

## Discussion paper;

### “The future of the NSC”.

#### 1. Background:

The basis for the discussion is the different NSC documents, especially The NSC Strategy Paper “From Vision to Action” and the conclusions from the Regional Debate at the General Assembly in 2004. The documents are to be found at the NSC website: [www.northsea.org](http://www.northsea.org).

At the Executive Committee meeting in Aberdeenshire October 2004 it was decided to keep the 6 thematic groups for 2005 and a Strategic Committee was established. Further the Executive Committee decided to give the Vice-Presidents specific roles, Vice-President Findlay in charge of NSC affairs and substitute for CPMR and Vice-President Byman in charge of external relations. In addition the Swedish representative Cllr. Andersson was given the responsibility of NSC – BSC cooperation.

Further at the meeting in Aberdeenshire it was agreed to give the members of the Executive Committee and the Chair of the thematic groups the possibility of being NSC spokesperson in their field of interest.

The discussion in Aberdeenshire was also about the economy of NSC. From March 2005 two of the Thematic Group co-ordinators are no longer employees of their County Councils. The Secretariat has received one nomination for a co-ordinator for the Business Development Group, but we need a transition period before the take over of co-ordinator. There is a challenge to find a suitable solution for this. If the Executive Committee wishes to retain the functions of co-ordinator for the Education & Research group – and the present person holding the posts – it will have to find an economic solution for the co-ordinator to continue for 2005. The present membership fee doesn't cover these expenses for the NSC. A suggestion of mixed financing has been discussed; the members of the group pay a part and the Executive Committee pays a part (as has been the arrangement of the Economic Development group for 2004).

Further there are a number of important principles that perhaps need to be considered as part of the discussion.

1. The Executive Committee has agreed that it wishes the NSC to be much more “politically led” rather than “officer or project” driven. The work plans for the coming year of the thematic groups are to be presented for the General Assembly for approval.
2. The vision and objectives of the NSC may not always agree or fit with the CPMR “Agenda”.

3. Any new arrangements should ensure that the NSC influences CPMR and EU policy generally rather than simply follows it.
4. Where joint working across Commissions and with the CPMR is mutually beneficial then it should be encouraged to avoid duplication of effort.

## **2. Short Term Arrangements to cover Co-ordinator Costs.**

The Strategic Committee proposes to allocate maximum 7.000 Euro for each co-ordinator, 14.000 Euro in total for the two co-ordinators, Vivien Collie and Ann Brown for 2005.

To cover for the expenses the Strategic Committee proposes to raise the membership fee with 10% from 2006, from 2.684 Euro to 2.952 Euro. This gives a total rise of the membership fee for the NSC of 14.000 Euro. This is the first raise in membership fee since 2001.

## **3. Future Structure of the NSC.**

The Executive Committee has already given serious consideration to the number of Thematic Groups and came to a clear decision that we should continue with the current arrangements. However there will clearly be a need to review this in the light of changing circumstances and the Executive Committee needs to put in place a mechanism for achieving this in a measured and thoughtful way.

There are many changes at the regional level in the NSC countries. For the Executive Committee to keep up with the situation it is a suggestion to have a short report on status and progress of NSC issues from each country representative at the Executive Committee meetings.

If the above arrangements are agreed then the Strategic Committee suggest that the main structure should remain in place until June 2007 to ensure some stability particularly through the transitional phase and challenges of EU funding post 2006.

Nevertheless, the discussion of the future structure of the NSC has to continue, and the question is how we want the structure of the NSC to be from June 2007. There are some questions we have to consider;

- Are the thematic groups we have today the best structure past June 2007 or do we have to change?
- If we decide to make changes, can we make the changes gradually or all at once?
- Do we want to change the groups into more updated EU policy areas? One example is to meet the challenges in the Lisbon Strategy.
- The renewed and re-focused Lisbon Strategy is likely to become a significant player in the work of the NSC. It focuses on “growth and jobs” in the context of Europe’s ageing population and increased global competition. The emphasis will be on increasing and improving investment in research and development, facilitating innovation, the uptake of ICT and the sustainable use of resources, together with



making sure that education and training keeps ahead of the demand for high level skills, flexibility and entrepreneurship. A significant amount of activity has produced already in 2005 a number of reports and papers, including a five-year plan “Europe 2010 – a partnership for European renewal”. The regional dimension within Lisbon activity is crucial to its success because the structural and cohesion funds will be the main underpinning resource for fulfilling its objectives.

