

**Conference – Green Paper on Maritime
Policy
Hosted by the Committee of the Regions
Brussels, 8 June 2006**

Mr President, Honourable Members of the Committee of the Regions, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address this conference today and to thank Mr Stevenson, the President of the Inter-group on Sustainable Development of the European Parliament for having organised it.

I would also like to thank the Committee of the Regions, and in particular President Delebarre, for hosting it.

The Green Paper on Maritime Policy, which the Commission adopted yesterday, represents a milestone for this Commission.

I have been asked to speak on "options for European Union regulations on the impact of maritime and offshore industry on the environment". I will however extend the scope of my contribution in order to touch upon the impact of all human activities on the marine environment. It should not be forgotten, in fact, that land-based activities account for approximately 80% of marine pollution.

Europe's marine environment is rapidly deteriorating. Some of our seas are close to the point of no return. The marine ecology of the Baltic Sea is reckoned to have "crashed" under the pressure of nutrient inputs, in particular from agriculture.

The Mediterranean is threatened by uncontrolled coastal development. The Northeast Atlantic is one of the busiest shipping regions in the world, with all the attendant risks and impacts. Fish stocks throughout Europe are in a poor state.

And climate change too is having a serious impact on our oceans and seas – indeed, carbon-induced acidification could lead to a major change in the distribution and abundance of marine ecosystems.

It has become clear that, if we are to reverse this situation, relying on all our existing measures and efforts, whether at international, European Union or national level, was not enough. Most measures in the European Union were not designed to protect the marine environment as such. And international measures have proved difficult to implement and enforce.

Moreover, it has become evident that protecting the marine environment must no longer be a mere side-effect of other policies, but that there should be an integrated strategy at European Union level, encompassing all pressures and impacts.

This is the fundamental objective of the Thematic Strategy on the Marine Environment, which the Commission adopted in October last year.

The Marine Strategy is one of the seven so-called "thematic strategies" contained in the environmental roadmap of the European Union for the decade – the Sixth Environment Action Programme. These strategies represent a new, holistic approach to environmental policy-making.

The objective of the Strategy is to achieve “good environmental status” of the marine environment of the European Union by 2021. It includes the proposal for a directive that will establish marine regions based on geographical and environmental criteria. Member States will have to cooperate closely with one another, but also with any third country sharing the same region.

In particular, Member States will be required to :

- provide detailed assessments of the state of their marine environment;**
- draw up strategies based on scientific evidence;**
- propose a set of measures to achieve “good environmental status”, and**
- analyse the potential economic, social and environmental impact of each proposed measure.**

The Marine Strategy will build on measures which are already in place, ranging from European Union legislation on freshwaters and nature conservation to the integration of environmental concerns into the Common Fisheries or Agricultural Policy, not to mention maritime safety measures.

The Strategy will incorporate those measures into a time-bound framework. In turn, these measures will contribute to meeting the Strategy's objectives.

An additional essential role of the Thematic Strategy is that it will deliver the environmental pillar of the future Maritime Policy of the European Union.

This will be done through a series of elements, some of which I am going to briefly describe now.

First of all, the Strategy introduces the principle of "ecosystem based-management". Human activities affecting the marine environment will be managed in an integrated manner. They will respect the carrying capacity of oceans and seas. We must in fact be able to manage in a sustainable way the increasing, and often conflicting, uses of the oceans.

Secondly, the Strategy will take into account the fact that each sea has its own specific environmental characteristics. Ecosystem-based management will therefore be implemented at regional level. The Strategy establishes European Marine Regions and identifies potential sub-regions. For example, the Mediterranean Sea has been identified as a Marine Region and the Adriatic or Aegean-Levantine Seas as sub-regions.

So the Strategy introduces an element of spatial planning into Europe's marine regions. It fits in well with the broader objective of bolstering our maritime economy, without impairing marine ecosystems, under a future Maritime Policy of the European Union.

Thirdly, the Strategy will work on the knowledge base required for future action. This entails drawing up detailed assessments and measurements which will help in regulating

the uses – and users – of our oceans and seas under a future Maritime Policy for the European Union.

This is why the Marine Strategy was already adopted by the Commission last October. This knowledge-base should be operational by the time a future Maritime Policy is in place.

