DRAFT REPORT

on exploiting research and development potential in the blue economy to create jobs and growth
(2014/2240(INI))

Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on exploiting research and development potential in the blue economy to create jobs and growth (2014/2240(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 13 May 2014 entitled ‘Innovation in the Blue Economy: realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth’ (COM(2014)0254),


– having regard to the Commission communication entitled ‘Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union’ (COM(2010)0546),

– having regard to the Limassol Declaration of 8 October 2012 on a marine and maritime agenda for growth and jobs,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 13 September 2012 entitled ‘Blue Growth opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth’ (COM(2012)0494),

– having regard to the Commission Green Paper of 29 August 2012 entitled ‘Marine Knowledge 2020 from seabed mapping to ocean forecasting’ (COM(2012)0473),

– having regard to its resolution of 2 July 2013 on Blue Growth – enhancing sustainable growth in the EU’s marine, maritime transport and tourism sectors¹,

– having regard to its resolution of 23 October 2013 on marine knowledge 2020: ‘Seabed mapping for sustainable fisheries’²,


– having regard to Decision No 1312/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT): the contribution of the EIT to a more innovative Europe,

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0300.
having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee, delivered on 15 October 2014, on ‘Innovation in the Blue Economy: realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth’ (2015/C 012/15),

having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions, delivered on 21 January 2015, on Innovation in the Blue Economy: realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth (2015/C 019/05),

having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,

having regard to the report of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the opinions of the Committee on Fisheries and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0000/2015),

A. whereas the concept of the blue economy covers a wide range of economic sectors linked to the seas and oceans, spanning traditional and emerging sectors including fisheries, aquaculture, (seagoing) shipping and inland waterway transport, ports and logistics, tourism, pleasure sailing, and cruising, shipbuilding and ship-repairing, maritime works and protection of the coastline, prospecting for, and exploitation of, offshore mineral resources, prospecting for, and exploitation of, offshore energy resources, and biotechnology;

B. whereas the development of the blue economy needs firmly embedded scientific knowledge, this being the starting point for innovation, and whereas the scientific and technological fields related to the blue economy are widely diverse;

C. whereas there is a great deal of ignorance about the seas and oceans, their resources, and the ways in which these interact with human activities – whether taking place or still to be developed – and whereas inadequate knowledge on those points severely inhibits sustainable use of the resources concerned and poses an obstacle to innovation;

D. whereas developing the blue economy could greatly boost growth and economic development, as well as job creation, especially in coastal and island countries and regions and in the outermost regions;

E. whereas the fact of exploiting the potential of the blue economy must not serve as a pretext for subjecting the seas and oceans to forms of exploitation of resources and growth models which have already shown themselves to be unsustainable, and whereas marine and ocean resources must be exploited strictly in accordance with the need for their sound management and conservation, without altering marine ecosystem balances;

F. whereas the EU has been producing a set of programmes and guidelines providing a framework for blue economy-related activities and innovation; whereas that framework should be judged according to its practical usefulness in supporting Member States’ efforts to develop the blue economy;

G. whereas coastal and island communities are key stakeholders in the debate on the potential of the blue economy and the manner of realising it;
1. Takes note of the Commission communication entitled ‘Innovation in the Blue Economy: realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth’; points out that the communication is of limited scope, confined as it is to relatively few sectors (deep-sea mining, energy, and biotechnology, for example); calls on the Commission to adopt a more comprehensive approach encompassing the challenges of innovation and job creation over the whole varied range of sectors making up the blue economy;

2. Maintains that the blue economy should be defined in broad terms covering all sectoral and inter-sectoral activities connected with oceans, seas, and coastal areas, including forms of direct and indirect support; draws attention to the cross-cutting importance of innovation for all these activities, be they traditional or emerging;

3. Calls on the Commission, in close coordination with Member States, to gauge the financing needs of the blue economy (at sectoral, national, and European level) with a view to realising its growth and job-creating potential;

4. Stresses that the development of the blue economy requires greater investment in knowledge and that, in order to improve understanding of the marine environment, the EU and the Member States must provide substantial funding under arrangements making for continuity and predictability over the long term;

