



Item 1

**21st NSC Annual Business Meeting,
20 June 2012.**

NSC PRESIDENT, THEMATIC GROUPS ANNUAL REPORTS AND OTHER REPORTS

The Presidents report will be presented at the meeting.

Enclosed are the Annual reports 2011-2012 for the Thematic Groups.

There will be oral reports from;

- CPMR by General Secretary Eleni Marianou
- Report from the Interreg IVB North Sea Region programme, by Head of Secretariat Christian Byrith

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. The NSC Annual Business Meeting of 20th June 2012 adopts the Presidents report and the Thematic Groups Annual Reports and continues to support the work of the NSC.***
- 2. The NSC Annual Business Meeting of 20th June 2012 adopts the other reports for information.***



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Culture & Tourism Group

The Culture & Tourism Group in the period 2011-12 was chaired by Cllr. Lars Nordström (Västra Götaland Region), with Cllr. Frederikke Stensrød (Østfold County Council) and Cllr. Peter Grant (Fife Council) as Vice-Chairs. Advisor has been Geir Sør-Reime (Rogaland County Council).

In the period, the group has met 4 times:

Fredrikstad (Østfold) 6-7 June 2011

Scotland House, Brussels (hosted by Aberdeenshire Council) 26 September 2011

Skive (Central Denmark) 22-23 November 2011

Middelburg (Zeeland) 21 March 2012 combined with a seminar on new projects 20-21 March

Attendance has been between 10 and 17; and 9 member regions of the NSC have participated, from Denmark, England, Netherlands, Norway and Scotland. Cllr. Ole B. Sørensen, Vice-President of the NSC, has attended the two last meetings.

There have been two main and inter-linked issues on the agenda of all these meetings: the North Sea Region 2020 strategy and concrete follow-up projects linked to that strategy, including the issue of a North Sea Tourism Strategy.

The meeting in Fredrikstad also included a mini-seminar on tourism strategies, led by Prof. Greg Richards. Ideas from this meeting were further elaborated at the Brussels meeting, and at the meeting in Skive, two concrete project ideas based on these discussions were presented and discussed. At the seminar linked to the Middelburg meeting, developed versions of these two projects were presented by Østfold County Council by Børre Berglund (Visit Your Neighbours) and by Central Denmark Region by Karsten Bækgaard (The North Sea Seafood Route). These two project proposals were discussed in detail at the seminar and various suggestions for improvements were presented. Both project developers agreed to present revised versions to the group at the meeting in Bremerhaven 18 June, where they also will be discussed.

At the meeting in Middelburg, the group also discussed its input into the action plan linked to the North Sea Region 2020 strategy, as well as input into the public consultation on the proposed EU Charter on Sustainable Tourism.

Innovation & Education Group

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to summarise the work of the North Sea Commission's thematic group "Innovation and Education Group" (IEG) from June 2011 to June 2012.

2. IEG Chair, Vice-Chairs and Adviser

- Chair: June 2011 - May 2012: Cllr. Kate Dean, Aberdeen City, Scotland
- Vice-Chairs:
 - Cllr. Ellen Marie Solheim, Rogaland County Council, Norway
 - Cllr. Annika Carlsson, Region Halland, Sweden
- Adviser: Erik Lindboe, Rogaland County Council, Norway

As per June 2012 the IEG chair position is vacant.

In addition, adviser Erik Lindboe will retire from his position after the GA 2012 in Bremen.

3. The IEG Strategic Group

i.e. the group chair, vice-chairs, adviser and supporting officers - meets regularly to plan IEG activities. The Strategic Group met during at the CPMR GA in Aarhus, Denmark, 28th – 29th September 2011, and in Aberdeen 1st February and 8th June 2012.