As far as human activities are concerned, all options have been left open. Under the Marine Strategy, it is at regional level that specific management options have to be decided. For example, if dredging for sand and gravel extraction is identified as a major pressure on the marine environment in a particular region, that region can restrict the areas where this activity is permitted.

However, it is not only the Thematic Strategy that complements the Green Paper. There are in fact various ways in which a future European Union Maritime Policy can complement the objectives of the Marine Strategy. This will be done in particular through : a) data and knowledge, b) integration, and c) action at global level.

First of all, the Green Paper lays great emphasis on the need to have more comprehensive data and deeper knowledge in order to set up a more efficient way of addressing problems. So does the Marine Thematic Strategy. It is vital to identify and fill knowledge gaps, reduce duplication, and promote harmonised collection of reliable data.

The Marine Strategy proposes a new approach to marine monitoring and assessment. It will strongly benefit from the ambitious approach of the Green Paper, which proposes to set up a European Marine Observation and Data Network and which suggests a comprehensive mapping of European coastal waters. This would enhance our ability to regulate the use of oceans more effectively. Indeed, the mapping of existing and planned activities in the water and on the seabed, and the mapping of the location of marine flora and fauna are important elements of successful marine spatial planning policies in line with the ecosystem-based approach. This would also lead to efficiency gains across the board.

Secondly, the Green Paper fully recognises the need for improved coordination between the different policy areas. Threats such as climate change, coastal development, nutrient enrichment, etc. can be addressed from different policy angles. For example, additional measures will be required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the shipping sector. All this would have a very positive effect on the marine environment and would contribute to the successful implementation of the Thematic Strategy.

Another important link is related to the issue of ship dismantling. While I am clearly in favour of pushing for an international solution, it is true that we can and should also act at European Union level and practice what we preach. The Green Paper will help the European Union to address this issue thus solving a problem that could have dramatic and everlasting consequences on the marine environment.

Thirdly, as regards the global level, it is essential to reduce the footprint of the European Union in other parts of the world, and promote higher standards of marine protection globally. While the Marine Strategy focuses on the protection of the regional seas bordered by countries of the European Union, it identifies the concept of “good environmental status” that could also be applied in other parts of the world.

A future Maritime Policy of the European Union will help to identify needs for new international rules, and implement them. It will also enhance the role of the European Union in major maritime agreements and organisations. Community membership in the International Maritime Organisation would clearly give us more leverage on issues of key importance to the marine environment – and with our broader shipping interests of course.

Last but not least, protecting the marine biodiversity in the high seas beyond national jurisdiction is a priority for the European Union. Oceans and seas cover 71% of the Earth’s surface and 90% of the biosphere, most of which are in the high seas. Our fight to combat biodiversity loss, boosted by the Commission's recently adopted biodiversity strategy, can only be won by protecting the high seas effectively. Given the magnitude

of the challenge, the European Union will need to come out strongly and lead global efforts to improve the governance of oceans.

Ongoing efforts of the European Union to promote the negotiations of an implementing agreement of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas aimed at providing mechanisms to designate and manage Marine Protected Areas should be boosted as part of a future Maritime Policy of the European Union.

The Green Paper on Maritime Policy that was adopted yesterday will do much to further protection of our oceans and seas. The broad consultation process we are launching today will no doubt bring new ideas and identify new challenges and solutions.

Oceans and seas are the resource base for our maritime economy. A dynamic maritime economy can thrive only if the marine environment is healthy. Preserving the resource base means preserving the industries that depend or rely on the seas. This will in turn improve the European Union's long-term competitiveness.

But our seas are not just an economic resource. They perform other key functions and services essential to life on our planet : *inter alia*, they regulate the climate, provide us with food, and distribute solar energy. We must preserve those functions, so that future generations may enjoy them too. Raising awareness of the importance of oceans and the crucial functions they perform for us lies at the heart of the United Nations' decision to establish the World Oceans Day which we are celebrating today.

The synergies that the Thematic Strategy on the Marine Environment and the Green Paper on the Maritime Policy will create will allow us to reach the ambitious objective of reinvigorating our maritime economy and make it truly sustainable.

I look forward to engaging in further discussions inside and outside the Commission in the year to come.

Thank you for your attention.

François Wakenhut
ENV.D.2 – 65380
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