

Aberdeenshire Council

N E W S R E L E A S E

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European Ministers agree four-year plan for North Sea

The North Sea Commission (NSC) has put forward its views on the latest action plan examining the impact of shipping and fisheries on its waters.

Environment ministers from the eight North Sea countries that form the group met with European Union Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas in Gothenberg, Sweden, to participate in the sixth Ministerial Declaration process.

Every four years, European Environment Ministers come together to discuss a draft declaration of intent for the following four years.

In preparation for this, the NSC has played an active role in the drafting and development of the latest declaration over the past two years.

The North Sea Commission represents 70 regional authorities of its eight member states, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, The UK, Norway and Belgium.

Representing the group in Gothenberg were NSC environment chairwoman Alison McInnes and fisheries chairman Anders Fasth, along with NSC environment and fisheries groups co-ordinators Ann Bell and Per Horberg.

They welcomed a number of initiatives contained within the declaration, but raised reservations in other areas.

Cllr Alison McInnes, who is also chairwoman of Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee, said she was pleased the ministers had made a number of commitments, but disappointed they had missed the opportunity to take a stronger stance on some issues.

"We particularly welcome the commitments made by the ministers to progress the Clean Ship Initiative, and the steps towards the reduction of air pollution from shipping," she said.

"I am also pleased the ministers have acknowledged continued concern over the safety of maritime transport of radioactive materials.

"We also welcome the ecosystems approach to fisheries management and the recognition of the need to greatly reduce discards, as well as fully supporting the effort management trial which is to be undertaken in the Kattegat, which is fully supported by the North Sea Regional Advisory Committee.

"However, we record our reservation on the matter of Marine Protected Areas, believing that they should only be implemented after thorough consultation with all

stakeholders, including the NSC and the North Sea Regional Advisory Committee (NSRAC).

“It remains a matter of real concern to the NSC that ship fuel remains unregulated, and there is no indication when the proposed review with IMO will be finalised, and we would therefore call on the EU to start work on drafting a new directive on the quality of marine fuels.

“We also request that the NSC is invited to work with the Netherlands on their proposed issue group to progress the Clean Ship Initiative.”

Cllr McInnes stressed co-operation with regional authorities, NSRAC and other stakeholders would be essential to ensure good progress on the matters discussed, and urged ministers to support such co-operation.

Cllr Fasth commented the issue of marine litter would only be addressed through close-working with the fishing and shipping industries and stressed the important role fishing vessels played in their local communities.

During the meeting, discussions also took place regarding the imminent green paper on EU maritime policy, and it was agreed to hold a meeting between Marine Policy Task Force Head John Richardson and the NSC chairs of environment and fisheries in early July.

Cllrs McInnes and Fasth also took the opportunity to discuss the benefits of shoreside electricity with Swedish Environment Minister Lena Sommestad.

The NSC is fully committed to the development of a Maritime Policy but believes it should adequately reflect the particular challenges facing the North Sea, and this will be discussed during the July meeting.