5. Calls for clear-cut objectives and time-frames to be laid down with a view to making data – whether relating to the sea-floor or to the water column and living resources – more accessible and more fully interoperable and for information about seas and oceans to be supplied to the public;

6. Calls for the findings of publicly funded research, as a matter of principle, to be placed in the public domain and for that principle to be binding on partners in EU research programmes; calls on the Commission to set up the Horizon 2020 research information platform as quickly as possible;

7. Deplores and rejects the cuts in the budget for the Horizon 2020 research framework programme and calls for their impact to be assessed, both as regards fields specifically related to the blue economy and as regards cross-cutting areas likely to affect it;

8. Urges the Commission to bring regular assessment to bear on the implementation of the Horizon 2020 programme in fields related to the blue economy and to publicise the findings;

9. Points out that the Member States have a key role to play in developing the blue economy and urges the Commission to support and encourage all forms of cooperation between Member States, for example joint programming initiatives;

10. Considers the shortage of qualified professionals in various fields of study and activity – including, though not confined to, researchers, engineers, and technicians, to be a huge hurdle that could prevent the blue economy from fully realising its potential; maintains that this shortcoming is closely bound up with the growing disengagement and disinvestment by Member States in the spheres of science and education and with the decline in the professional status and social standing of several of the professions.
concerned, and therefore calls for these two trends to be reversed without delay;

11. Believes that investment in the blue economy should be focused on ‘eco-innovation’, resource efficiency, the circular economy, nature conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable use of resources (ensuring that their rates of use do not, in the long term, exceed their natural regeneration rates); urges the Commission to incorporate these principles into present and future support programmes;

12. Calls for an appropriate financial framework to be established in order to stimulate the development of the blue economy and job creation, combining and coordinating the financial instruments available – structural and investment funding (EMFF, ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund), the research framework programme, and so forth; points out that the instruments should be better geared to the needs of individual stakeholders – public institutions, businesses, especially SMEs, non-governmental organisations, etc. – and the opportunities being offered widely publicised;

13. Urges the Commission to support the efforts of Member States to promote specialisation strategies with a view to creating and exploiting value chains linked to the many and varied blue economy activities; considers that the development of clusters or ‘hyperclusters’ implies that Member States must play an active role in fostering synergies between sectors;

14. Considers that coastal and island communities should be fully involved at every stage in the development of the blue economy, this being a sine qua non for realising its potential in terms of innovation, jobs, prosperity, and sustainable development;

Sector-based approaches

15. Calls for more active support for modernisation and sustainable development of the fisheries sector, laying emphasis on small-scale fisheries and seeking to make fishing gear more selective and reduce the environmental impact of fishing, in addition to providing more effective ways to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing; maintains that scientific fisheries-related data forming a basis for political decision-taking should be made public in their entirety;

16. Considers that the sustainable development of European aquaculture requires stronger support for scientific research and technological development related to the breeding of new species, especially indigenous species, in order to enable production and the supply of foodstuffs to be diversified and their quality enhanced while raising the level of environmental safety;

17. Believes that, for reasons to do with energy consumption, merchant shipping, compared with other ways of carrying goods, is increasingly assuming decisive importance; calls for resources to be channelled in order to support innovation in this sector with a view to improving energy efficiency, diversifying primary energy sources, and reducing noxious emissions;

18. Points to the strategic importance of shipbuilding and ship-repairing and their links to other sectors – including merchant shipping, fisheries, and cruise tourism; considers that
a commitment to technological innovation and a high degree of specialisation, which could lead to gains in added value, could create contexts less exposed to international competition and might help to reverse the downturn that the sector has been undergoing; maintains that specific support should be provided to revitalise and modernise the European shipbuilding industry in its different forms;

19. Considers that studies on coastal erosion and maritime works to protect the coastline are a key blue economy sector that is becoming more important in the light of climate change; calls for greater EU support for this sector;

20. Points out that energy from the seas and oceans, be it in the form of fossil fuels and above all in the form of renewables, has great potential from the point of view of utilising domestic resources and diversifying energy sources; stresses that prospection for, and the exploitation of, these resources has to allow for technology transfer requirements, especially as regards the training of skilled and highly qualified workers, as well as meeting stringent environmental sustainability criteria; draws attention to the potential multiplier effect of these activities in terms of jobs and related activities, both upstream and downstream;

