at the European level. This reflects the split between the three types of benefits which the NSC provides. There is more discussion on this and the main areas which the NSC should focus on in Section 5.

Clarify the division between politicians and officers

There was just one suggestion here, but it is an interesting point of view:

“We have to have a discussion within the organisation about how we are working, what kind of participants we have, and what we expect from each other: politician to politician, politician to civil servant, and civil servant to civil servant ...[in order to] keep up the energy and dynamics within the organisation.” (*Ole Sørensen*)

Build awareness with National Governments

The importance of the relationship with National Governments came out from several interviews. One part of this is to increase the influence and recognition of the NSC.

“It absolutely has to connect with its own national governments. In terms of how the structural funds were going to be sorted out ... we didn’t manage to influence national government at all, we didn’t manage to connect with them. So I think building those relationships would be worthwhile.” (*Alison McInnes*)

However, comments were made that national governments do not place much value in the regional level. If communications can be improved and national governments recognise the legitimacy of the role of the regions and the NSC, they are more likely to provide some support.

“The Scottish Government is doing a lot of work through the NSC, because they recognise the value of its large network and influence... It is really important that we continue to work with Governments at all levels. Joint working helps our credibility and also helps with the costs of organising major events.” *Ann Bell*

Build awareness within Councils

Awareness within councils links closely with the need to get more active involvement from politicians. In some councils many members have little interest in international matters. Others have a choice which regional bodies to put their resources into. It is important that they see their interests and priorities are reflected in the work of the NSC.

Councils have tried different ways of feeding back information on the NSC to their members. This appears to have been most successful where there is an international committee making sure that work in the local area is connected with international activity. The example of Västra Götaland was given in the “Promoting the Success” report. Another example is as follows.

“We set up a European group that was cross-party, where we used to meet, myself and Alison McInnes and the officers involved in the NSC and CPMR. We updated members on matters European, and invited along MSPs and sometimes MPs to hear. It was a good way to communicate what was going on.” *(Audrey Finlay)*

One valuable idea to publicise the NSC was introduced in Skien and could be used elsewhere.

“We want all the time to involve more politicians, so the suggestion is...when we are here, trying to meet local politicians from each region because the host changes from meeting to meeting. Then we have a unique possibility to meet local politicians and get more value from the meeting.” *(Gunn Marit Helgesen)*

Improve communication of the benefits

This general heading overlaps with communication with Councils and the public and the use of the media.

“[We need to be] more media savvy, because all politicians have to go back to their citizens and be able to say why they are off on a nice trip to Gothenburg...so that wherever we go, whatever we do, there’s press releases just thrown out...for the politicians to justify why they go to these meetings.” *(Ann Bell)*

“It is very important that we show people that there is a difference – and that people can feel the benefit. It is not enough that we as politicians who work with the NSC think that we are important, when the people in the street don’t think we are important.” *(NSC politician)*

“More practical outcomes, e.g. projects – more for their own sake and a way of proving to those who are not involved that it is worthwhile being involved and creating greater political awareness of what NSC is about.” *(Alan Livingstone)*

Develop relationship with North Sea Interreg Programme

The link to the Interreg North Sea Programme is one of the NSC's strengths, referred to by Patrick Anvoin of the CPMR. The NSC helped to make sure the programme continued when it was under threat. Several interviewees reported that Interreg projects are developed through the NSC network, but there were also suggestions for making more use of the relationship.

"The problem is that the NSC is not directly linked to it [the Interreg North Sea Programme].... Maybe a closer co-operation with the North Sea Programme would be an idea – where we could get more money. It is possible that the North Sea Programme could give the NSC a greater role." (*Geir Sør-Reime*)

A study carried out for the Interreg North Sea Programme Secretariat a few months ago set out the "vital role" which politicians played in Interreg projects, both in generating ideas and enthusiasm at the local level and in forming transnational strategic partnerships which could secure support from the relevant agencies. This seems to open up an opportunity for the NSC.

