

North Sea Commission Environment Group
Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held in Leeuwarden, Provincie Fryslân, The Netherlands.
April 4th, 2006

PRESENT:

Chair	Alison McInnes, Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland (items 8 - 13)
Vice chair	Andreas Lervik, Østfold fylkeskommune, Norway
Vice chair	Henrik Ringbaek Madsen, Nordjyllands Amt, Denmark (items 8 - 13)
NSCEG Co-ordinator	Per Hörberg, Region of Västra Götaland, Sweden

Denmark:

Nordjyllands Amt	Kenn Bloch Mortensen (items 8 - 13)
------------------	-------------------------------------

England:

Suffolk County Council	Jerry Hindle
------------------------	--------------

The Netherlands:

Provincie Fryslân/ Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland	Gerda Baarsma, Hans van Meerendonk (items 1 – 8.1)
---	--

Norway:

Buskerud/Telemark/Vestfold	
Fylkeskommuner, BTV	Tom Christensen
Østfold fylkeskommune	Steen Arne Hansen, Helge Kolstad, Hans Jensen, Torhild Kongsness

Scotland:

Aberdeenshire Council	Paul Kane
-----------------------	-----------

IN ATTENDANCE:

NSC Secretariat	Lars Haukvik (items 8 - 13), Vibeke Jakobsen
-----------------	--

1. Opening of meeting.

The chair Alison McInnes was delayed on the train, so vice chair Andreas Lervik started the meeting by welcoming all participants and thanking Provincie Fryslân and Gerda Baarsma for hosting and arranging the meeting. All participants briefly introduced themselves.

2. Apologies

Michael Allen, East of England Assembly, Susy Lauesen, Nordjyllands Amt, Henrik Jörgensen, Sønderjyllands Amt, Sverre Fosse, Aust-Agder Fylkeskommune.

3. Adoption of Agenda

A new item, "future structure of the NSC" was added as an item 8.1. Otherwise the Agenda was adopted as proposed.

4. Minutes of last meeting.

Minutes of last meeting (Arendal, October 22nd, 2004), distributed by e-mail December 2004 and March 28, 2006.

Jerry Hindle reported that the SAIL II project had not got approval for further Interreg funding. Thus the idea of a "Marine Park" in the south western North Sea had not been explored further. Paul Kane and Hans van Meerendonk commented that the NSCEG seemed to become successful in its ambition to have "energy" as an important theme for the future Objective 3/"Interreg 4" programme.

The Minutes were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters arising.

No further comments were made as a result of last year's Minutes.

6. Annual Report 2005.

The Annual Report 2005 (distributed via e-mail on March 28, 2006), was presented by the co-ordinator.

Jerry Hindle asked about the progress of the working group for regional planners, led by North Jutland. The co-ordinator explained that the group intends to have another meeting after the summer 2006. Information about their work as well as the result of a North Sea questionnaire on regional plans is available at: www.ntn.dk/planners_network.htm

The Annual Report was approved.

7. Projects - reports & new ideas, potential applications for a.o. Interreg IIIB

The co-ordinator explained that this item was kept on the agenda mainly for historical reasons (the NSCEG being originally a group for exchange of project ideas and partner search) and that any project initiatives could be raised also under agenda item 8.

8. NSCEG Work Programme 2006 - 2007 (draft distributed by e-mail on March 28)

The chair explained that a revised draft would be presented to the Executive Committee for approval in June and asked the meeting for comments on the various items of the draft Work Programme (WP).

Helge Kolstad suggested that two major North Sea environmental problems should be added to the Group's agenda: a) the negative impact of fisheries, and b) the increased use of fossil gas for power generation and the subsequent danger of storing CO₂ in the seabed.

The co-ordinator explained how the NSCEG has been working with the NSC Fisheries Groups over the years and that the observership at OSPAR had included the issue of CO₂ sequestering.

In the discussion, which followed, several voices advised that work with the Fisheries Group should be intensified and that both these issues should be brought into the task of following-up on the Ringkøbing Conference "The North Sea – Today and Tomorrow". It was also pointed out that the EU Maritime Policy Green Paper would address these issues and the NSCEG should respond to the coming consultation, which will run for 12 months from May 2006.

Regarding sustainable shipping, the ExComm had given the NSCEG the task of proposing how further work in this field should be carried out. The executive secretary suggested that such a proposal could be included in the NSCEG's report from the North Sea Ministerial Meeting, MM06, and that the ExComm could be asked to endorse this proposal at its meeting in June. Regarding the MM06 in particular it was noted that the issue of ship-to-ship transfer of oil should be raised there by the NSC. The co-ordinator pointed out that this issue had been introduced in the draft Ministerial Statement partly due to NSC intervention.

On various issues the opportunities for joint working with other NSC Thematic Groups were discussed. Examples were renewable energies, energy efficient housing and Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

Generally, guidance was given to the co-ordinator for a re-drafting of the WP.

