

Maritime Policy Green Paper- Summary

In June 2006, the Commission published a Green Paper on the different aspects of a future Community maritime policy. The Green Paper highlights Europe's maritime identity and leadership, which is worth preserving at a time when environmental pressures are threatening the future of maritime activities. Consequently, the maritime policy must aim to promote a maritime industry that is innovative, competitive and environmentally-friendly. In addition to maritime activities, the Green Paper also proposes that the approach include the issue of quality of life in coastal regions. With this aim in mind, the Green Paper considers what new tools and modes of maritime governance should be developed.

ACT

Commission Green Paper: Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union: a European vision for the oceans and seas. [COM(2006) 275 final - Not published in the Official Journal]

SUMMARY

The Green Paper is in line with the Lisbon Strategy . Its aim is to achieve sustainable development by reconciling the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the exploitation of the seas and oceans. For this reason, these latter aspects should be at the heart of the debate.

Maritime activities are an important area for the Lisbon Strategy, given the importance of the maritime economy. An estimated 3-5% of the European Union's GDP is generated by marine-based industries. The EU is the world's leading maritime power, particularly in terms of:

- maritime transport (because of the level of seaborne trade);
- coastal tourism (because of the fact that coastline accounts for two-thirds of the EU's borders);
- offshore energy production (because of the North Sea gas and oil resources);
- shipbuilding technologies (because of the construction of ships of exceptional quality in terms of their complexity, safety and environmental impact);
- related services (because of the expertise in marine technology).

The EU is also the leader in a number of probable growth areas, such as the building of cruise ships, renewable energy and ports.

Given the social and economic importance of these sectors and the importance of effective maritime transport for an export-oriented Europe, it is crucial that Europe's competitiveness be maintained in these areas. For this reason, the Green Paper examines the factors influencing competitiveness: the state of the marine environment itself, scientific knowledge in all areas relating to the oceans, innovation and the expertise of the workforce.

The marine environment

Some of the issues that the marine environment is facing include:

- increasing loss of biodiversity (which has a knock-on effect for achieving the potential of "blue biotechnology");
- over-exploitation of resources (which has a knock-on effect on fisheries);
- climate change (which has a knock-on effect on fisheries and coastal tourism);
- land-based pollution;
- acidification of seawater;
- pollution from ship-based operational discharges;
- maritime accidents (due to the absence of better maritime safety).

For this reason, it is important to reduce these pressures. The main tool for achieving this will be the thematic strategy for the marine environment . It is also essential to:

- further strengthen legislation on maritime safety;
- introduce risk assessment as an instrument for drawing up policies in this field;
- assist developing countries so that they can apply the "Global Ballast Water Management Programme";
- introduce ballast water treatment technologies .

Research

Research is important for making fully informed strategic choices. It may benefit from the 7th Framework Programme , which pays particular attention to the priority inter-thematic scientific areas. At the same time, Member States may go further by coordinating their national research programmes, so as to create a pan-European research network and avoid duplication. Cooperation between scientists and technology developers is also important.

Innovation

Innovation may help to find solutions in areas that are currently undergoing change, such as energy and climate change. In addition to the benefits for the environment, the solutions could also be 'exported' to third countries which choose to adopt the model of sustainable development; in this way, such solutions could constitute a competitive advantage. Wind energy, tidal current turbines and deep sea gas and oil resources may provide new sources of energy. Carbon capture, the reduction of NO_x emissions from ships, the abandonment of road transport in favour of maritime transport and methane hydrates may help in the fight against climate change.

Expertise of the workforce

The Green Paper examines ways of compensating for the lack of qualified labour resulting from the combination of a number of negative factors.

"Clusters" and the regulatory framework

These factors could also contribute to sustainable development. The private sector could organise itself into networks of maritime excellence - so-called 'clusters' - around common projects such as in the field of education. For its part, the legislature should further simplify the legislation, so that the objectives of one policy do not have a negative impact on other maritime objectives. The goal is to establish a stable and coherent regulatory framework that has the support of stakeholders. The Green Paper also examines the establishment of incentive mechanisms to compensate ship owners with a good track record, and even the monitoring of international rules on the high seas to combat the flying of flags of convenience.