Alongside a consideration of how all the thematic groups are implicated in the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, the NSC should consider whether there would be any advantage in merging the Economic Development Group and the Education and Research Group into a Competence and Innovation Group dealing with the Competence and Innovation Policy (CIP).

There are other policy areas the NSC has to consider in the future

- The Northern Dimension/ Northern Periphery,
- Rural Development
- Ocean or Maritime Perspective
- TEN
- The EU Sustainable Development strategy (“the Göteborg agenda”)
- Other??

The political angle of this proposal is if NSC restructures like this, the NSC will work within policy areas that are important for EU. These policy areas should be important for the member regions and many of the regions probably will do some work on these policies. If we are able to combine the work done within the regions in an NSC context, we can make a North Sea input of the policy. The members of the NSC can then maybe use the respective policy to create projects and use the project to help financing the activities of the NSC.

The Executive Committee also needs to look at the links to the CPMR and the Baltic Sea Commission. It might be helpful to look at these to see whether there would be benefits in adopting similar organisational arrangements.

The Strategic Committee wants the NSC to have more contact with the CPMR and to use their Secretariat and working groups. At the latest meeting of the Political Bureau January 14<sup>th</sup> 2005 a paper of the Sectoral issues for the CPMR interest was presented. The different sectors are divided into three different categories and are as follows;

- Work area of the CPMR Secretariat:
  - State aids
  - Services of general interest
  - Maritime safety
  - Integrated coastal zone management
  - Cohesion
  - Territorial cooperation
  - Governance
- Work areas with a lead Region:
  - Agriculture and Rural development
  - Transports



- Europe of the Seas
- Sustainable Development
- Work areas with a structures working group:
  - Research and Innovation
  - Fisheries
  - Energy

How can we use these groups in the NSC work? Can we get involved in a CPMR group instead of having a separate NSC group? Can we do work for the CPMR and get some money from the CPMR for doing so?

One example of closer cooperation with the CPMR was a decision taken at the meeting of the Fisheries Group January 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. It was agreed that the NSCFG would offer Shetland, who is the lead region of the CPMR Fisheries group, their help and to introduce the NSC way of working into this group. This is a constructive and interesting effort from NSC to get in better contact with the CPMR. This might be an idea for the other groups to consider?

Regarding the Baltic Sea Commission the cooperation can be done through closer cooperation between the Commissions. The joint meeting of the NSC Strategic Committee and members of the BSC Executive Committee February 18<sup>th</sup> is the first step in finding areas of cooperation.

Another important policy document for the future North Sea is indeed the North Sea Spatial Agenda and the 5 highlighted themes of this document;

1. Coastal Water Management
2. Transport and accessibility (TENS/MOTS)
3. Facilitating innovation
4. Energy
5. Demographic change

This will be an important document for the new Interreg IV for the North Sea Region, and these themes should also be reflected in the new structure of the NSC.

#### **4. Suggested Next Steps.**

The Strategic Committee would suggest that there is a need to take some time to look at the existing objectives of the current NSC Thematic Groups and to compare these with the objectives of the work areas of the CPMR and indeed the Spatial Agenda all as summarised in this paper. By doing this we will be able to identify where the objectives of the various organisations fit and indeed where there are “gaps”. This process could also be extended to include the Baltic Sea Commission.

The Strategic Committee further suggests that this work could be done by the existing coordinators along with the Chairs with the President as Chairman of the meeting.



The NSC still has to rely on its members' wish to contribute to have a strong and vital organisation for the benefit of the North Sea. As a network organisation the NSC has to rely on the knowledge and work capacity of our members to bring forward important policy documents and projects.

The NSC must adapt to the future and the challenges ahead. In order to do so the NSC in the future must have a flexible structure able to perform work of political interest.

Skien 08.02.05

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