4. Innovation & Education Group meetings

- a)** The innovation & Education group met in Fife, Scotland, 7th – 9th November 2011. 26 group members attended the meeting, and on the agenda were amongst other things excursions to the Whitlock Energy Collaboration Centre, The Hydrogen Office, Energy Park Fife and Tullis Russell Environmental Strategy and Eco Educational Centre. The IEG was also introduced to ***Celebrating Fife 2010: Our Year of Culture***, a very successful cultural event which went on through 2010. Fife allocated one million pounds to create "our year of culture". It turned out to be a great success, and it generated millions of pounds as well as new jobs.
- b)** The second IEG meeting was held in Stavanger, Norway, 14th – 16th March 2011. 15 delegates attended this event, which included visits to Kongsgaard upper secondary school, dep. of music, dance and drama, and Bergeland upper secondary school's young entrepreneurship shop. The main subjects during this meeting were innovation and economic development. The other study tours took the IEG to the new Risavika harbour and GENA - the only Norwegian forensic laboratory accredited for the analysis and interpretation of biological stains- and reference samples. The IEG also visited the Ullrigg Drilling and Well Centre in Stavanger. Ullrigg is a full scale offshore type, fully automated drilling rig using the cyberbase control system. Finally, the group was introduced to **Lyse**, which is a major power company based in the south west part of Norway. The company operates ten hydroelectric and one thermal power plants, the power grid in 16 municipalities as well as fiberoptic broadband and other telecommunication services, natural gas distribution, district heating, burglar alarms. The company's head office is located in Stavanger and owned by 16 municipalities.



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5. The Work Plan

The Work Plan is "a living document" and is regularly updated. The IEG Strategic Group will have a closer look at the Work Plan in the fall of 2012 to pinpoint important future issues, including the work with NSR 2020.

6. The North Sea Schools Sustainability Network

Ms Ann Brown, former NSC adviser, has been very helpful indeed in developing the North Sea Schools Sustainable Network under the North Sea Commission umbrella. So far, four North Sea Comenius projects have been completed and the fifth project will finish in the summer of 2013. These projects have attracted a total of 645,000 euro and involved schools and colleges from all the countries around the North Sea. Over 700 pupils/students and teachers have been on study visits, meetings and conferences in each others' partner regions, and around 2,500 have been involved indirectly in project activities, through hosting visitors and engaging in project activities at their own schools.

Three new proposals have been submitted by the 21 February 2012 deadline for the Comenius part of the Lifelong Learning funding Programme. If the bids are successful, these projects will be funded to begin in September 2012.

New projects submitted – results will be known on 1 July 2012

1. "Re-thinking Energy"

Partners (Lead partner first)

Bucksburn Academy, Aberdeen City, Scotland
Arbroath High School, Angus, Scotland
Alfa-College, Groningen, The Netherlands
Natural Resource Use School Strommaskolan, Västra Götaland, Sweden
Alstergymnasium Henstedt-Ulzburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
Greåker videregående skole, Østfold, Norway
Borg Videregående Skole, Borgenhaugen, Østfold, Norway
ROC Westerschelde, Terneuzen, Zeeland, The Netherlands

Project summary

A measure under the Climate Change priority for the North Sea Commission in "**North Sea Region 2020**" is to: "Raise awareness and provide access to knowledge of climate adaptations throughout local regional and national levels as well in the general public"

If it gains funding, the proposed project "Rethinking Energy" will enable young people from Germany, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and The Netherlands to investigate the topic of alternative energy. They will experience different cultures by studying and working together to understand the need for European energy cooperation. Each partner will set up case studies of good energy practice in their country to be shared across the group. The technology behind the energy source, its benefits and challenges will be explored and analysed.

2. "Improving Employability"

Partners (Lead partner first)

Bungay High School, Suffolk, UK
Lycée Charlotte Perriand, Genech, Nord Pas de Calais, France
Borg Videregående Skole, Borgenhaugen, Østfold, Norway
ROC Westerschelde, Ternuezen, Zeeland, The Netherlands
Häggvall skolan, Höviksnäs, Västra Götaland, Sweden

Project summary

This project sets out to examine the gap between the achievements of young people and the expectations of employers. Its broad aim is to find some new strategies and practices to improve the employability of young people in each of the partner regions.

Each partner will consult a range of local organisations and businesses that have a part to play in the transition from school or college to the workplace. Partners will also work closely with local employers, chambers of commerce and business support organisations in order to define a set of "Employability Criteria", and to develop new strategies and approaches.

The partners will formulate a set of criteria to be used in surveys and questionnaires. These will gain data about the specific skills which employers want from young people entering the workplace. The teachers will work together as an international group to devise project activities, trials of new ideas, approaches and materials.

Results and outcomes of the project are designed to provide a framework which will include new strategies and approaches in each of the partner schools/colleges. A set of case studies will identify innovative approaches to raising aspirations and increasing employability.