In a separate interview, a member of the Steering Group of the North Sea Programme felt that the NSC operated more at the political level, and suggested this political and strategic drive could be harnessed more directly to the Programme.

There's still an acknowledgement of the value of the Commission, but from a practical perspective there's a sense of lack of real contact between them and the practitioners in developing projects..... I think the Commission is necessary, but it's not fulfilling its potential, it could be a huge driver to ensure that Interreg is stronger and has a stronger identity and essence to it.

In the Programme Steering Group the main driver is the quality of the project. Thematic groups should be giving political and strategic drive – maybe there's a need for local thematic groups that have looked at the local perspective and how Interreg could be utilised, that gives something more tangible to justify attendance at transnational thematic meetings.

Some NSC interviewees agreed that the thematic groups should be linked to Interreg and this idea is looked at in Section 5.

Develop the relationship with CPMR

There were more comments and suggestions on the relationship with CPMR (compared to Interreg), which NSC is already formally linked with. This is already important to the influence which NSC can have in Europe. There were suggestions that the NSC should learn from how other regions work through the CPMR, both formally and informally. The current review of CPMR could provide new opportunities for the NSC.

"The North Sea must discuss for ourselves the future for the CPMR and how is the best way to have involvement for all the regions." (*Annelie Stark*)

"I think that is the best way which the NSC could develop – if we can get the CPMR to divert some of their resource down to the commissions [for policy work]" (*Kevan Lim*)

"If the CPMR want to make changes, it is time to be upfront about the interests of the NSC and be clear about what they believe to be the best outcomes. It is important for the NSC to have a clear collective view of the way forward." (*Audrey Findlay*)

Improve relationships & contacts with EU institutions & politicians

There were fewer suggestions for developing relationships directly with the EU institutions and politicians. One interviewee proposed direct representation in Brussels, another felt that this was not necessary. A third argued that the NSC needed to create a bigger impact with politicians in Brussels. This was also the view of Patrick Anvrouin at CPMR, who felt that perhaps the NSC could learn from how the Islands Commission worked through the European Parliament.

Better integration of NSC work with regional & local work

This heading is linked to the subject of communications with councils covered earlier and the international perspective which people spoke about as one of the benefits of the NSC.

“Political awareness: we still have the problem of going back to the county council and one or two members still see the international work as something done by a colleague or two – instead of seeing it as a necessary part of whatever they do. All council services need to have an international approach.” *(Henrik Jensen)*

More integration across the North Sea

Two responses came under this heading. One was an argument for more political integration across the North Sea. The second was this practical proposal:

“We should have more exchange between NSC people attending meetings in Europe and going to committees. We should use that more and be better prepared, but we operate then very much from our regional and local perspective. We know each other and we should use that more.” *(Rinske Kruisinga)*

Develop relationship with the Baltic

The relationship with the Baltic attracted five comments. Three were in favour of strengthening links for mutual benefit, whilst two were more cautious: “be careful not to shift the emphasis from the North Sea”; “the time may not be ripe.”

Content of work and future areas of interest

These responses were grouped separately and are set out below.

Times mentioned	Suggestions for content of work and future areas of interest
9	More on energy , climate change, sustainable development & environment
9	More focus on marine and maritime issues, fisheries, marine transport
6	More focus on projects and outputs
5	More focus on priorities
3	More lobbying generally
2	More on economic development , education, culture & tourism
2	Hold more events
2	Lisbon strategy
2	EU Budgets & CAP reform
2	Focus on common N Sea issues
2	Other

These figures really speak for themselves, with energy and environment along with marine issues being the most favoured, and differing views on whether the future focus should be more on projects or lobbying.

These will be discussed along with the future of the thematic groups in section 5.