21. Considers that prospection and mining on the continental shelf require uninterrupted State involvement, especially as regards information, environmental impact assessment, analysing and minimising risks, and the exercise of sovereignty; points to the potential offered by these activities for embedding scientific knowledge and development and technology transfer; points to the challenges entailed in extracting minerals dissolved in sea water;

22. Considers marine- and ocean-related biotechnology to be a highly diversified sector which, taken as a whole, has immense potential from the point of view of engendering and applying new knowledge and creating new products and processes with high added value (new materials, foods, pharmaceutical ingredients, etc.); draws attention to the education and training requirements related to this sector, implying a need for Member States to shoulder a large measure of responsibility and for international cooperation to be pursued on a similarly comprehensive scale;

23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the Member States.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The sea has been known to be a source of wealth at least since ancient Greek and Roman times.

Ships were the main means of transporting passengers and goods over short, medium, and long distances until the end of the 19th century. Fishing has been, and remains, a major source of food for waterside populations. Added to these are the related (upstream and downstream) inland activities: shipbuilding and ship-repairing, port building and maintenance, the manufacture of fishing gear, insurance and banking, and many more besides.

During the last 50 years there have been significant changes in the nature of humankind’s relationship to the sea, of which the following can serve as examples: the fact that fewer passengers are being carried by sea (and correspondingly more are being carried by air); the growing importance of leisure activities; the prospection for, and exploitation of, fossil energy resources (oil and natural gas, in increasingly deep waters) necessitated by the dearth of resources on land; seabed exploration (still in its infancy) and the prospects for deep-sea mining; the prospects for utilising the energy potential contained in waves, tides, currents, and biomass (seaweed) to generate electricity; offshore wind farms; and the development of marine-related biotechnologies.

The answers to many of the major challenges to society being posed to humankind could lie in better marine knowledge and a greater ability to use, manage, and conserve the resources of our seas, oceans, and coastal areas.

The concept of the blue economy covers a wide range of economic sectors linked to the seas and oceans, spanning traditional and emerging sectors including fisheries, aquaculture, seagoing shipping and inland waterway transport, ports and logistics, tourism, pleasure sailing, and cruising, shipbuilding and ship-repairing, maritime works and protection of the coastline, prospecting for, and exploitation of, offshore mineral and energy resources, and biotechnology.

Notwithstanding the enormous potential of some emerging sectors, traditional sectors still have their place in several Member States and should not be overlooked. We must not think that innovation is exclusive to emerging sectors. It is also important, not to say essential, to approach it from the perspective of traditional sectors. To give an example: faced with the serious difficulties that have beset the European shipbuilding industry in the last 30 years, some Member States have managed to overcome and reverse the general downturn by relying on a high degree of specialisation, which has led to visible increases in added value; having moved in this way into contexts less exposed to competition, they are in a position to rival the mighty shipbuilding industries of the Far East. As far as fisheries are concerned, the challenges are similarly huge: the sustainability of fishing, improving the selectivity of fishing gear, and combating illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing are just some examples.

As regards emerging sectors, including prospection for, and exploitation of, offshore mineral and energy resources, and biotechnology, for all their immense potential, it is necessary to bear in mind that, given the sensitivity of marine ecosystems and the environmental,
ecological, and social functions of the seas and oceans, state authorities have to take the lead in managing resources in a sustainable way and protecting them so as to ensure that the general interest and the public good takes precedence over the particular interests of sectors or individuals. Mistakes made on land must not be reproduced when it comes to seas and oceans; there must be no repetition of those models which quickly use up resources and rapidly become unsustainable (as well as serving to concentrate profits into the hands of a few).

Transparency must be brought to sea- and ocean-based campaigns and research projects, especially when they are financed with public funds.

Education and training and research and development are central to the sustainable development of the blue economy.

The yardstick for assessing the suitability of existing programmes and measures (including where financing is concerned) should be the development aims of the blue economy and the interactions linking the machinery and programmes in place, and the results achieved.