

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

One year ago, I stood in Gothenburg talking about what I wanted to do if you elected me as President. Viborg had led the NSC with excellence for 9 years and now I was the one to take over the task. It was and still is a challenge. On the other hand, this was an opportunity to change the path we had followed and to make some changes.

In my election speech I told you of my ideas for the future of NSC:

- *It is vital that we continue the cooperation in the Executive Committee and strengthen political dialogue;*
- *We need to continue and further develop the work within and between the Thematic Groups and strengthen the work of the coordinators;*
- *Today's challenges require a trans-sectoral approach and cooperation to meet the challenges of spatial development. The thematic groups must continue to work together. A good example of this was the joint seminar on 'Sustainable Innovation' arranged in cooperation between the Economic Development Group and the Environment Group;*
- *We need to ensure continuity of resources (stronger participation and financial commitment) in order to further develop the thematic groups and their initiatives;*
- *We need to continue to improve and develop our communication strategy and ensure transparency.*
- *The cooperation between the CPMR and the NSC has been improved and strengthened.*
- *We have to establish concrete cooperation projects which will strengthen the network and further show the common challenges which stand before us, for ex. Safety at Sea – a theme which is an issue for all regions within the CPMR 'family'.*
- *I would also like to strengthen the cooperation with the Baltic Sea Commission.*
- *We need to ensure that the North Sea Region is secured a place in the next Interreg IV programme.*

In order to meet these challenges, we have to set the direction we want to go and then follow the path step by step. There will be challenges and setbacks but in the end we will succeed. And why will we succeed, we have dedicated Vice-Presidents, we have dedicated members in the Executive Committee, dedicated Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the thematic groups, and dedicated co-ordinators, dedicated officers working for the NSC.

What have we accomplished so far? I wanted a more politically led NSC, to do so the Executive Committee in their October meeting appointed one Vice-President who is responsible for the external relations, Peter Byman, and one Vice-President responsible for the internal NSC and CPMR matters, Audrey Findlay. At the same meeting, Roland Andersson was appointed responsible for NSC-BSC cooperation. There, the Executive Committee also set up a Strategic Committee consisting of above-mentioned persons and myself. The Strategic Committee has had two meetings, discussing some of the papers we are voting on later today.

In order to accommodate the future strategy within the North Sea Commission, the Executive Committee decided to propose an update to the NSC Charter to be in line with today's situation. We have for some time had problems to fill the different positions of Chairs and especially Vice-Chairs of the Thematic Groups. In the last year we have had many candidates for some of the different posts that have been available and a number of new people have been elected to take up positions within the different Thematic Groups. This is a new and exciting situation but isn't taken account for in the NSC charter. At the Executive Committee meeting on October 15th 2004 the Executive Committee decided to recommend

for changes to the NSC Charter. We will vote over the changes later in this meeting, but it's important as a follow up to the changes within the charter to also make a set of more transparent procedures for election and voting. The Executive Committee must supervise this and will present these for the Annual Business meeting next year.

An important task for me, with the support of the Executive Committee, is to strengthen the relationship with the CPMR and I know CPMR has the same interest. I'm very pleased to have the CPMR President Claudio Martini and General Secretary Xavier Gizard present at this meeting, welcome to both of you and I look forward to President Martini's speech later today. The common use of both organisations competence and contacts will be important for all of us in the future. I also want to highlight the lobbying and the political achievements CPMR has accomplished in recent years. This is an effort we will benefit from in the years to come.

Both the NSC and the CPMR will gain by a closer cooperation and there are examples of this already; DG Fish and conferences on regional fish management. I think our experiences regarding the recently established North Sea Regional Advisory Council (RAC), is of importance for the other Geographical Commissions of the CPMR. I'm very grateful to the goodwill demonstrated by the NSC Fisheries group to support the work of the CPMR Fisheries Intercom Group. The project "Europe of the Sea" is another example of a joint effort between CPMR members to influence with the regional perspective on the new EU maritime policy. The NSC wants to play an active part in this project and we are now planning a seminar in Bergen, Norway in November to help bring the "northern perspective" to the project.

As I said earlier, the relationship between NSC and BSC is of importance to us. I'm pleased to have the BSC Executive Secretary Marko Mally at our meeting today to learn about NSC and to make contacts with our members. It is beneficial for the Northern regions to join forces to work together on issues, which promote the interests of Northern Europe. On February 18th we had the first joint meeting of members of each commission's Executive Committees and we agreed to work closer together on the issues of Transport and Sustainable Development. There is also a wish to promote important political issues together; one example is the future of Territorial Cooperation.

Our Thematic Groups are extremely important for the work within the NSC. We are very fortunate to have dedicated and skilled co-ordinators, I want to thank them for their huge contribution in making the NSC a vital and strong organisation. At our Executive Committee meeting March 1st we had a change of co-ordinator in the Economic Development Group. Vivien Collie was replaced by Erik Lindboe, welcome Erik. I want to thank Vivien for her work for the EDG and I want to thank her for all of the great work and results she has accomplished for the NSC. We will miss you and we wish you all the best for the future.

We also have new Chairs and Vice-Chairs in several thematic Groups;

- **Culture & Tourism:** Annelie Stark as new Chair and Alan Livingstone as new Vice-Chair
- **Education and Research:** Bernard Callieau as new Vice-Chair
- **Economic Development:** Rinske Kruisinga as new Chair and Kevan Lim as new Vice-Chair
- **Environment:** Alison McInnes as new Chair, and Andreas Lervik and Henrik Ringbæk Madsen as new Vice Chairs
- **Fisheries:** Anders Fasth as new Vice-Chair

I also want to mention some of the important activities of our Thematic Groups. Please read the Annual reports of the Thematic Groups for further information.

