

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2004-05

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to summarise the work of the North Sea Commission (NSC) Economic Development Group (EDG) since the last NSC General Assembly in June 2004. It will also describe the Group's future priorities and projects.

2004-2005 has been a year of change for the EDG, and the group has continued to build on its achievements in increased partnership working with the other NSC Thematic Groups.

2. EDG Chair, Vice-Chairs and Co-ordinator

In 2004 Councillor Ms Audrey Findlay (Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland and Vice President of the North Sea Commission) stepped down as Chair of this group. In October 2004 Ms Rinske Kruisinga (Noord-Holland, Netherlands) became the new Chair of the Group. Mr Thore Westermoen (Vest-Agder Fylkeskommune, Norway) continued his role as one of the Vice-Chairs and in March 2005 Councillor Mr Kevan Lim (Suffolk County Council, England) joined the group as a new Vice Chair. Vivien Collie in Scotland was the Group Co-ordinator until the start of March 2005 when Mr Erik Lindboe (Rogaland County Council, Norway) became the new Group Co-ordinator. There has been a hand over period since March during which the Co-ordinators tasks have been transferred and Vivien has assisted with the introduction of the new group structures.

3. EDG Meetings

Since the last NSC General Assembly the EDG has been involved in a number of meetings and events. These have included:

'New Energy Husum' exhibition and conference, Husum, Germany – October 2004

At the start of October 2004 members of the group joined Interreg project partners to attend the 'New Energy Husum' exhibition and conference in Germany. At this event delegates had the opportunity to learn about the federal state government strategy in the field of Renewable Energy. The meeting also included information about the main activities concerning the wind power sector in Nordfriesland / at the westcoast of Schleswig-Holstein.

In addition there was an overview on:

- windcomm schleswig-holstein
- POWER
- Offshore-platform NEPTUN

On the second day of the event the main focus was biomass activities with presentations on the Northsea Bioenergy and Pro Bio Energy Programmes.

NSC Conference on Sustainable Innovation Arendal, Norway – October 2004

During October 2004 an EDG meeting was held in Arendal, Aust-Agder, Norway. The meeting was held to coincide with a two day NSC conference on the theme of 'Sustainable Innovation for Regional Development'. This conference was jointly promoted by the NSC Environment Group and the EDG. The aim of the conference was to explore what Regions can do to promote innovation in products and services which will contribute to Sustainable Development – economically, socially and environmentally. The conference had a unique combination of high profile speakers, case study examples of good practice, a study tour and workshop sessions. There were speakers from Unilever, the Cartesius Institute, the Worldwatch Institute and the Norwegian 'Green Partner' business innovation network. There was also a visit to the town of Grimstad to see the successful development of SMEs following cutdowns at the large Ericsson plant, and to the Agder University College Department for Technology where the focus was on renewable energies. The EDG assisted with the creation and delivery of a workshop on the topic of Green Tourism business opportunities.

NSC North Sea House of the Future Wick, Scotland - October 2004

A special meeting was held in Caithness, Scotland during October 2004. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of developing a showcase project linking energy efficient house building expertise with renewable energy technology in the North Sea area. The meeting included presentations by specialists on new solar energy technologies, and how several compatible renewable technologies could be integrated into the same building. Study Tours were also arranged to the modern Caithness Stone house at Halkirk, and to the Old Pulteney Distillery at Wick - the hub of a proposed new combined heat and power district heating scheme.

EDG Strategic Planning Day Haarlem, The Netherlands – November 2004

In November 2004 EDG members were given the opportunity to participate in a special 'Strategic Planning Day'. This unique one-day training and development event was designed to result in an agreed and achievable 12 month Action Plan for the NSC EDG - and also demonstrated a successful decision making technique that members would be able to use in the future to accomplish major planning tasks.

This event was organised by a professional UK based facilitator who has considerable experience working with international companies, local government and the voluntary sector.

The Strategic Planning Day followed a process that included:

- Developing an agreed common goal for the future of the EDG
- Identifying the barriers to achieving our aims
- Agreeing the activities required to overcome these barriers
- Prioritising the activities
- Creating a list of specific actions for the next 12 months including details of who will do them, what resources are needed and how we will measure success

This is a process used successfully by many major organisations. The Strategic Planning Day was designed to be a crucial event for the future work of the NSC EDG. The results of this exercise are an agreed group Action Plan, and recommendations for new working structures (see item 4 in this report).

EDG Forward Planning meeting Haarlem, The Netherlands – April 2005

A special meeting was held in April 2005 with EDG officials and politicians to agree the delivery of the EDG Action Plan and the transfer of tasks to the new EDG Co-ordinator.