4 Improving the “NSC Benefits Delivery System”

As shown in Section 3, the suggestions received under the “Processes” heading cover many different aspects of the NSC, including:

- encouraging more involvement by politicians;
- improving promotion of the benefits;
- increasing the resources of the NSC;
- building on the relationships with Interreg and CPMR; and
- changing the way the thematic groups operate.

These suggestions are linked, and perhaps they can be understood better by looking at the whole system within which the NSC operates. Each of the suggestions raised by interviewees can then be seen to contribute towards the way the system operates and towards the delivery of benefits to members.

This section looks at each part of this “NSC Benefits Delivery System” in turn . Each part contributes towards the next one , building up a picture of the system as a whole.

1. Benefits

→ 2. Results for Members

→ 3. Publicity

→ 4. Councils’ Response

→ 5. NSC Results (increased capacity) + 6. Networking

→ Increased Benefits

Each of these 6 parts is explained below, followed by a picture of the overall system.

1. BENEFITS

Policy & Influence

Projects

Learning

The organisation is focusing on the benefits which it can deliver to its members. The “Promoting the Success” report showed that members were clear about these benefits: Influence, Projects & Learning

But the responses in this report indicate that many members feel that more can be done to increase the Commission’s influence and achieve more projects on the ground.

The benefits provided by the NSC produce “results” or “outcomes” for member councils.

2. MEMBER RESULTS

Personal & organisational development

Integrate ideas into local work

Concrete outputs

There are significant benefits in terms of learning and development for individuals and for their organisations. In many cases policies and ideas are being integrated at the local level. However, many interviewees argued that there is a need for more concrete outputs – especially projects but also influence – which have meaning for fellow councillors and electors. Major achievements could be seen as “beacons of success” which can be used to help publicise the effectiveness of the NSC.

3. PUBLICITY

Raising awareness Promoting benefits

There are already many examples of benefits of involvement in the NSC which could be explained better within councils and with the public. These include specific projects and funding, examples of collective policy-development and influence, and benefits in terms of individual and organisational learning.

The added benefits which members would gain from making a commitment of time and resources over a longer period of time were emphasised by many interviewees.

This publicity should in turn produce a response from Councils.

4. COUNCILS' RESPONSE

More politicians involved



More resources & officer support

Greater awareness of the benefits should make it easier to encourage greater involvement by politicians, and especially more senior politicians who carry the authority of their councils. They in turn could commit officer support and funding to ensure they make the most of their involvement.

Greater involvement by councils and politicians from around the North Sea, including Germany and Belgium, was hoped for “to complete the circle” and increase the authority of the Commission.

Measures to make it easier for politicians to contribute, e.g. more use of video-conferencing and development of resources on the website such as news alerts, could also reduce the obstacles which part-time politicians face in making a contribution at the international level.

The benefits for the NSC from increased political involvement and officer support are clear.

5. NSC RESULTS (i)

More authority & legitimacy +

Better funding, planning & clearer priorities =

More capacity & scope to influence

Increased political involvement would give the NSC more authority and legitimacy. The additional resources, both in terms of people (politicians and officers) and funding, would build the NSC's capacity to carry out its work and further increase its influence.

In addition, better planning of the organisation's work, setting of clearer priorities and reflecting these through the structure and workplans of the thematic groups, would help to increase the organisation's effectiveness.

(There were many suggestions for the thematic groups and these are discussed in Section 5, along with the subject areas to focus on.)

There is a second set of results for the NSC:

5. NSC RESULTS (ii)

Specialist input & better events +

Stronger relationships with CPMR, Interreg, EU =

More capacity & scope to influence

Additional resourcing could help achieve more specialist input and more/better conferences and other events. This in turn would help attract more high-level politicians to take part. With a higher political standing, the NSC should be able to develop its relationship with national governments and other agencies and institutes which could help to fund events and policy studies jointly with the NSC.

In addition, the involvement of more politicians would improve the NSC's position in negotiating a stronger relationship with the parent organisation, the CPMR, and with the Interreg Programme. It might help to justify a presence Brussels and closer links with the European Parliament.

