



Report from the NSC Environment Group to the NSC Annual Business Meeting, June 22, 2001.

Since the previous NSC General Assembly the NSCEG has held one meeting of the full group, in Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland (see below!). The Project Working Group (PWG) has had three meetings: in September in Inverurie, Scotland, in January in Leeuwarden, Friesland, the Netherlands, and in May in Brugge, West Flanders, Belgium. Most meetings of the PWG were attended by a representative of the NSC secretariat, which is essential for the work of the group.

In connection with the January meeting, the PWG also met with representatives of the NSC Fisheries Group to discuss the possible arranging of a joint seminar on "Fish Stocks and Eco-systems". At the May meeting the PWG had a joint seminar with the NSC Communications Group to prepare for a potential joint conference on Sustainable Transports. To the May events all members of the NSCEG, as well as other NSC environmental contact persons, were invited. However, the response to this invitation was surprisingly weak.

• The NSCEG Annual Meeting and Conference 2000;

This was hosted by Aberdeenshire Council, September 21 - 23 in Inverurie, Scotland. The topic of the Conference was "Water". A full report has been distributed to all NSC members, to all participants and to other interested parties. The report is available on the NSC website at:

<http://www.northsea.org/Groups/Environment/environment.html>

One purpose of the conference was to present the then recently approved EU Framework Directive on Water – a document which will have an immense impact on the management of water resources, also on the regional level. Another purpose was to develop project ideas for the upcoming EU Interreg IIIB Programme for the North Sea.

Five workshops concluded the first Conference day, including a special session on "Political Visioning", aimed particularly at our elected members. The latter turned out to be highly appreciated and it was requested that a similar workshop be held at the Conference 2001.

The other workshops dealt with "River Basin and Sub Basin Plans", "Nitrate Vulnerable Zones", "Sustainability Indicators" and "Industrial Waste Water". From the workshops – and from the reporting exercise from the "Political Visioning" workshop on the second day of the Conference – a number of project ideas were born. They were developed in special group discussions. Many of these ideas were later compiled by the co-ordinator in a project partnersearch list (see below!)

The participants of the "Political Visioning" workshop defined some priorities for future work. These included "Agriculture and its environmental effects" and "Public Participation". Generally there was agreement that no positive change would be

possible unless citizens have reached an understanding and acceptance of the problems and the solutions. These priorities have been taken into consideration when preparing the NSCEG Conference 2001.

The study trip to the Ythan Estuary (National Nature Reserve) further emphasized the importance of involving the public in measures taken.

The Annual Meeting following the Conference 2000 concluded that the dual purpose of allowing interesting political discussions and the development of project ideas should be kept to the Conference 2001.

• **Projects;**

A "NSCEG project partnersearch list" was compiled by the co-ordinator with the help of colleagues within and outside the NSCEG. This list was distributed as widely as possible – within and outside the NSC – in February - March. Work has since been going on to develop project proposals for the Interreg IIIB Directoria in Aalborg on June 20th. These proposals include a.o.

- Sustainability and Waste Prevention,
- Green Purchasing,
- Water Cities International, II
- Forum Skagerrak, II

• **Conference on Sustainable Transports;**

An initiative from the NSC Communications Group for a joint arrangement, focusing on how future transports can be made more long term sustainable than today's transport system. The NSC Executive Committee has agreed to help finance this event, which was intended to take place in Aarhus, Denmark, in November 2000.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of personnel resources, it had to be postponed and is now scheduled for early 2002. A preparatory seminar was held jointly with the NSC Communications Group in Brugge on May 10th.

• **Member Profiles;**

The NSCEG Member Profiles had not been updated as previously planned. A renewed effort to update them and make them more useful to members was made through a consultant. The purpose is to facilitate for colleagues in various fields and in all NSCEG regions to find each other directly. All NSC members are invited to supply information for the ongoing update!

• **Conference on Maritime Safety;**

The co-ordinator participated in a conference arranged by CPMR and two French regions in Brest, Bretagne, France in November 2000. The conference raised the attention around large maritime disasters such as the wreck of the Erika in 1999 and the Ievoli Sun, coinciding with the conference(!) The NSC wanted to draw the attention to "minor" oil spills, as well, since these – being numerous and constantly ongoing – contribute with more pollution of the sea than the major disasters. This aspect was covered in a report to the conference, "Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe; Outline Strategy for Maritime Safety".

• **Observership status at the North Sea Conference;**

The co-ordinator could not participate in the CONSSO meeting in October 2000 in Oslo, Norway. (CONSSO is the group of Senior Officials preparing and following up on the North Sea Conferences.) The next, 5th, North Sea Conference will take place in Norway in March 2002. There will be reporting on the implementation of decisions made at earlier Conferences, notably the one in Esbjerg in 1995 (The Esbjerg Declaration, stating a.o. "the generation goal" for the elimination of discharges of hazardous substances, etc.) and the one of Environmental and Fisheries Ministers in Bergen in 1997.

The host of the 5th North Sea Conference encourages active participation from IGO (Inter-Governmental) and NGO (Non-Governmental) observers at the conference itself, Ways for this participation could be suggested by the observers (see below, political visioning!).

More information about CONSSO/The North Sea Conferences is available on the home page of the Norwegian Department of the Environment:

<http://www.dep.no/md/html/conf/>

• **Service to the NSC Executive Committee and secretariat.**

The NSCEG assisted in the preparation of letters and background material:

To influence radioactive discharges from the reprocessing plant at Sellafield, UK:

The NSCEG prepared a response from the NSC to the official consultation process in March 2001 on future discharge permits for Sellafield. The UK Environment Agency had proposed continued large discharges of Technetium –99, something which is unacceptable to the NSC. The NSC also expressed concern about the storage of radioactive waste at the Sellafield plant, following government reports about insufficient safety there.

Contribution to CPMR Intercom Group on "Northern Dimension":

The new Intercom Group aims to influence and support the EU's concept of "The Northern Dimension". The Executive Committee felt that it is vital that the North Sea area in this context gets as much attention as the Baltic Sea area. In order to achieve this, efforts have been made to propose actions to promote the northern areas, jointly, a.o. in the environmental field. The co-ordinator has contributed with background information, as well as proposals for areas of action within the environmental field.

Contribution to Executive Committee "Political Visioning":

The co-ordinator, not being able to participate in a meeting of the Executive Committee and the Thematic Group co-ordinators in Brussels on April 27th, wrote a note describing the situation concerning the North Sea Conferences, the meetings of the Environmental Ministers of the North Sea countries. The content of the note was that the regions may have to consider whether they wish these Conferences to continue, and if they want to act in support of them.

The NSC should also consider how it (and the regions) could contribute to the 5th North Sea Conference, held in Bergen, Norway, in March 2002.

The co-ordinator took part in a number of meetings with the secretariat and the other

Thematic Group co-ordinators. The co-ordinator also assisted the secretariat with material for the NSC Newsletter.

Borås, May 8, 2001.

Per Hörberg, co-ordinator of the NSCEG