

**Speech by Commissioner Borg at the European Parliament Joint Hearing  
"Towards a Future Maritime Policy for the Union:  
A European vision for the oceans and seas"  
Tuesday 20 March 2007**

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Honourable Chair,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

It is with great satisfaction that I appear before you today at this final session of the Parliament's joint hearing on the European Commission's Green Paper for a future EU Maritime Policy.

On 7 June last year, on the same day and only a couple of hours after the Commission had adopted the Green Paper, I addressed a joint meeting of the Parliament's committees on Transport & Tourism; Environment; Regional Development; Industry, Research & Energy and Fisheries. On that occasion, I noted just how fitting it was that the first port of call on the voyage of consultation was with the elected representatives of European citizens. I was also particularly pleased to see that Europe's elected representatives had brought together the various sectoral committees in one joint meeting. Given that one of the most vital messages of the Green Paper is precisely the need to consider the many facets of our relations with the seas and oceans together, this was certainly most fitting.

I am pleased that the "joined-up" meeting of the sectoral committees together in June 2006 has continued, has yielded much deliberation *and* has led to today's hearing.

Clearly, we have come a long way since June of last year. As a result of the Green Paper, we have had much debate on what a future maritime policy for the EU should be, we have been invited to look at questions on governance, sustainability and inter-operability, and, possibly most important of all, we have attracted interested parties to discuss their future - their relationship with the oceans and seas.

An overwhelmingly large number of stakeholders, interested citizens and public authorities at all levels, have participated in this process. The Committee of the Regions has already made a very positive contribution to the process and the Economic and Social Committee is currently in the course of preparing its views on the proposed maritime policy.

What Europe needs now is for its elected representatives here in the European Parliament to deliver their verdict:

- Is it time for Europe to put forward a policy that envisages an integrated approach to sectoral interests in the maritime cluster?
- Which aspects do you feel need to be addressed in the short term?
- Do we need to reconsider the way we manage our maritime resources?
- Do we need to plan the many and growing uses of the seas in a better and more co-ordinated manner?

The vast coastal areas, islands, seas and oceans around Europe are indeed critical for the Union. Can we reflect their importance better in our decision-making? Should we consistently include Europe's strong maritime dimension in our European policies? Can our twin Lisbon goals of higher growth and better jobs be better achieved by strengthening the maritime dimension of Europe?

These are some of the more fundamental questions on the table.

This is what we are seeking to address.

I know that the European Parliament is conscious of this and I, in fact, interpret today's hearing as an important step by the European Parliament in moving towards the adoption of a report on the Green Paper that will address these questions.

However, as always when dealing with such matters, we need to keep an eye on the clock. We are approaching the time when we can make a 'sea change' in the way we manage our relations with the oceans and coastal waters; but this will not be done by one person or one European institution.

The Commission, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, together, have a crucial say in charting the right course. In the same way that Poseidon's trident was three-pronged and was used to 'rule over' the seas so too must we – the Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Commission – put our heads together to achieve the optimal means to manage our oceans and seas.

For our part, within the Commission, we are already planning the steps that will take us beyond the end of the consultation period, beyond the end of June. Immediately following therefrom and on the basis of what comes out of the consultation period, the College will hold an orientation debate towards the end of July. The Commission services will then prepare a Communication to the Council and the Parliament which we are planning to present to the College for adoption at the beginning of October 2007.

As for the Council of Ministers, the Portuguese Presidency has indicated it is planning to hold a Ministerial Conference in Lisbon on the Commission's proposal in the second half of October 2007. This conference will seek to involve representatives from various sectors reflecting the holistic approach to decision making for the maritime policy. At the end of the year, namely at the European Council in December, the Portuguese Presidency plans to then reach conclusions on a maritime policy.

In terms of the European Parliament, as I have already indicated, we are eagerly awaiting your views and opinions. I understand that five committees are working towards voting on a report on the Green Paper in a plenary session in early July. I would encourage all your committees to work as closely as possible towards providing your report by the date you have targeted for plenary, as I am fully committed to taking your views into account as fully as possible.

The European Parliament has already signalled its commitment to the Green Paper and today's hearing is no exception. The wealth of knowledge and expertise that has been brought together today, leaves me with no doubt that the arguments raised can only further enrich the ongoing work in your different committees.

For my part, and as a means of signalling some of the findings we have already made, I would like to underline the broad consensus that I see emerging on a number of principles which should underpin an integrated maritime policy. Amongst these there is the importance of the extensive participation of stakeholders in the development of rules for behaviour with respect to the oceans and coastal waters. There is the recognition that, only by having a full picture of our oceans and seas, will we be able to develop the appropriate

networks that will connect the different parts of the whole. There is also agreement on the need to ensure that decisions affecting both the quality of life in coastal areas and the livelihoods of those earning their living in the maritime sectors, are taken at the appropriate level of government. Indeed, this implies that action at the level of the Union should only be undertaken where there is genuine added value to existing policies and programmes.

Other countries outside Europe, notably Canada and Australia, have already embarked on developing a new generation of more integrated maritime policies. One lesson we can learn is that taking a holistic approach to our relations with the seas and oceans is such a radical departure from past practice that it will require a collective learning process on the part of all stakeholders throughout the Union, whether citizens, economic actors or governments. It will not be achieved overnight, and policy tools, designed to further this process, need to be developed if we want to see this materialise.

Although much has already been achieved – more by way of understanding what is needed - it is clear to me that a lot of work lies ahead if we are to make a success of this policy. This work will include not only the Commission, but also the Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

I have every confidence that all institutions will play their part and the European Parliament will right there where it really matters.

(1300 words)