

Cllr Brad Watson OBE

Speech for Macro Regions Conference, 13th April, CoR Brussels

Good morning, thank you very much for this opportunity to contribute.

My name is Cllr Brad Watson OBE and I am the Vice-President of the Channel Arc Manche Assembly – a cross-Channel co-operation body that represents most of the southern English and northern French local and regional authorities.

I am also the Cabinet Member for Communications for West Sussex County Council, which is a large local authority of over ¾ million inhabitants along the coast of southern England.

West Sussex is county with rural and urban areas, coastal towns, a national park, seaports and, of course, Gatwick airport, the 2nd largest international airport in the UK

West Sussex County Council is a leading member of Southern England Local Partners (SELP), a group of local authorities, universities and other public bodies in the South East of England who work together on European affairs through our partnership office here in Brussels.

As an organisation of diverse members, SELP is acutely aware of the need for partnership working, and value highly the knowledge and

expertise that we can gain from sharing experience and information, and by co-operating with each other – both within our own country; across the Channel sea-basin; and across Europe.

This applies equally to West Sussex County Council and as it does the Channel Arc Manche Assembly.

Also our involvement with the Association of European Regions regularly brings us into contact with regions from across the wider Europe; indeed it should be remembered that not all North Sea stakeholders are within the EU.

The very successful 'Do You Speak European' youth debating competition, which is now a pan-European AER-competition, was developed by West Sussex County Council, to encourage young people to participate in EU affairs.

My own authority, West Sussex County Council, takes great pride and interest in the opportunities that the EU can offer to us.

We actively participate in and lead on European projects, which help us to deliver high quality services to our residents and respond to the many challenges facing a local authority in the 21st Century, which naturally include climate change and economic development.

We are keen to seek common means and methods on these issues that we face together, something that EU funds naturally promote.

One of our most successful and highly regarded projects to date was the ground-breaking Interreg IIIc project, called ESPACE, a project on climate change adaptation that has influenced the philosophy and practice of spatial planning across Europe.

Follow on action is currently in preparation – both at a local, regional and EU level – including innovative methods of waste management.

Indeed, the last very successful Channel Arc Manche Assembly annual conference held in England was on climate change adaptation.

Greening the economy not only offers us the chance to avoid damage that could be done to our regions by climate change, e.g. coastal flooding in areas such as Selsey and Pagham in West Sussex.

PICTURES

Coastal flooding is a threat that all of us around the Channel and North Sea face, and we would be better facing the challenge together; but there are also economic opportunities, not least green jobs.

Partnership working within Channel Arc Manche Assembly has included the Interreg IIIb project, EMDI (Espace Manche Development Initiative), that was led by our friends and neighbours in Upper Normandy.

The resulting highly acclaimed atlas “Channel Spaces: a World Within Europe” has been recognised by DG MARE, and indeed the then Commissioner Borg himself, as an example of best practice.

SHOW BOOK

Indeed it has now found a commercial publisher and a version for the Irish Sea is in preparation.

The Interreg IVa France-Channel-England funding programme has meant that we have now successfully secured funding for a follow-up project known as CAMIS (Channel Arc Manche Integrated Strategy). CAMIS includes West Sussex and Upper Normandy as well as local universities, which will ensure continued co-operation and exchange of best practice – including on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, vital in combating climate change and ensuring good management of the Channel for all its inhabitants and users and between the regions bordering this vital sea-basin;

Which is the busiest shipping lane in Europe, if not the world, with over 500 vessel movements per day! On top of that there 1000's of leisure boats as well; A leisure boating playground.

Don't forget that 70% of the EU's ship-borne trade goes through the Channel.

We believe the Channel starts in the western approaches, a line roughly Cornwall to Brest and ends somewhere north of the Dover Strait. So roughly a line from, say, the North Foreland to Dunkerque.

We have closely followed the development of the Baltic Sea Strategy with great interest and see it as the first of many.

The Channel Arc Manche has worked closely with other Channel and North Sea regions on macro-region strategies, both in CoR North Sea-Channel intergroup as well as the last two Open Days conferences; and again later this year on 5th October in Brussels, for which we thank our colleagues from Bremen and Lower Saxony.

We welcome co-operation in the North Sea and English Channel on all issues that we face together. Any North Sea/ Channel strategy must be within context; recognising the differences between the North Sea/ Channel and the Baltic.

To be effective, a strategy needs to provide an agreed framework for cooperation that has outcomes that benefit all parties thus ensuring 'buy-in' by all stakeholders.

I firmly believe that we must call our Macro Regions - Macro Economic Regions so we get support from the citizens who will otherwise see them as just political strategies and therefore not for them.

This will achieve much more than forced projects reporting endlessly to grey accountants and bureaucrats as to how project money has been spent.

Funding is often the glue that binds things together but it should not be the only means: cooperation on many levels is sought - academic, social, civil society, business, cultural, sporting, education and so on. In the case of the Channel it should be noted that the Channel is a distinct sea basin with differing characteristics and needs from either the North Sea or the Atlantic.

Climate change is affecting all of us irrespective of geography so any future sea-basin strategy must have responses to adapting to climate change as a core component.

It is highly likely that in the near future off the coast of nearby Brighton, one of the largest wind farms in the EU will be built to provide much needed renewable energy that will help the UK go some way to meeting its climate change targets agreed under the EU's 20-20-20 environmental strategy.

These types of activities are being mirrored right along the shores of all of our coasts.

In fact the wind farm in the Thames estuary has been very effective not only in energy terms but in conservation, as I understand that one

of the hidden benefits has been the conservation of fish stocks, the wind farm area cannot be fished!. Surely, a useful addition to coastal zone management.

Sea basins have commonalities that need to be shared for the benefit of all. A strategy that brings this all together we would welcome.

But it is therefore important that macro-region economic strategies do not add another layer of bureaucracy to the workload of already stretched local and regional authorities, especially given the current economic climate.

In this economic context, future macro-region strategies also need to be properly resourced and we are looking with great interest to the publication of the Commission's EU2020 strategy in June and to the territorial cohesion programme post 2013 for support here.

EU funding enables local and regional authorities to play their full role in Europe and support via, for example, Interreg programmes for existing pan European forums such as Channel Arc Manche Assembly as counterparts to the Baltic Sea Group, is a good way to achieve EU collaboration on common problems.

Nor should macro-region strategies be exclusive, we also value our connections to the hinterland greater than 50km inland, be that the Thames Valley or London or places further north.

Thus whilst we in the Channel Arc Manche Assembly would have preferred a separate Channel strategy, we welcome DG MARE's willingness to listen to the interests of the Channel and welcome their suggestion for a Channel sub-strategy to be annexed to the North Sea and Atlantic strategies.

We remain keen to work with regions in both areas; the Channel being the vital link between them.

I hope that was within my allotted few minutes! Thank you for listening!