

**North Sea Commission Executive Committee
TV Documentary Series
Thursday 27 October 2005
Trollhättan, Västra Götaland, Sweden**

A powerful effort on publicity is key to the successful branding of the North Sea Region. Over the years the North Sea Commission and the North Sea Programme have, as key stakeholders, been working together in order to raise the profile of the region.

There is now a possibility to make a 6 episode TV documentary series about the North Sea Programme [appendix 1]. This 2 year project has been proposed by an Edinburgh based TV director, Alistair Moffat. So far a number of UK independent TV companies have expressed interest in the project, as have Nordisk Film and Egmont, which are Scandinavian based.

The full cost of the series would be approximately €600,000. Half the funding would be raised from the TV companies. The North Sea Programme would be prepared to cover between €200-250,000 from its Technical Assistance budget. In addition, the North Sea Commission has expressed interest in providing some financial support from their members.

Before the picture is entirely clear a lot of discussion and negotiation still needs to take place. However, it seems to be an ideal opportunity to achieve the maximum coverage of the programme looking at the emergence of the North Sea Region, its culture and identity in the past, present and future. If this can be achieved then the TV documentary series represents excellent value for money.

NORTH SEA

1. The Idea.

The idea is simple; to produce a high-quality television series, write a substantial book and perhaps mount a travelling exhibition about the North Sea.

To our motorised, land-based eye the North Sea seems a barrier, a place to be crossed safely, a blank on the map, a grey space between the twinkling lights of home ports. But history shows something very different. Instead of a barrier the sea was a connector. People, animals, products and ideas crossed and recrossed it constantly, many communities made their livelihoods from it and many fought its devastating advance for centuries. There was - and there is again - a North Sea culture and this television series aims to show what it was and what it is once again becoming. As communities around its shores begin to recognise what they have long had in common, it is surely timely to record how that culture operated and how it is beginning to revive.

2. How To Get The TV Series Made.

To allow the maximum flexibility to television schedulers in 7 countries, the best format for the TV series is 6 half-hour programmes made so that they do not date quickly and can easily be repeated.

The costs ought to be as high as can be managed so that the programmes compare favourably with other documentary programmes surrounding them in the schedules. And the average cost for programmes of this sort on the ITV/BBC networks (with high production values, multiple locations, original music and sophisticated graphics) is **£150,000** per hour. With savings of around £50,000, that makes a series cost of **£400,000**.

The proposal is to raise half of this from broadcasters from the North Sea countries, and the producer plans to invest a small percentage to secure video rights. That means match-funding of **£200,000** from the Interreg IIIB programme.

3. The Book.

Television series become much more of an event when a book is attached - press coverage and general PR is greater and the impact of the series is prolonged. It is proposed that a British publisher be found (by the producer's literary agent) and all the costs of an English language version be met by them. But for translations and the cost of press and PR in all 7 countries, support might be sought from Interreg IIIB.

4. A Travelling Exhibition

If this is timed to coincide with the transmission of the TV series and the publication of the book, then the impact of both will be enhanced. Costs ought to be comparable to the *Kings of the North Sea* project.

5. Timescale.

Done properly, considered and well researched, this is a 12 to 14 month project from green light to completion. Synchronised scheduling will prove impossible but some measure of co-ordination ought to be managed.

6. Impact.

Many of the schemes listed in the *North Sea Project Book* make historical references in their introduction or carry a historical note in their *Did You Know?* sections. And yet there is no history of the North Sea. This TV series and book would not only key into many of the projects already underway - Nortrail, North SEAfaring, NMC-NSR, WCI-II, Seaport, Waterfront Communities Project - it would also underpin all of them with a solid cultural foundation. And it would bring the ancient idea of the community of the North Sea into the 21st century.

Alistair Moffat
August 2005.

