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Briefing Paper – North Sea Region 2020

Macro-regional strategy development

The North Sea Region 2020 is an initiative which has been proposed by the North Sea Commission and the Committee of the Regions North Sea Intergroup in the context of the development of a number of macro-regional strategies at a European level. Macro-regional strategies can be considered as a new type of EU cooperation. The first strategy being the Baltic Sea Strategy adopted by the Commission in June 2008, followed closely by calls for the development of a Danube Basin and Mediterranean Sea strategies.

Such strategies provide the framework for an integrated approach to policy delivery and as such have a role to play in delivering a number of European, national and regional policies. Key European policies affected and central to macro-regional strategies include territorial cohesion (the interest of DG Regio) as well as the Maritime policy (the remit of DG Mare). Other policy areas which are central to macro-regional strategies include climate change, transport and energy. Macro-regional strategies have been described as “a major step forward for the EU’s regional policy” by former Regional Policy Commissioner Pawel Samecki ahead of a Ministerial conference in Stockholm on the 17th and 18th September 2009. At this meeting, the 27 member states came together to discuss the prospect of further macro-regional strategies following the Baltic lead and whether this could become a model for EU cooperation in other regions.

The development of Macro-regional strategies fits with the idea of place based policy making and has implications for the post 2013 budget of the European Union as well as in the way it might be delivered.

Macro regional strategies are essentially an initiative towards more effective policy making and more efficient use of existent resources rather than producing new funds and instruments. It is a means by which a dialogue and subsequent action plan is created around areas with common features about their challenges and opportunities and how these can most effectively be addressed in a coordinated way. The strategy is intended to facilitate not impose better ways of addressing policies.

What will North Sea Region 2020 involve?

Different strategies across Europe will have different objectives, it is recognised that different areas of Europe have different needs which would therefore result in quite different macro-regional strategy objectives. In some areas there will be specific and visible opportunities or problems which urgently require a joint approach in order to be more effective, this was particularly the case for example within the Baltic Sea Strategy in addressing environmental challenges. In other cases there may not be such an obvious issue or purpose for a strategy but regions may feel such a commonly produced strategy will leave them better equipped to compete in the global market place and address issues that may not otherwise be tackled effectively. Stakeholders across the North Sea are invited to collectively identify; in which areas and how by working together we might address key market failures or an indispensable need?



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The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region brings together eight Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland), who have joined forces to tackle specific challenges in the area, in particular environmental problems resulting from the high pollution levels in the Sea. Other aims include strengthening the competitiveness of the regional economy, with a focus on research and innovation, developing energy and transport links, as well as improving the region's security, especially in the maritime field. The Strategy contains a detailed action plan, comprised of 80 flagship projects in 15 priority areas, each under the responsibility of a "lead country" or other partners (such as federations of farmers, Innovation Centres, Nordic Council of Ministers etc).

Why do we need a North Sea Region 2020?

It is of course necessary to identify where the benefits are in working collectively which outweigh any associated costs. Over all, coordination would only be suggested where we would collectively benefit from better results than those achieved by individual regional or national initiatives. New and innovative ways of working could potentially result in opportunities for specialisation, cooperation and greater efficiencies.

Stakeholders are invited to consider where the value may be in a North Sea Strategy looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which are common to this macro-region. An example that springs to mind which could benefit all our regions could be the creation of an integrated North Sea energy grid to transfer energy between areas located around the North Sea.

Other obvious policy areas include addressing the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and flooding, more effectively protecting the environmental sustainability of our seas and ecosystems, ensuring we have comprehensive and coherent data available across member states to enable the most effective policy decisions (particularly in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy and Integrated Coastal Zone Management), ensuring Europe's sustainable energy supply and sustaining and developing Europe's competitive advantage in the world in the field of R&D and innovation.

An integrative approach is key to this macro-regional strategy concept; the key question is how can existing resources, legislation and structures be better used for the benefit of all within the North Sea Region? The fundamental purpose of these strategies is to add value by coordinating policies and funding in order to address challenges which can not be addressed at the level of the region or member state alone in the most effective way.

Which geographic area will North Sea Region 2020 cover?

A macro-region does not have fixed boundaries but rather remains flexible allowing common action on specific identified common features or challenges. The common features or challenges is the important aspect which provides the consistency, this could be geographical, cultural, economic or other.



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Within a European context a macro-region must be credible and will cover several regions in several countries. It is important to indicate different parts of Europe can be located within more than one macro-regions.

Resources required in the development and implementation of such a strategy?

The strategy success relies on results. There will be a need to explain and justify the selection of actions and then go on to select and sequence actions. The strategic document would act as a catalyst for the leverage of additional resources within member states and regions. A successful strategy is dependant on commitment of participating stakeholders which in turn is dependent on the value accorded to the process and actions prioritised. Time and effort will be required to identify and reach agreement on prioritised areas.

What could the relation to strategy, policy and European funding mechanisms be?

The development of a macro-regional approach forms part of a wider reflection on the future EU Cohesion Policy post-2013. The question of whether macro-regions could become an important medium for programming and delivering EU funding is a key issue. Cohesion policy funding could support macro-regional strategies and funding could be available on a competitive basis based on how well the action supports the strategy.

The key challenges identified so far are linked to;

- **Managing Maritime Space;** *The North Sea is a very complex and open marine ecosystem, providing a nursery for fish and a migratory and wintering area for many species of birds. It is also one of the most heavily-used seas, supporting fishing, shipping, trade, energy, sand mining, defense and recreation. Increasing economic activity in the sea, such as growing shipping traffic and the development of offshore wind farms, is leading to more and more competition between users of the sea.*
- **Increasing Accessibility and Attractiveness;** *North Sea ports are important hubs for the export/import of goods and provide access to business locations and Europe's hinterland, stimulating **economic development** in our region. Further globalization of the economy and an increase in the global population is likely to increase traffic. It is essential to ensure free passage in the North Sea and a good flow to the hinterland.*
- **Tackling Climate Change;** *One of the main challenges facing the North Sea Region is **climate change**, with adaptation and mitigation measures required. Increased precipitation and flooding in the North, coupled with increased temperatures and aridity in the South will cause significant changes to both physical and human geography in Europe. Exhaustion of fossil fuels and the resulting increase in fuel prices will be another challenge for the region.*
- **Promoting innovation and excellence;** *The North Sea Region is a European stronghold in relation to other regions when it comes to innovation capacity and performance. The progression towards a knowledge based society and a strong research base have enabled excellence in sectors such as ICT, renewable energies, marine technologies and creative industries. The future challenges in this context will be to capitalise on the regions excellence and to promote and maintain innovation in existing and upcoming sectors.*

NORTH SEA



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- **Sustaining liveable communities;** *The North Sea area is a diverse region offering both attractive natural and urban environments. The changing population structure brings with it a shift in demands which impacts upon the vitality and sustainability of communities. One challenge will be to continue to support and enhance the strengths of urban and rural areas and their mutual links on the macro regional level. In this way economic growth and attractiveness of the regions communities need to be promoted to sustain liveability.*