3. The Culture of Coastal Communities - Stories from the Sea Shore

Partners (Lead partner first)

Kirkhill Primary School, Aberdeen City, Scotland

Manstad skole, Manstad, Østfold, Norway

Vrije Basisschool Zedelgem De Leeuw, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

IES NUM 1 XABIA, Xabia, Spain

Project summary

All of the partners are situated in coastal communities, which despite their maritime nature, can often be isolated from meaningful contact with other cultures. The project sets out to motivate pupils and teachers to understand their own communities, but at the same time to look beyond them to other European cultures which have the common thread of being coastal communities.

Pupils from the partner schools will work together to investigate the common thread of living and working in a coastal community over the centuries in their own and other European regions.

The move from primary to secondary school is an important issue for the partners, and so the age range 9-13 has been specifically chosen. Results will be shared in each partner region between local primary and secondary schools.

The partners will involve their wider communities in providing resources and information, and for dissemination. A final event will celebrate and publicise project achievements.

North Sea Commission support

Throughout the life of these projects the North Sea Commission and the IEG has provided support and provided dissemination opportunities required by the funding programme. This has taken place through reports to the IEG; reports to Executive Committee; reports to other thematic groups, and for the General Assemblies. In addition IEG adviser Erik Lindboe has attended project meetings and conferences.

In the forthcoming round of European funding starting in 2014 the Lifelong Learning programme, and therefore Comenius as part of it, will disappear. It will be replaced by a new programme with the name 'Erasmus for All'.

Hands across the sea

Schools and colleges have benefited tremendously from the Comenius programme. Some remarks from schools and colleges which have been part of the North Sea Schools Network include the following:

- "Comenius generated a whole school common goal which focused our attention on both working together and working with others. It broadened the student's horizons and enabled them to see how others lived and worked."



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- “The visits to other countries had an enormous effect both on the students involved and the school as a whole due to the feedback given.”
- “Our college staff and students rose to the challenge and immersed themselves in all the activities; it was fabulous for their own skills development and in building relationships with colleagues from other countries. “
- “The whole project generated great community interest and involvement with our school.”
- “The project provided us with an opportunity to showcase our work to students and staff from other schools and colleges. It is hard to quantify the immense positive impact this has had on the whole school community.”

Marine Resources Group

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is update the General Assembly as to the work of NSCMRG over the past year

1. Advisors activities on behalf of NSC

3 meetings with EU Commission

15 meetings Marine Scotland planning NSMF

Preparing project application

2 Brent Decommissioning Seminars

1 Clean North sea ships Assembly

3 meetings with Fishing Industry

Advisors meeting Bremen

GA Brugge

NS 2020 Launch Brussels

NSCMF meeting and lunch with Baroness Scott, Alistair Dillon, Lord Sewell

NSC President meeting with Director Marine Scotland

NSC Presidents meeting in Edinburgh and Presidents meeting and lunch at Scottish Parliament

NSCMRG meeting in London

NSCMRG politicians and vice President dinner and political debate House of Lords

NSC Ex Com Brussels

Meeting with OSPAR

WWF Pisces Seminar. Gave presentation on NSMF proposal and NS 2020

NSMF Proposal Seminar Edinburgh

GAP 2 meeting on Regionalisation of Fisheries in North Sea London

2. North Sea Maritime Forum

Much of my time has been spent preparing the proposal for the North Sea Maritime forum; I have worked closely with Lynsay Ross, Marine Scotland and Manfred Vollmer, Wadden Sea Forum in the preparation of Application one and two. I would like to thank them both for all their hard work. I would also like to thank the Interreg Secretariat for their support.

However all the work was to no avail as the Interreg Steering could not reach consensus and the project was rejected twice, even though we thought we had met all the criteria. Our Project Partners were, as you can imagine very disappointed.

Everyone agrees it is very important project but !! We are having a meeting with Interreg to try and find a way forward.

3. NSMF Project proposal Seminar

The workshop was hosted by the Scottish Government and had over 70 participants from 8 countries, representing Oil & Gas, Renewables, shipping, ports, fishing, science, transport, NGOs, EU Commission, OSPAR and local and national governments. The aim of the workshop was to develop the North Sea Maritime Forum proposal. It also brought together the different sectors and provided

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them with opportunity to highlight their views on the future of their sectors and to their opinion on how EU policies would impact on them.

Information regarding Interreg funding and its implications were provided to participants enabling them to make the decision whether they would or would not become partners.



Some of the speakers, Lars, Malcolm Morrison (SFF), Lieselot Marinus (EU Commission), David Johnson (OSPAR), Me, Euan Dunn (Birdlife International), Pim Vsser (VizNed, Netherlands), Linda Rosborough (Director Marine Scotland).

