

UK Nature conservation agencies contribution to
THE NEW EUROPEAN MARITIME POLICY FORUM
Challenges and Opportunities

The importance of a healthy marine environment for European society

The seas provide many goods and services that are essential for Europe's society and economy. For example, the seas are used directly for food production, transport and recreation, but indirectly they are essential in regulating weather and climate. If the seas are not safeguarded and protected, there would be a loss of these goods and services, with a corresponding loss in employment, human health and future economic activities. The forthcoming European Maritime Green Paper needs to ensure that the environment is fully safeguarded, otherwise any attempts to fulfil the Lisbon agenda are at serious risk of being undermined.

The value of the marine environment - why balancing use against environmental protection is critical for a strong economy

The estimated EU value of fish landings in 1998 was 7.3 billion euros. In 1999, the value of fish imports to the EU reached 8.6 billion euros. While some of these imports are of high value species that do not occur naturally in European waters (e.g. tropical shrimp species) many of them are of species such as cod that do occur in our waters. In the case of these latter species, harvesting within the EU has been of such intensity that many species have been and continue to be harvested beyond sustainable limits and output is therefore much lower than potentially possible. Should stocks be allowed to return to a larger size, catches could be greater, the EU would not need to be so reliant on fish imports, fishermen's enterprises would be more profitable and the environment would be exploited more sustainably. Management of the environment for improved fish stocks is not reliant solely on management of fishing pressure: pollution, climate change, mineral extraction and preservation of important habitats for fish all have a role to play.

Participative/democratic process – the example of Strategic Environmental Assessment

A particular challenge with the management of human activities in the marine environment is that of ensuring that all users can have a balanced input to decision-making. In the terrestrial environment, there is a relatively long history of democratically elected councils and local authorities. This is not the case for most sea areas where there is no analogous 'local community'. In the UK, strategic environmental assessments (SEA) of offshore oil and gas development have provided some examples of good practice in stakeholder involvement. In deciding on the scope of these assessments, a steering group comprising representatives of all sectors potentially affected by proposed developments is consulted. An assessment based on these consultations is then carried out; particular attention being paid to those features of the development likely to have the greatest effect on the environment, society and the economy. The assessment is then made available both on the internet for comment by anyone interested and at a public open meeting near the area covered by the SEA. A series of public advertisements is used to draw attention to these processes. A formal response to the comments of the public is then made prior to

decision-taking on the development. Processes such as these will be required on a both national and international scale if we are to achieve better environmental management and fully involve all relevant stakeholders.

Who are we?

The United Kingdom has three nature conservation agencies, Scottish Natural Heritage, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales that are represented for UK wide and international issues by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The agencies and Committee have a statutory responsibility for advising government and others on nature conservation.

Contact:

Mark Tasker

Head of Marine Advice

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

mark.tasker@jncc.gov.uk