

Update on the North Sea Programme to the North Sea Commission Executive Committee meeting October 2004

Introduction

The Interreg IIIB North Sea Programme continues to make excellent progress towards its objectives and spending targets. Last week at MC6 in Karlstad, Sweden, there was a presentation about the progress of the work towards delivering the programme targets as described in the CIP, with all the projects approved at SC meetings 1,2 and 3 now in their main delivery stage.

The second reporting round of the year is now in process with the projects overall having met 78% of the spending target for the year. This will necessitate a further reporting round in November in order to meet the n+2 targets but the secretariat is optimistic that this is an achievable goal.

If the programme can meet its spending targets for 2004, the pressure will be off as all the 54 approved projects will in their main spending phase from 2005!

Lead Partner seminar November 2004

The next Lead Partner seminar will take place in Brussels in November. This is an important meeting to which all lead partners and their finance managers will be invited. They will receive all the information they need in order to submit their final claims but also will be invited to share some of the learning points about participating in the Interreg IIIB programme so that these can be incorporated into the administrative structures for the new programme where possible.

Focused Call for applications

The focused call will open on the 1st November and close on the 30th November. There are five themes for the focused call and it is expected that there will be at least one application per theme submitted by the deadline. There are approximately €10.5 million available for this call. MC6 agreed in principle that there may be a second focused call in the autumn of 2005 which would aim to spend returned funds from projects under spending, unspent funds from the first focused call and possibly interest money. This will be discussed again at MC7 in March and the focus of this call would be decided. It is likely (but not confirmed) that plans for the future would be an important feature!

Maritime safety umbrella operation

This initiative is making sound progress now. The Monitoring Committees of the North Sea, North West Europe and Northern Periphery programmes have approved the funds and involvement in the project. The Baltic Sea and Atlantic Area programmes are very positively disposed and in the case of the Atlantic Area will make a decision during the coming days. Interviews have been held for the co-ordinator post and it is expected to have the successful candidate in position by the 1 January 2005. The launch event for the initiative will be held in Antwerp in April/May.

The future of the North Sea Programme

The future of the Interreg programmes is, of course, the subject of intense discussion at the moment. The recent Monitoring Committee meeting, however, decided that the preparations for the new programme should begin by June 2005! Work on updating the mid-term evaluation and the spatial vision will begin in November 2004. The first results of the update

of the Norvision will be presented at the Annual Conference in Middleburg in June. This will be an excellent opportunity to involve the North Sea Commission members directly in the discussions, which will take place at the beginning of the preparations for the new programme. At MC6 it was pointed out that the scope of the draft regulations is very narrow, omitting some key subjects of importance for our North Sea Region. These include urban systems, urban/rural areas, nature, cultural heritage and tourism. All countries were asked to push these themes in the Council working group where possible in order to provide the basis for a good "Interreg IV North Sea Programme".

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