4. NSC Presidents Meetings in Edinburgh

20 December.

NSC President accompanied by Lars Haukvik, Vibeke Jacobsen and Ann Bell had a meeting with Linda Rosborough, Director Marine Scotland, Scottish Government to discuss the NSC 2020 Document, the NS Maritime forum and the relationship between the regions and national administration. This was a very positive and constructive meeting.



21 December

The NSC Presidents had a meeting hosted by Marine Scotland, at their Headquarters in Victoria Quay Edinburgh. This was followed by a study tour to the Scottish Parliament hosted by Alison McInnes MSP, former Chair of the NSC Environment Group. During this visit Alison McInnes MSP agreed that she would be delighted to present the NSC 2020 Document to the Scottish Government.



NSC Presidents in the Scottish Parliament Chamber

5. NSCMRG meeting in London



1 February NSCMRG Politicians and NSC Vice President Ole Sorensen had a meeting with Baroness Scott, former Chair of the NSC Culture and Tourism Group, at this Ole Sorensen presented a copy of the NSC 2020 Strategy to the Baroness Scott. Baroness Scott then gave a guided tour of the House of Commons where we were able to observe a parliamentary debate and a vote on Welfare Reform. We then proceeded to the House of Lords where we again were able to follow a debate.

The Baroness Scott then gave a very informative tour of the House of Lords this was followed by a political debate and dinner where we were also joined by Lord Sewel who was chairman of two of our NSC conferences on Working together to Manage the North Sea. This provided NSC politicians to have some informed discussion on a number of political

issues.

All agreed it a very special evening

2 February NSCMRG held its meeting in Europe House London

Anders Fasth welcomed everyone, particularly Ole Sorensen and John Lamb, NSC Vice Presidents. He felt it was very important that members of the Strategic Committee attended meetings of the Thematic Groups as this presented a more integrated approach to the work of the NSC.

Before the meeting started formally I asked the Chair if I may have a moment to inform the Group that I would be standing down as Advisor at the GA in Bremen.

During the meeting we discussed a number of issues including;

Our updated work plan, which was thoroughly discussed and some new actions added. The updated Work plan is attached. Our Work Plan was and is developed to meet the priorities and actions of the NSC 2020.

North Sea Maritime Forum was also discussed and I gave an update on the present status of the project. The Forum did not get approval from Interreg in December, however we have been asked to re submit the project. It was felt we had too many UK partners. All members of the Steering Committee that the Forum was a good idea.

On 31 January Vibeke and I attended a meeting Brussels with Interreg and some of the steering committee, who had not approved the project. One of the work package organisation also attended and we were pleased that Vastra Gotaland attended and have agreed to take more high profile role in the Forum. We had a very constructive and positive meeting and now have to provide more information and some new partners and then re submit the project. Another meeting is planned in Edinburgh mid February to prepare the first draft of the re submission.

North Sea 2020

NSC Vice Presidents Ole Sorensen and John Lamb presented the 2020 document to the Group. They notified us that it would be launched in European Parliament on 27 March hosted by Danish MEP Ole Kristiansen.

All felt that this was an extremely well written document and would be very be useful in shaping the future work of the NSC. It was also agreed that everyone felt that had the opportunity to be part of its development. As noted earlier in this report Ole Sorensen presented copies of the NSC 2020 to both the Baroness Scott and Lord Sewel so that may ensure it was seen by the whole House of Lords.

Ole and John also notified us that at the NSC Executive Meeting they would look at the formation of the Thematic Groups to see if they met the 2020 future requirement.

It was also discussed and suggested that the NSC 2020 Document should be presented at a Workshop during the Maritime Days in Goteborg.

A copy of the 2020 document was presented to Haitze Siemers of DG MARE, during a meeting Vibeke and I had with him in Brussels

During the meeting we also had very thorough discussion on Aquaculture and the development of a North Sea Grid, which should ensure accessible, affordable green energy for the communities of the North Sea.

Tom Christer Nilsen gave an update on Clean North Sea Ships, the project was moving forward according to plan. The next Assembly of the Project will take in Europe House, London in June 2012. Members of the group were encouraged to attend if possible.