World Renewable Energy Congress 2005 Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire, Scotland – May 2005

EDG members were invited to Scotland to a meeting that would coincide with the World Renewable Energy Congress and the 2005 All-Energy Conference and Exhibition - the UK's largest renewable energy show. The meeting included speakers on:

- The work of the Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group
- AMEC Wind Energy

The group also met to discuss the strategy for the new EDG Specialist Cluster group.

EDG meeting Brussels, Belgium - June 2005

As part of the EDG's new focus a meeting was organised for group members at the start of June in the House of the Dutch Provinces in Brussels. The meeting included presentations on:

- The future of European Structural Funding
- The Lisbon Agenda
- Territorial Co-operation

The group also discussed the EDG's contribution to the joint NSC meeting on the Lisbon Agenda (due to be held in November 2005).

In addition to these events, dialogue and partnership working has continued with the other NSC Thematic Groups. Topics of particular interest for the future include the Lisbon Agenda, renewable energy and traditional food projects. It is intended that these topics will be pursued through the new EDG structure.

4. EDG New Structure

In November 2004 the EDG held a special Strategic Planning Day – the first of its type for the NSC. This exercise provided a structured day where group members could agree a practical vision for 2005. It also helped the group to identify key activities, actions, responsibilities, timescales, resources and outputs.

The Strategic Planning Day resulted in the identification of a number of key practical activities for the EDG. These included:

- Knowledge transfer between group members
- Strengthening the network of EDG members
- Influencing policies and international debate
- Increasing links with the other NSC Thematic Groups

During the Strategic Planning Day the group members also discussed new structures and methods of working. It was agreed that the group should consider identifying and creating a small number of themed 'specialist clusters' comprising group members with a shared area of interest.

The group members also agreed a series of actions that were required in order to achieve the EDG's key areas of activity. One of the first actions was to undertake a 'Knowledge Audit'. The aim of the Audit was to identify areas of interest and expertise amongst the NSC EDG members. This would identify key topics for consideration during 2005-2006, and establish the potential for creating 'specialist clusters' of group members to work together on these topics.

The Knowledge Audit was undertaken during December 2004 and January 2005. The results of the Audit identified a number of areas of joint interest including:

- Energy and renewable energy
- SME innovation and development
- Baltic Sea co-operation
- Academic and business knowledge transfer
- Economic benefits of culture, heritage and events
- European funding after 2006
- Food production, promotion and development
- Rural development
- Community economic development

A number of group members expressed an interest in leading a specialist cluster that would focus on a specific topic. It was subsequently agreed that the clusters identified as priority areas are:

- Energy and Renewable Energy
- Rural Economic Development
- SME Innovation and Development

The Energy and Renewable Energy Cluster is being led by Cllr Mr Albert Moens from Noord-Holland Province, the Netherlands. Leaders are currently being sought for the remaining clusters.

5. Influencing Policy and Debate

Over the last twelve months the NSC EDG has increased its influence in the field of energy and renewable energy. Albert Moens, the EDG Energy and Renewable Energy Specialist Cluster leader, has become an active member of the CPMR's new Working Group on Energy. The CPMR hope to use this group to develop the exchange of experience and good practice, and influence legislation and EU policies.

Over the next twelve months the EDG members are also keen to contribute to future discussions within the NSC on the Lisbon Agenda and new European funding programmes.

6. EDG Joint Projects and Partnership Working

The NSC EDG has a strong tradition of working with the other NSC Thematic Groups. Possible joint projects identified for 2005-2006 include:

- Exploring the impact and potential of the Lisbon Strategy focus on growth and jobs
- Culinary Heritage and Regional foods – building on the joint regional food event held in May 2004
- Energy Efficient Housing – working jointly on the environmental and education requirements linked to energy efficient and renewable energy applications
- Ports and Shipping – participating in the new Ports and Water Borne Transport Partnership
- Examining the economic impact of arts and cultural events

7. EDG Membership

Membership of the EDG is diverse and includes a wide range of expertise. This expertise reflects different working practices and methods in the fields of Economic Development and Business Support within the North Sea Commission area. During 2004 - 2005 the Group membership list has been updated and developed. Additional databases have been maintained for professionals interested in specialist topics (renewable energy, business centers and local food initiatives). Information is regularly sent to over 90 Group members and additional contacts within the NSC.

8. The Future

The Economic Development Group continues to provide a good forum for exchanging information and best practice. Over the next 12 months the Group intends introducing its new structure and work practices in order to achieve the aims of its agreed Action Plan. Through this new structure the group intends to include more discussion on policy making, and to increase the level of the Group's political involvement and influence in the future.

During 2004 - 2005 the Group will continue to progress new and existing projects, attract additional members, form strategic relationships with other European economic development organisations and develop the opportunities offered by working in partnership with the other NSC Thematic Groups.

Minutes of all meetings of the EDG and its Action Plan are available on the NSC website.

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**Paper for the
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**Item 1 Annual Reports
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