The joint Conference in Ringkøbing “The North Sea – Today and Tomorrow” was an example of what we can achieve when we work cross-sectorally and join forces within the NSC. The conference gathered over 170 participants for 3 days discussing Management of the Fisheries, Coastal Zone Management and a Sustainable Development of the North Sea. You will learn more about this conference later at this meeting. Thank you to Ringkøbing Amt for hosting this conference.

The initiative taken by the **Education & Research Group** on the Lisbon Strategy is an excellent example of another cross-sectoral initiative within the NSC. Their conference on Lifelong Learning in September 2004 was an important step in the process of enlightening the NSC on the Lisbon Strategy. I look forward to the future seminar in November in Västra Götaland to help us to contribute a North Sea dimension to the Lisbon Strategy.

During the last twelve months the NSC has increased its influence in the field of energy - a key issue for all our Regions. Through our **Economic Development Group** we have become an active member of the CPMR's new Working Group on Energy, and we now have international representation in key energy and renewable energy issues. Through this Working Group the CPMR hope to develop the exchange of experience and good practice, and influence legislation and EU policies. Energy and Renewable Energy are areas in which our member regions have considerable expertise and I am delighted that we will be taking an active role in this important international group.

The **Transport Group** has also been active as you see in their Annual Report. I wish to highlight their work on Response to EU consultation on Motorways of the Sea, an excellent paper adopted by the Executive Committee. On May 31st and June 1st the Group organised a Sustainable transport conference in Kristiansand together with the NTN project with over 100 participants. You find more information of the conference on our website. I also want to emphasize the work the Group has done to promote of the role of transport in a future North Sea Programme.

The **Fisheries Group** has started the cooperation with the CPMR Fisheries Inter Com Group. Cllr. Malcolm Cook Scottish Border, representing the NSC, would be the second Vice-Chair of the CPMR FIG. The CPMR are also to be given funding to undertake a series of Inter Regional Co-operation meetings, as, this is another area where the NSCFG could assist both politically and technically.

I also want to mention The North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC). One of the aims of the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership (NSCFP) was set in place a North Sea Regional Advisory/Management Council it partially achieved this aim on 4 November 2004 when the NSRAC was established the North Sea Regional Advisory Council at its first General Assembly in Edinburgh. The North Sea Commission Executive Committee and the NSC Fisheries Group played a major part in its birth. The NSC Executive Committee and CPMR are well represented on the NSRAC by the NSC Vice President Cllr. Audrey Findlay and her substitute Cllr. Harry Jensen

For the **Environment Group** I want to emphasise two areas of work;

- **Observership at OSPAR**

CPMR has gained observership status at OSPAR, the political framework that adopts binding regulations for the environment in the entire North East Atlantic, including the North Sea. The NSC will carry out this task. It puts great demands on our members to make an active contribution to various committees and working groups, as well as to OSPAR political meetings.

- **Observership at the North Sea Conference process;**

Next year on May 4-5, the Environment Ministers of the North Sea countries will have a Ministerial Meeting in Göteborg, Sweden, the "MM06". They will discuss the environmental impacts of shipping and fisheries

The NSCEG is representing the NSC in an "Issue Group for Sustainable Shipping" (IGSS), assisted by two experts provided jointly by the NSC and the Region Västra Götaland, Sweden. Two IGSS meetings have been held since last summer, in The Hague and Hamburg. This work includes the writing of proposals for the Ministerial Statement and various studies to bring light on issues of importance.

The **Culture and Tourism Group** has celebrated their 10-year anniversary this year. The main issues last year were;

- ***Culture 2007 and other culture/tourism items on the European Agenda***

The Group has seen it as a starting point to establish close contacts with the Commission and with the Committee of the Regions in order to be able to respond to future policy documents and initiatives on the European agenda..

- ***'In the footsteps of history'***

In 2004, the Culture and Tourism group published a booklet entitled 'In the footsteps of history', written by Mr Keith Newton from Aberdeenshire Council (Scotland). This booklet summarises the role of value of non-material culture in spatial development, with concrete reference to places visited by the group during recent meetings.

Further I'm very pleased for the cooperation we have with the North Sea Interreg IIIB Programme. One example is this joint conference. For both of us has the former and present Interreg programmes been a important tool for a Sustainable Developing the North Sea Region. The work the Interreg Secretariat does to make Interreg as one of the most important tools for regional development in the North Sea is important. I look forward to see the results of the Spatial Agenda and the future programme for the North Sea. NSC can and will use our political and administrative networks to promote the future programme. And NSC will also in the future be a catalyst for future projects.

To end this report I want to look at the future.

The activity level of the NSC is increasing, examination of the work plans presented to this meeting of the Thematic Groups and the Executive Committee shows this. To be able to have this activity level we need resources, there is a proposal to raise the membership fee with 10% from 2006. This will cover the rise in inflation since the last raise of the membership fee in 2001.

The NSC needs to look at the financial situation in the future. In the end NSC cannot rely on rich regions to takeover the Presidency. We need to find a solution for a secretariat that doesn't have to follow the President, but have a permanent location and staff to ensure continuity to prepare the organisation to meet the needs of the future in a flexible and sustainable manner.

I'm looking positive at the future, there will be many challenges, but when we work together they will be overcome. The commitment members of the NSC has shown this last year is needed also in the future so NSC can continue to be the strong and influential organisation we are.

Thank you.