North Sea Management Plans and the Reform of the CFP were also discussed. Camilla Loevaas Stavnes is co ordinating all the North Sea Managment Plans for the Group and she is preparing a short paper which will be attached to the report of our London meeting and put on the web site. It was decided that a letter on the eliminations of discards be prepared for the Executive Committee meeting February for approval before being sent to Commissioner Damanaki.

Alistair Dillon from the House of Lords joined the meeting in the afternoon, Anders Fasth thanked him for all his asistance over the past two days. Alistair will work with John Lamb to ensure that the NSC 2020 document is presented to the UK Government.

NSC Advisor Meeting in Bremen

We had an excellent meeting planning the joint meeting and study trips and our GA.



The wonderful room where our GA will be.

NSR 2020 Launch Brussels

It was my privilege to attend the above launch, which was very well attended. It was great to hear some of the MEPs were considering setting in place a North Sea Inter Group. This would great for the work of the NSC



PIECES Seminar

I was invited by WWF to give a presentation on our proposed North Sea Maritime Forum and the NS 2020.

This Seminar was the final workshop of a project to develop guidelines for the implementation on Marine Strategy Framework Directive in the Celtic Sea. It was most interesting and if we ever get the NSMF approved joint working with the Celtic Seas would be very worth while.

GAP2 Regionalisation of Fisheries in North Sea

The NSC was invited to attend this workshop in London, because of NS Fisheries Partnership and the NSRAC. I attended on behalf of NSC and thought I had gone back ten years most of the people from the NS Partnership. Will send the reportt of the meeting to Lars to put on the web site.



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The next meeting of the NSCMRG will take in Bremerhaven on 18 June prior to GA.

NSC Marine Resources Group Advisor

As most of you will now be aware I plan to step down as Advisor at the GA. I would like to express the pleasure it has been for me since 1995 to be part of such an amazing organisation.

Being Advisor to this group has never ever been a hardship; it has felt like my extended family as does the NSC as a whole. I have had the privilege and delight to work with four extremely competent, fair and wise Chairmen, Harry Hjeltnes, Harry Jensen, Sandy Cluness and Anders Fasth all whom were and are committed to the work of the NSC and to ensuring that we have a future for fisheries and fishing communities around the North Sea. I would like to thank them all for their support and friendship over the years. I would also like to thank all the members of our small but very productive group, what a pleasure it has been working with you.

Being part of the North Sea Commission has enabled me to develop a wide, varied and diverse network which will continue to be useful to the NSC.

I have made some wonderful friends from all over Europe, Norway and of course Japan my dear friend and colleague Professor Hideo Kojimoto who has followed and contributed to the work of the NSC for many years.

It has also been great working with the CPMR especially the FIG group under the Chairmanship of Josie Simpson and Secretariat Sally Spence. How we have all enjoyed the many meetings in Shetland (many of which happened to coincide with Up Hellya, purely by chance of course).

I cannot finish without thanking Aberdeenshire Council particularly Audrey Findlay and Anne Robertson who supported my work and me over the years.

Finally may I thank our dear President and my friend Gunn Marit and Lars and Vibeke for all the fun, hard work and politics we have shared (trouble makers)...

I would like to wish my successor and the new President and secretariat every good wish and hope that you enjoy your time as much as I have.

**Thank you all
Ann**

Sustainable Development Group

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to summarise the work of the North Sea Commission's thematic group "Sustainable Development Group" (SDG) from July 2011 to June 2012.

6. IEG Chair, Vice-Chairs and Adviser

- Chair - Cllr Henrik Ringbaek Madsen
- Vice Chair - Cllr Ben de Reu
- Vice Chair - Vacant

The position of Vice Chair for this group is still vacant.

7. Activities

The SDG Chair, Vice Chair, NSC Secretariat and adviser – Met in Holland at Schipol Airport on the 4th April 2012. At this meeting it was decided that the group have their next full group meeting in Bremerhaven on the 18th of June at the Klimahaus.

4. Sustainable Development Group Meetings

The SDG strategic group met in Schipol on the 4th of April. It was noted that the group is now struggling with members as currently Sustainable Development is a cross cutting theme which makes it very difficult for the group to really get to grips with it and focus on specific issue as various members want various topics covered and it is just not possible for this to happen. As such the Strategic group would like to put forward to the NSC Executive group its views on how it see best for the Thematic groups to be re structured, as sustainable Development will be looked after by each individual group and not by a separate group.