Both these sets of "Results" would give the NSC more capacity for project activity and policy work and greater scope to influence at the European level.

There would be benefits also in terms of networking, which so many interviewees see as one of the benefits for them of involvement in the NSC.

6. Wider & deeper NETWORKS

NSC politicians who are involved in different organisations, such as the CPMR and CoR could make more use of these connections in working with colleagues in the NSC network.

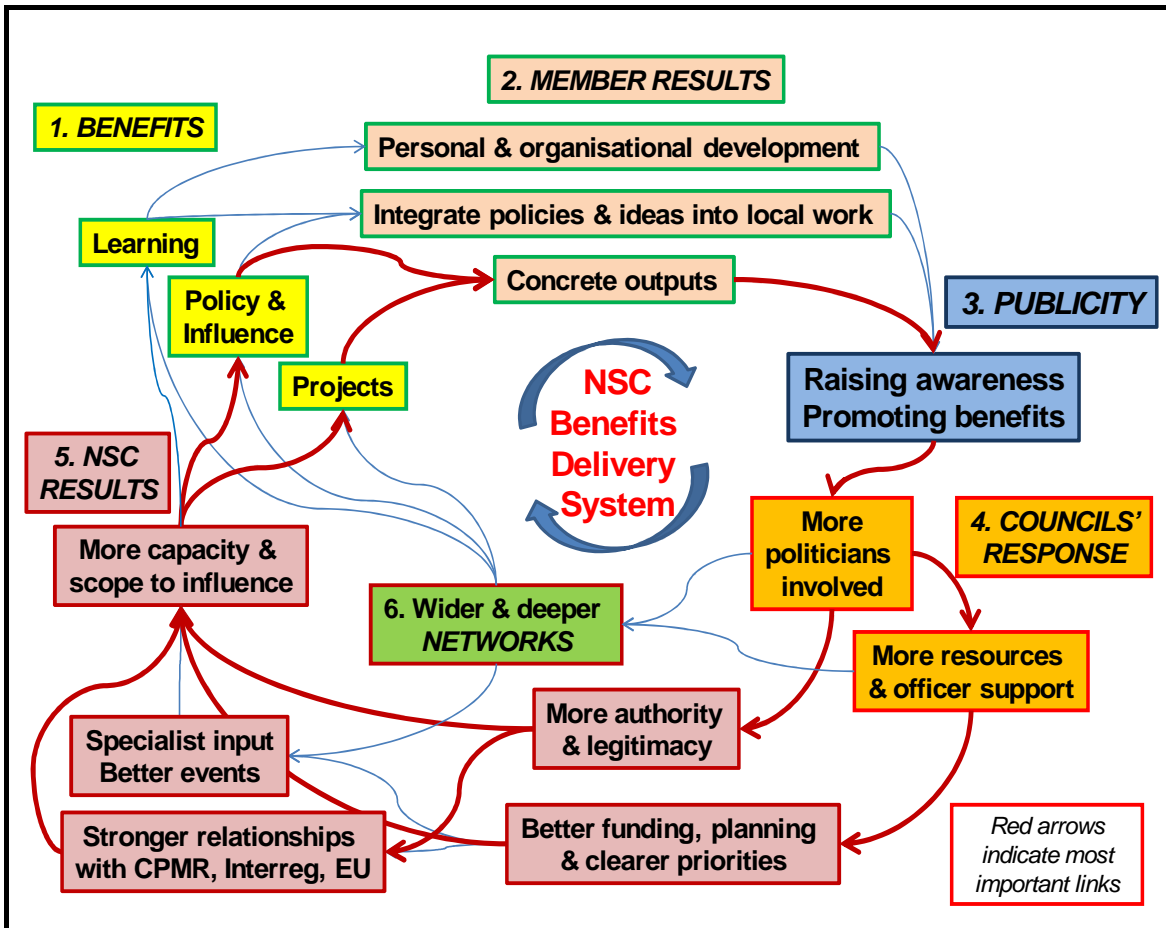
This would deepen the networking activity around the NSC. It would also increase in breadth as a result of the involvement of more politicians and officers. Involvement of more specialists in the work of the NSC would also benefit from, and contribute to, the increase in networking activity.

