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A View on the Commission process 'Towards a Maritime Policy'

Avoiding a conflict of visions

04 July 2005

"Our next generations can enjoy biologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas that are safe, clean, healthy and productive"

Marine Environment Strategy Vision, as agreed in the December 2004 Council Conclusions

"Our vision is that of a Europe with a dynamic maritime economy in harmony with the marine environment, supported by sound marine scientific research and technology, which allows human beings to continue to reap the rich harvest from the ocean in a sustainable manner."

Commissioner Borg; speech to the IMO International Maritime Law Institute on 4 April 2005

In light of the European Commission's plans to elaborate an EU Maritime Policy, as outlined in President Barroso's and Commissioner Borg's Communication of March 2005, the environmental NGOs – BirdLife International, Greenpeace, IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare), Oceana, Seas at Risk, WWF and the Fisheries Secretariat– offer the following views and recommendations:

The Communication contains welcome acknowledgement of the need for a holistic approach to oceans and seas. The environmental NGOs are also encouraged by outlined plans for improving the information-base and monitoring system for the marine environment, and urge that this must complement efforts to improve our understanding of marine ecosystems. We also support the Commission's intention to address the international dimension of oceans affairs. To be successful, this process should involve all countries bordering Europe's seas from an early stage, as well as coastal states beyond Europe and relevant international and regional bodies, including the Regional Seas Conventions. We are pleased that the Commission is consulting other countries on good marine governance. Environmental governance should be a key component of this consultation.

The environmental NGOs are concerned, however, that the Communication fails to explicitly recognise the centrality of healthy marine ecosystems to the sustainability of the sea's resources. The Communication highlights that *"oceans and seas are of great economic importance"* and that any future EU Maritime Policy *'should aim at striking the right balance between the economic, social, security, safety and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, ensuring the preservation of the resource-base, which is a key element for improving the EU's competitiveness, long-term growth and employment in the maritime sector.'* It does not note that the *'resource base'* relies upon healthy, functioning marine ecosystems. Sustainable development and use of marine resources requires the maintenance and recovery of marine ecosystems, and the management of the impacts of human activities upon the marine environment. Commitments to protect and conserve the marine environment and its biodiversity must thus be explicitly acknowledged.

In this context, we would like to highlight that the marine environment is in a state of crisis: only 10% of the biomass of fish targeted in fisheries remain, compared to times predating industrial fishing. About three quarters (75%) of the world's commercial marine fisheries are either fully exploited (50%) or overexploited (25%); species extinction is estimated to be 100-1000 times above the normal background rate;ⁱ over 85 % of Europe's coastlines are thought to be at high or moderate risk due to unsustainable management.ⁱⁱ In spite of the apparent crises, less than 1% of the world's oceans has been adequately

protected. The reason for the continuing overexploitation of marine resources is the sector-by-sector management, without consideration for the health of the marine environment.

The European Institutions recognised this state of affairs in their 6th Environmental Action Programme (2002), calling for an integrated, broad, collaborative and coherent approach to marine policy - to cover all sectors. This would be the first comprehensive attempt to manage the marine environment. After a long and in-depth consultation process, we are now urgently awaiting the adoption of the Commission's European Marine Strategy and associated Framework Directive due in July 2005.

This is not a time to duplicate effort! In the development of the EU's Maritime Policy, the European Institutions and EU Member States are expected to take on board and, where necessary, build on the conclusions of the consultation on the European Marine Strategy. This is imperative if synergies are to be achieved between both processes, as called for by the Environment Council in December 2004. This would also be in line with the results of a recent Eurobarometer survey on the Lisbon Strategy, which found that 63 per cent of citizens give priority to protecting the environment over economic competitiveness.

We thus call upon the European Institutions and Member States to recognise from the start the centrality of healthy marine ecosystems to a sustainable marine economy, and to embrace the European Marine Strategy and Marine Framework Directive, instead of seeking to integrate or 'add-on' environmental considerations. The vision, scope and principles of the EU Maritime Policy should be consistent with those already agreed as part of the European Marine Strategy, including the following strategic goals:

- i. *to protect, allow recovery and, where practicable, restore the function and structure of marine biodiversity and ecosystems in order to achieve and maintain good ecological status of these ecosystems.*
- ii. *to phase out pollution in the marine environment so as to ensure that there are no significant impacts or risk to human and/or on ecosystem health and/or on uses of the sea.*
- iii. *to contain the use of marine services and goods and other activities in marine areas to levels that are sustainable and that do not compromise uses and activities of future generations nor the capacity of marine ecosystem to respond to changes*
- iv. *to apply the principles of good governance, both within Europe and globally.*

We are concerned that there is still opposition against binding targets for the protection of the marine environment. Europe has everything to gain by acting decisively and effectively, and **we urge the Task Force and Steering Group to support DG Environment's proposal for marine legislation.**

The European Marine Strategy and resulting Marine Framework Directive should provide the framework that guides maritime resource use and development, ensuring its sustainability. It should further act as the reference point for any further EU legislation and policy relating to the marine environment and its natural resources. In this context, the Task Force must urge Member States to reach the most environmentally ambitious agreement on the Marine Framework Directive.

ⁱ Ecosystem and Human Well-Being: Biodiversity Synthesis Report, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

ⁱⁱ EEA, 1999