The SDG recommends that the Thematic Groups should be re-named as follows:

Fisheries
Innovation, Economic Development and Climate Change
Tourism and Sustainable Communities
Education and Culture
Transport

SURF Project

The SDG has also worked very closely with the SURF project and have developed a position paper along with the group which the SURF project would like the SDG and NSC Executive to approve and support. Below is a summary of the document. The entire document is attached.



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Summary

A key to creating competitive advantage for European Cities and Regions is to recognise the opportunities and value that the urban fringe area presents through making smarter use of space to enhance sustainable urban development.

With a focus on either urban or rural policy, current European policy does not consider the importance that the urban fringe connection has to the success of cities and regions in Europe.

The Sustainable Urban Fringes (SURF) project recognises that there is an opportunity for the European Union to bridge the gap between urban and rural policy and create new policy which can specifically benefit the development urban fringe areas. Complimenting existing urban and rural policy, this would recognise the characteristics and contribution of these areas to the sustainability and competitiveness of Europe's Cities and Regions.

The SURF project therefore supports the European Union Regional Policy 'Cities of Tomorrow' report which states that "a coherent approach to smart, inclusive and green strategies must be adopted so that conflicts and contradictions between these different objectives can be overcome and accomplishment of one objective is not detrimental to meeting others".

The report continues to stress the importance of "a harmonious development of the city with its surrounding area"

SURF recognises the importance of green spaces to cities and green infrastructure in enabling connectivity and enhancing sustainable urban planning. It is becoming more evident that Europe would benefit from further recognition the level in which cities rely on the ecological services that the surrounding fringe area provide.

In order to advance the Europe 2020 aim for sustainable growth in particular, the Flagship initiative for a 'Resource efficient Europe', the SURF Project has identified significant opportunities for cities and regions offered by the urban fringe area, which if recognised could contribute to a higher quality of life in the EU and a more globally competitive European community.

SURF calls upon the Commission to ensure that future policy proposals and Directives unlock possibilities to secure the economic, environmental and societal future of these areas. The Sustainable Development Group along with the CPMR Energy Group and Aberdeen City Council held a very successful and fruitful meeting in Aberdeen in January 2012 on drafting a response to the Energy Efficiency Directive. Given below are the comments on the 2014 to 2020 Cohesion Policy:

CPMR ENERGY WORKING GROUP

Comments on the 2014 – 2020 Cohesion Policy « package »

- CPMR welcomes the emphasis put by the EU in supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors, in promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management, in protecting the environment, in promoting resource efficiency, as well as in modernizing Europe electricity grid. However, it wishes to underline that in spite of the substantial growth in funding allocated to such goals in the forthcoming programming period, these sums will still remain very insufficient to cover Europe's considerable needs to modernize its energy infrastructures, and to achieve the objectives set out in the Energy and Climate change package and in related legislation (amongst which the promotion of Energy Efficiency in buildings, which will have a considerable financial impact on regional and local authorities). CPMR recalls that another, perhaps more substantial, source of funding should be found in the revenues generated from the auctioning of ETS Allowances under the ETS Directive (2003/87/EU). It call the EU Commission to ensure that Member States abide to the provisions of Article 10 which earmark 50% of those revenues for energy and climate change expenditure.
- CPMR takes note of the Commission's intention to allocate a very substantial share of the Structural Funds resources to the ESF, especially in more developed regions [c.f. Article 84 of Common Provisions Regulation]. Though the ESF may indeed be used for "*Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient, resource-efficient and environmentally sustainable economy, through reform of education and training systems, adaptation of skills and qualifications, up-skilling of the labour force, and the creation of new jobs in sectors related to the environment and energy;*" it remains that the bulk of investment required to meet such goals will require the use of ERDF rather than ESF. Therefore it considers that this compulsory use of ESF should not be retained, or should be softened.
- Though CPMR welcomes the emphasis put upon the "shift towards low carbon economy in all sectors" it considers that the provisions of the ERDF Regulation on Thematic concentration (Article 4) are somewhat too restrictive. The imposition of a minimum allocation of ERDF to Thematic Objective N° 4 [shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors] should be broadened to points N° 5 [promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management] and N°6 [protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency] , since such objectives, which all relate to energy and climate change issues, cannot be dissociated from each other.
- Regarding the imposition of Ex-ante conditionalities [Article 14 & al of Common provisions Regulation], the CPMR recalls that Regional authorities, whose responsibilities varies in the different Member States, often have little or no way to ensure that such or such conditionality is being met, but would suffer directly from a suspension of payment arising from the lack of action of the responsible authority. Therefore, the implementation of an Ex ante conditionality requires the setting-up of a level playing field with proper discussion procedure associating all the concerned bodies.