In addition, further development of networks would contribute to the organisation's effectiveness alongside the more formal capacity of the NSC to carry out its work and influence policy. It would strengthen the NSC in promoting a sense of commonality and collaboration across the North Sea region.

Together these changes in the NSC would all contribute to an increase in the Benefits for members, completing the cycle of improvement illustrated in the diagram below.

This model could be used by the Secretariat and Executive Committee in various ways:

- a. as the basis for a diagnostic tool to track performance and identify areas for attention, with an annual performance report which members could take to their own Councils.
- b. in order to develop a systematic "stakeholder analysis" to assess the state of the relationships with the main stakeholders and decide what actions (communications, services etc) may be necessary to improve some of these relationships.
- c. to provide the basis for developing more of a corporate model for the NSC, the services and benefits it provides, the stakeholders (as above), the priorities for it to work on, and the resources required (people, funds).



5 What to focus on and how to organise the work

Coming round again to the Benefits (Influencing, Projects and Learning), two key questions arise:

- What would be the main areas to focus the work on?
- How would this work be organised?

This is all tied up in the debate about the shape of the Thematic Groups and Ad Hoc Groups which 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. The Groups are producing some good work, but there are still many interviewees who feel that the structure is not working as well as it should.

People raised issues such as:

- Finding enough politicians to take an active part in some groups
- Over-reliance on the goodwill of specific regions to provide co-ordinators
- The need for a manageable plan of work for the year
- Not seeing how the work plans for the thematic groups fit together in a strategic way
- The need for sufficient focus on important topics to be able to produce well-informed policies
- How to cover the cost of professional specialists to add to the quality of work
- How to handle topics which cut across groups, such as sustainable energy
- Failure to follow up on decisions to work on cross-cutting topics
- Whether sustainable development should be a separate theme, or part of all the others
- The need to link more closely with Interreg and drive more project development
- How to involve politicians more in practical project activity.
- How to generate enough resources to produce results across the range of activity.

Individual groups have tried ways of dealing with some of these issues, such as creating a strategic group to plan meetings and co-ordinate activity, and there will be lessons from these for sharing with other groups.

As shown by the suggestions for the content of future work (in the box at the end of Section 3), there is a strong feeling that "more focus" is needed, but no agreement on where the focus should be! Some want to emphasise the influencing role by concentrating on subjects which are important areas for European policy-making and which impact on the North Sea. Others want to focus on developing more projects on the ground which demonstrate the practical value of the NSC. Both are valid objectives for a political organisation.

Several interviewees spoke about the need to balance the longer-term strategic influencing approach with the need for more immediate and practical results on the ground. The NSC should continue to address both these objectives as well as enabling shared learning across the North Sea regions.

A suggested way forward

The strength of the NSC lies in the sense of common heritage and common circumstances around the North Sea. Although there are big differences between the Netherlands and Shetland, for example, there are also shared interests linked to their maritime situation. This

commonality provides the basis for the three areas of activity and benefits: Influencing, Projects and Learning. Some people who are active in the NSC are enthusiastic about one area of activity, and some are enthusiastic about another. They all bring strength to the organisation and should be given space. The three areas of activity are linked but different and the way the NSC is organised should recognise this.