Action: Per Hörberg

8.1 NSC future structure, views from the NSC Environment Group Annual Meeting

The following description of the AGM discussion and its conclusions was sent on April 18 to the NSC Strategic Committee for its discussion of the future structure of the NSC.

General views expressed were that the NSC should structure its organisation according to what tasks it will be supposed to perform – and not according to (temporary?) difficulties in recruiting co-ordinators for some of its Thematic Groups. The latter seems now to be a main reason for the present discussion of a new structure. Also there was the view that the NSC should avoid any drastic changes, which could risk alienating politicians and officers, who now are active in our organisation.

Other general observations were that the structure should be "open" so members, politicians and officers, should feel welcome to join the work of the NSC. It is now perceived as difficult to take part – a future structure should reflect that concern. Getting more active members was also seen as crucial for the survival of any organisation, not least the NSC. ("More" in terms of numbers and "more active" in terms of level of activity.) In fact, activities of a "missionary" nature could well be what should be the main priority of the ExComm and the Group co-ordinators.

It was discussed whether the important issue of the future organisational structure should be brought to the attention of all NSC members to get a maximum of democratic input, but it was agreed that this would take too long a time. Decisions need to be taken this year.

When pressed to choose between the two proposals for new structure presented by the Executive Committee meeting of March 2nd, the NSCEG first asked to have alternative 2 explained by the executive secretary. The group then seemed to lean towards proposal 1, "business more or less as usual". The view was that it would be feasible – or even advisable – to merge some of the Thematic Groups, but the general feeling was that the Environment Group needed to remain intact. If anything, it could be merged with the Fisheries Group. NSC work should focus on topics/areas, which Regions "have in common", such as environment, fisheries and culture.

Further discussion revealed that the Annual Meeting wanted the ExComm to be more "dynamic", i.e. to be more specific in requesting various actions from the Thematic Groups. Any "ad hoc" groups within the ExComm would need to be "anchored" in the Thematic Groups. It was noted that there are serious threats to the NSC: a few Regions in countries such as Germany and England are considering leaving the organisation. If this becomes a reality, it could set a harmful precedent to other Regions, also in other countries. It would be wise by the ExComm to relate the new structure to these threats. Or perhaps even to solve these issues before changing the organisational structure.

It was agreed that "all" want a more political organisation, for instance with the purpose of influencing EU and national agendas and decisions. The executive secretary pointed out that the Thematic Groups now can act as spokespersons for the whole NSC.

9. Next Annual Meeting + Conference 2007

9.1 Host(s), 9.2 Time, 9.3 Theme(s), 9.4 Arrangements

There was agreement that next Annual Meeting should be arranged in connection with a conference – but it does not necessarily have to be a NSCEG Conference. As for a theme, the feeling was that it would be wise to decide this after the NSC General Assembly has indicated how the Thematic Groups will be organised and if there should be a joint Conference with a theme related to the EU Maritime Policy consultation.

10. Election of Project Working Group members (repr. + subst. from each NSC country)

The chair explained how PWG meetings now are more open to any NSCEG member, but that it would still be an advantage to have two representatives from each country, one regular and one substitute. The delegates from the respective country elected as their representatives in the NSCEG PWG:

Denmark: due to recent changes in Regional authorities and staff, Denmark will come back soon with names

England: Jerry Hindle, Michael Allen. Due to imminent changes in the NSC membership of Suffolk County Council, Jerry Hindle will get back with definite answer.

France: vacant

Germany: vacant

The Netherlands: Hans van Meerendonk, subst. Gerda Baarsma

Norway: Torhild A. Kongsness, subst. Sverre Fosse

Scotland: Gordon Summers, subst. Paul Kane

Sweden: Per Hörberg acts as Swedish representative for the time being, but will check with the Region of Halland.

11. Reports.

The executive secretary reported on the preparations for the NSC General Assembly, to be held in Aviemore, Highland Council, Scotland on June 14 – 16.

At the same time an Interreg event takes place to inform and discuss about the new Interreg 4 Programme for the North Sea, now about to be called "Objective 3".

The co-ordinator reported that the topic for the environment study trip on Thursday 15th June will (preliminarily) deal with the role of forestry, agriculture and "landscape stewardship" in rural development. He added that apparently the study trip is being planned by the hosts without any communication with the NSCEG. Lars Haukvik would investigate the reason for this.

12. Any Other Competent Business

Jerry Hindle reported that Suffolk County Council is leaving the NSC as individual member and will in the future be a member only through its membership in the East of England Assembly. JH could not foresee what implications this would have on his own activity in the NSCEG.

13. Next Meeting

Next meeting of the NSCEG Project Working Group will be held in Östfold Fylkeskommune, Norway on Thursday, September 14 – Friday, September 15th (lunch to lunch).

Notes: 2006-04-26

Per Hörberg, Co-ordinator of NSCEG

Phone: +46-(0)33 17 48 26, Fax: +46-(0)33 17 48 05

Do you have any news to share with the group?

Please e-mail Per Hörberg, NSCEG co-ordinator, at: per.horberg@vgregion.se