Some conditionalities referring directly to energy and climate change issues should be amended:

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- Conditionality 4.2 on Renewable Energy which refers to Directive 2009/28/EC on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources should be completed by an explicit reference to Whereas 63 and article 16§7 of the aforesaid Directive to ensure that *“Electricity producers who want to exploit the potential of energy from renewable sources in the peripheral regions of the Community, in particular in island regions and regions of low population density, should, whenever feasible, benefit from reasonable connection costs in order to ensure that they are not unfairly disadvantaged in comparison with producers situated in more central, more industrialised and more densely populated areas”*, since this provision is not being respected in some Member States.
- Conditionality 5 on Promoting climate change adaptation and risk prevention should rephrase thus its criteria for fulfillment to take the variety of institutional situations into account: *“A national or regional risk assessment **undertaken by the competent authorities** shall be in place that includes etc.”*

[*N.B: a further consultation on the issue of conditionalities will be undertaken with CPMR Regions because of the highly technical nature of this matter. The present list is not exhaustive*].

- The CPMR wishes to highlight some potential risks arising from a narrow interpretation of the draft Regulation on Guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructures, which is directly related to the Connecting Europe facility Regulation. The TEN-E Guidelines [Annex IV, point 4.c)] which specifies the rules and indicators concerning projects of Common Interest proposes that *“Network connectivity and access to all categories of network users”* should be retained as a criteria. This should be measured (inter alia) by *“assessing the methods used for calculating charges and tariffs”*. However, Article 16§7 of the Directive 2009/28/EC on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources specifies that *“charging of transmission and distribution tariffs does not discriminate against electricity from renewable energy sources, including in particular electricity from renewable energy sources produced in peripheral regions, such as island regions, and in regions of low population density.”* This point should be recalled in the TEN-E Directive.

5. Cooperation with the NSC Innovation and Education Thematic Group.

There have been joint meetings in 2010 and 2011 between the Innovation & Education Group and the Sustainable Development Group and these meeting will continue to develop with the hope that all the groups will meet on a regular basis. The two group will also be working together along with the CPMR Energy group to develop a joint conference on Renewables and its technologies in November this year.

6. Next SDG Meeting

The next meeting of the group is scheduled to be held on the November 2012.

Transport Group

1. Introduction

This report summarises the work of the NSC Transport group since the last NSC General Assembly in Bruges in June 2011.

2. The Transport group in brief

The main aim of the group is to improve cohesion, accessibility and competitiveness in the North Sea Region (NSR) through the development of sustainable and efficient transport solutions.

Current key issues of the group: Monitoring and responding to the European Agenda on Transport, shadowing projects in the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme, statistical mapping and promoting good practice on sustainable transport solutions.

Leadership and administration

Chair: Cllr. Preben Friis-Hauge, South Denmark Region, elected on 31 October 2011

Chair: Cllr. Leif Blomqvist, Västra Götaland region Sweden (elected 1 March 2006), up to 31 October 2011

Adviser: Jon Halvard Eide, Vest-Agder Norway (appointed October 2000)

Vice-Chair: Cllr. Anne E. Robertson, Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland (elected in June 2007)

Vice-Chair: Cllr. Leif Blomqvist, Västra Götaland region Sweden, elected 31 October 2011

At the Executive meeting on 31 October 2011, Preben Friis-Hauge and Leif Blomqvist changed positions with the former taking over as Chair for the latter, and the latter taking over as Vice-Chair for the former.

Membership

The group has got about 30 registered members. In addition, a number of regions are on a correspondence list receiving information about the activities of the group.

3. Group meetings

The group has held two meetings in the 2010 – 2011 season:

- Aarhus 28 September 2011
- Örebro, Sweden 22 February 2012

Attendance

On average, about 10 - 12 persons coming from member regions in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Scotland have attended the meetings of the group, a level of attendance fairly similar to that of the 2010- 2011 season. No representatives from German, Dutch and French member regions have attended any group meetings this season.