The thematic groups are where most of the detailed work is carried out (along with any ad hoc groups that are set up). Each thematic group can contribute towards the three areas of benefit, but some will have a stronger focus on influencing because they deal with important areas of European policy-making. Looking at the groups in this way:

- Marine resources (including energy), transport and the marine environment are all important for the regions around the North Sea and they are all subject to decisions made in Brussels. The need to tackle and adapt to climate change is a major issue affecting all these themes. This work should be resourced on an agreed collective basis.
- Culture and tourism, and innovation and education, are subject more to national decision-making, even though the Lisbon agenda should have an impact. These are themes where joint projects and learning are likely to be more important. Regions could have the option to focus their efforts on a specific group in line with their own priorities, providing additional resourcing on an agreed, regularised basis.
- Ad hoc groups may still be required to address broad topics which cut across several groups – the Maritime Policy Task Group is an excellent example of how to make this work. This also should be resourced on a collective basis.

In addition, the possibility of working more closely with the Interreg North Sea Programme should be investigated – this might offer real opportunities to build more substance into the work of some groups. It would not be necessary to reshape the groups to fit the Interreg priorities perfectly, but they could be modified so that it is clear which group is responsible for providing strategic input for each of the priorities. This is an area for investigation. The objectives of Interreg IVB are closely aligned to the benefits provided by the NSC.

There may also be opportunities to work more closely with CPMR and interested national governments on some policy areas, bringing in extra resources for joint policy work. The Bergen Seminar on the Maritime Policy Green Paper was an excellent example of this, making a big impact with the CPMR, the European Commission and national governments.

This report does not propose a revised structure, but it suggests that the Executive Committee agrees on a mechanism to look again at the structure and remit of the thematic groups and arrangements for ad hoc groups. This should recognise the different types of benefits which the NSC provides, the different types of activity which each thematic group is suited for and the need for a more satisfactory basis for resourcing their work.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

The programme of interviews has produced a large number of suggestions for further improving the performance of the North Sea Commission in providing benefits for its members.

The Executive Committee is invited to discuss these and agree on the priorities for action.

These could include:

- a. adopting the recommendations on publicity already included in the “Promoting the Success” report

- b. 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
- c. 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
- d. adopting the “Benefits Delivery System” model as a tool for assessing the performance of the NSC
- e. developing more of a corporate business approach¹ for the NSC with a sounder basis for resourcing the work of the thematic groups
- f. agreeing arrangements to review the structure and remit of the thematic groups
- g. seeking discussions with the Interreg IVB North Sea Programme Secretariat on ways of strengthening the links between the NSC and the Programme
- h. ensuring that opportunities for strengthening the position and resourcing of the NSC are pursued as part of the current review of the CPMR.

Andrew Llanwarne, IDEAction and Vivien Collie, VIVID
NSC Ideas for Improvement v0.2 – 5 June 2008

¹ A “corporate business approach” would set out clearly the objectives of the organisation and the services (benefits) which it provides to its main stakeholders. The main stakeholders are the member organisations and CPMR, but others could include National Governments, the Interreg IVB North Sea Programme, and some other agencies (e.g. Marine Research Institutes).

The corporate business approach would assess the resources required to deliver the services and how these should be provided. The range of services and specific activities would be planned from year to year according to an overall strategy and the current priorities, taking account of the resources available. The subsidiary parts of the organisation, such as the Thematic Groups and Ad Hoc Groups, would have annual work plans with appropriate targets and resource calculations which would contribute to the overall “corporate plan”.

This would make it easier for the Executive Committee to oversee the work of the NSC and to ensure that resources are available to meet priorities. Stakeholders would have a clearer idea of the services being provided to them, for an agreed contribution. Thematic Group members would see how they contributed towards the overall objectives of the organisation. Proper account would have to be taken of “intangible benefits”, particularly learning and networking, which could be overlooked in a traditional business model.

This idea was put forward by Sandy Cluness in his interview (see page 3). However, the explanation above has been put together by the authors of this report, and Mr Cluness may wish to explain it in a different way. Other interviewees spoke about the need for greater clarity and focus in the work of the thematic groups and the NSC as a whole.