Quality of life in coastal regions

The Green Paper attaches great importance to this matter, since almost half of the population of Europe lives on or close to coastlines, while the attraction of coastal areas is constantly increasing. For this reason, targeted statistics should be compiled on coastal areas in order to establish the transport infrastructure and services of general interest that are best suited to this trend.

In addition, parallel to the growth in the population living in coastal areas, the risks this population is facing are growing as a result of climate change among other things. Public authorities must therefore assess these risks in order to plan how to protect the population, economic activities and the environment, and to manage the costs entailed. Once new responses to these risks have been established, the expertise gained can be exported to other countries.

The Green Paper also examines the crucial role that sustainable tourism can play in local economies and studies the inter-relation between land- and sea-based activities. In this context, it proposes a unique and integrated management of the sea and land in coastal areas, which requires integration at all administrative levels, including at the European level. Such integrated management would prove particularly useful with regard to managing marine pollution originating from land-based sources and managing the expansion of ports as multi-functional platforms.

New tools to manage our relations with the oceans

The Green Paper highlights the necessity of creating a European marine data network that would incorporate existing national networks. The objective of this network would be to harmonise the systematic collection of data from multiple sources in order to serve a multitude of activities. It would form part of the GMES system.

Access to better data in real time would facilitate navigation and the detection of illicit activities at sea such as fishing infringements or infringements connected to safety and security. The EU already agrees with the provisions of the International Maritime Organisation in this respect.

The Green Paper also proposes a spatial planning system to allow various activities to coexist along coastlines and to eliminate uncertainties on the part of investors with regard to obtaining authorisations. It is important to define spatial planning principles and to draw on the experience of Canada in this respect.

As regards financial support, the Green Paper supports the need to improve global data on financial assistance and to examine how these resources might contribute to maritime policy.

New methods of maritime governance

The governance by sector or geographical area that is in force at present must be replaced by a cross-cutting approach. This will have consequences for maritime governance, whether at national, European or international level.

Some Member States have already transferred a number of responsibilities from public authorities to single national authorities. The Member States may however deepen integration in the field of customs or in the safety of goods, as demonstrated by the examples of Frontex and the European Maritime Safety Agency. The establishment of a European coastguard service and the creation of a common maritime space for the European Union governed by the same set of rules are examples of other possible projects.

The integration of policies often makes it possible to benefit from economies of scale with regard to equipment. This is necessary to make certain expensive technologies such as sea surveillance systems affordable.

The diverse nature of the seas means that ecosystems can be managed better at regional level. The European level is more appropriate for promoting the common interest and for providing tools for spatial planning and supervising their use.

Climate change, the protection of biodiversity, illegal immigration, piracy, non-discriminatory access to the market for maritime services, and other phenomena make it imperative that the European Union shares these new ideas with the international community and considers the best ways of promoting its vision.

Protecting maritime heritage and increasing public awareness

In its conclusion, the Green Paper reflects on cooperation between the different maritime sectors to increase public awareness of maritime heritage and the role of the oceans and seas in the lives of each of us. The Commission suggests that education is a channel for action. A more positive image would make it easier to recruit seafarers.

Background

Maritime policy dovetails with the Lisbon Strategy by proposing to exploit synergies between regional policy and policies on fisheries, research and innovation, businesses, maritime transport, the environment and energy in order to promote sustainable development.

In addition, in its strategic objectives for 2005-09, the Commission has called for an exhaustive maritime policy.

The Green Paper calls on stakeholders to participate in the development of a cross-cutting vision of the oceans and seas. They have until 30 June 2007 to provide the

Commission with their comments on the issues raised. By the end of 2007, the Commission will have completed the process by issuing a communication containing its proposals for the future.