4. Issues and activities

Monitoring and responding to the European Transport Agenda

- Opinion on the EU Transport White Paper 2011

In September 2011 the Transport group adopted a draft NSC opinion on the EU Transport White Paper which was validated by the Executive Committee on 31 October

- Contribution to the CPMR policy position on the future TEN-T (TransEuropean Transport Network) policy

At the CPMR General Assembly in Aarhus in September 2011, representatives of the Transport group attended a meeting with Jean-Eric Paquet, Director of DG Move, together with representatives of other CPMR Commissions to be briefed about and exchange views on the TEN-T revision prior to the transport session at the General Assembly.

Then Vice Chair Preben Friis-Hauge delivered an intervention on the TEN-T revision in the transport session at the CPMR General Assembly.

Representatives of the Transport group attended a meeting of the CPMR Intercom group on TEN-T in Zaragoza on 7 – 8 November. At the meeting, the NSC representatives presented an input to the CPMR follow-up of the European Commission draft regulation on the revised TEN-T from 19 October, as well as to the draft regulation on the funding instrument “Connecting Europe Facility”.

The Transport group was also represented at a meeting of the CPMR in Brussels in December to draft a policy position on the TEN-T and the “Connecting Europe Facility” for the CPMR Political Bureau on 9 February. The CPMR policy position agrees to NSC’s priorities on adding the ports of Hirtshals, Frederikshavn, Esbjerg and Aberdeen, and related rail- and road links to the TEN-T core network. DG Move is interested in working with the CPMR on defining a new tool to encourage sustainable maritime services under the TEN-T – a tool which would be important for the implementation of the NSR 2020 priority on Accessibility and Clean Transport.

Good practice on sustainable transport solutions

The Transport group has continued to develop the good practice data base on sustainable transport solutions among NSC members on the basis of an online survey conducted in the fall of 2010. The group has decided to promote this good practice framework as a model for the whole CPMR, taking into account that most good practice examples within transport would be applicable and transferable across Europe

Projects for Interreg IV B North Sea Region Programme & other programmes

The meeting has reviewed and exchanged information on transport-related projects approved in the Interreg IV B North Sea Region Programme in which group members and other NSC regions are involved. At the meeting in Örebro in February the group heard a presentation of the Dry Port project by the project manager in Västra Götaland Region. Several partners to the project in the Netherlands and the UK are also members of the NSC but not active in the Transport group. The group will therefore work to engage these partners in the activities of the group.

A project developing a green transport corridor in the North Sea Region from Oslo to Randstadt (GreCor) aims to reach an agreement at high political level on the development of green transport

solutions in this corridor. The Transport group believes that the NSC should try to exploit a possible mobilization of the high political level in support of the NSR 2020 measures on accessibility and clean transport. This project has also identified a need to map transport flows more accurately, which could be used as an argument for TEN-T support for a study on the mapping of flows in the North Sea Region, such as the Baltic Transport Outlook

North Sea Region 2020

The group submitted a response to the consultation on the NSR 2020 document which was reviewed by the Executive Committee on 31 October as part of the consultation process.

The Transport group is supporting the NSR 2020 priority on accessibility and clean transport by initiating and formulating policy positions towards relevant EU and national policy papers, facilitating cooperation between all relevant stakeholders in transport, disseminating relevant knowledge from and capitalizing on networks from Interreg projects.

5. Participation in other NSC meetings and relevant external activities

- A representative of the Transport group from Aberdeenshire gave a presentation on a planning meeting for the North Sea Maritime Stakeholder Forum project in Edinburgh on 25 August. The Transport group has later provided written input for the project application
- The Adviser and several group members attended the final conference of the Interreg IVB project StratMoS in Brussels on 7 September
- The Chair and the Adviser attended the Executive meeting in Brussels on 31 October
- On 9 November, the Adviser met with the NSC Executive Secretary and the consultant from COWI in Copenhagen to finalise the NSR 2020 strategy document adopted by the Executive Committee in Brussels on 31 October. The Adviser has also after this provided “technical assistance” in conjunction with the finalisation and publishing of the document.
- On 10 – 11 January, the Adviser attended a meeting in Bremen, together with the NSC Secretariat, other thematic Advisers and staff from the Interreg North Sea Region Programme Secretariat, for the planning of the 2012 Joint Annual Conference & General Assembly there.
- The Chair and the Adviser attended the Executive meeting in Gothenburg on 23 February
- On 28 – 29 February the Adviser attended a meeting in Aberdeen with the NSC Executive Secretary and fellow Advisers, discussing the implementation of NSR 2020
- On 27 March, the Adviser attended the launch of the NSR 2020 strategy in the European Parliament in Brussels