



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

## **Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends**

Another year has passed and it is time to look back on what we have achieved last year, but being able to talk to you on this event, I will also look forward on the challenges for the regions and NSC in the future.

Since we last met for the Annual Business Meeting in Zeeland last June, NSC has been active on several important issues.

### **Politicians**

First of all I want to thank all of you fellow politicians for your support and work to continue the progress of NSC; especially I want to thank my Vice-Presidents, members of the Executive Committee and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the thematic groups. Still there is a need for active involvement of politicians in all the thematic groups, and I have been asked to encourage all member regions of the NSC to appoint political members to the different thematic groups.

### **The thematic groups**

The main instrument for cooperation within NSC is the thematic groups, without their efforts and hard work the NSC would not be what we are today. NSC has for long had the reputation of an efficient and hard working organisation, with dedicated members. There are many to thank for this, but if I must mention someone I want to emphasize the work done by our co-ordinators. Their work for NSC is crucial for the progress of NSC.

### **Changes**

Our thematic groups have had some changes;

The Fisheries Group has undergone changes regarding of the leadership of the Group after an initiative from the former Chair Harry Jensen. Sandy Cluness has taken over the position of Chair of the Group and Harry Jensen has taken over the role as Vice-Chair of the Group.

The Transport Group has got a new Chair Charles King and Leif Blomqvist as new Vice-Chair.

### **Activities and Highlights**

All the groups' annual reports are available on the NSC website, but I wish to highlight a few issues from the groups;

The last year we have had a real large number of activities, both within the thematic groups - and between them.

### **More cross sectoral cooperation**

There has been a number of co-operating actions involving many of the groups, for example the conference in Trollhättan, and the planned Food Conference in Dundee later in 2006, which is a joint effort between the Education & Research, Culture & Tourism and the Economic Development Group.

This proves that the thematic groups have several fields of common interest; it supports the idea of



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

a closer co-operation across the old group boundaries and even reducing the number of groups by merging some of them.

The **Culture and Tourism group** has taken an active role in the work to promote Cultural Tourism as a major agent for regional development within the European Union, and has participated in several lobbying activities in this respect

The **Economic Development group** has in addition to the NSC Website produced Newsletters which will be sent to the NSC secretariat and all the thematic groups, contacts, politician's also.

**Members work profile** an inquiry was sent to the members of the Economic Development Group and the Renewable Energy Subgroup in order to survey the members work activities, tasks and responsibilities, and their employers plans and strategies towards international work / EU. Following this, a database of group members work profiles was created and published on the NSC website.

**The Renewable Energy Subgroup** An inquiry amongst the group members in February 2006 showed that the members want the Renewable Energy Subgroup to continue its work. The RES Annual meeting took place in Aberdeen, Scotland, 25 May 2006. This meeting is arranged to coincide with the 2006 All-Energy Opportunities Exhibition and Conference. This is a major UK conference and is supported by a number of national energy organisations and producers.

The **Education and Research Group** has recognised the importance of the Lisbon Agenda for the whole of the North Sea Commission, and its work during the past year has reflected this. The Education and Research Group took the major responsibility for organising the Trollhättan seminar last October. The main outcome of this seminar was the Trollhättan Declaration, and subsequently the theme for the General Assembly 2006.

Some interesting new areas of work for the Education and Research Group have grown out of Trollhättan. For example, the drive to achieve better inclusion of young people into economic and social activity is of significant interest to member regions. A project is beginning which will include research and exchange of practice, and will involve exchange of professionals around the North Sea.

In addition the Education and Research Group will focus on sustainable development through a new project to link schools and local authorities around the North Sea to explore different approaches to sustainable schools. This will look at how we are providing new school buildings, how sustainability and care for the environment is developed through the curriculum and how professionals can learn from each other. A bid for European funding will be submitted in February 2007 to enable opportunities for school and class links from September 2007.

The **Environment Group** was active in the preparations and participation on, the North Sea Ministerial Meeting on Environmental Impacts of Shipping and Fisheries May 4-5 2006, the "MM06", was held in Göteborg, Sweden. The NSC was represented there as observer by the Chairs and co-ordinators of the Environment and Fisheries Groups.



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

The Environment Group has represented the NSC in a series of meetings, where the MM06 Ministerial Declaration was drafted. We have made great efforts to get a good content into the Declaration. This was done with the assistance of two experts funded jointly by the NSC and the Region Västra Götaland, Sweden.

The work included writing proposals for the Ministerial Statement and studies to bring light on important issues like air pollution from ships in harbours. It is interesting, for instance, to note how such an important issue as ship-to-ship transfer of oil at sea was included in the Ministerial Declaration largely as a result of a NSC intervention! As you may remember this problem was highlighted in a Resolution at last year's General Assembly.

We particularly welcome the commitments made by the ministers to progress the "Clean Ship Approach", and the steps towards the reduction of air pollution from shipping. I am also pleased that the Ministers have acknowledged continued concern over the safety of maritime transport of radioactive materials.

### **Clean Ship**

The NSCEG has been particularly involved in the work on the "Clean Ship": This is a way of looking on ships through their entire life-span, from the design and construction stage, through the operation and maintenance stages to the final de-commissioning stage.

Here considerable progress has been made. The NSC proposed to get a quick start to the process of developing criteria and incentives for the "Clean Ship". This has now been taken on board in by the Ministers. "The Göteborg Declaration" includes a commitment by Norway and The Netherlands to lead further work in this field. The NSC Executive Committee has decided that the NSC should take active part in this work. The NSCEG will propose how this can be carried out.

### **Air Pollution**

In the field of air pollution the NSC has provided much appreciated input. Here the Ministerial Declaration addresses some issues and actions of great importance to environment and health in or near harbour areas. The NSC, again with Västra Götaland, funded a study of the possibilities to provide ships with electricity from shore, so that they do not have to run their polluting engines while at berth. The Ministers now agreed to encourage shore-side electricity in North Sea ports, for example by economic incentives.

### **Marine Fuels Directive**

One NSC proposal, which unfortunately was not adopted by the Ministers, was that they should call upon the EU to start work on a European Directive on Quality of Marine Fuels. Today marine fuels contain legal and illegal substances, without control – and the result is serious toxic pollution both in port areas and at sea, threatening both the health of our citizens and the balance of our environment. An EU Directive on Quality of Marine Fuels could guarantee the shipping industry better fuel and give us less air pollution from ships.

The MM06 was most likely the last session in the North Sea Conferences process. These Conferences have been the only regular meetings at National government level that take place around the North Sea. For the North Sea Commission it would be very important that these regular



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

contacts at national level were to continue and that they, preferably, were widened to other sectors. Let us try to convince our respective National governments that this would be a good idea!

The **Environment Group** represents CPMR and NSC as OSPAR observer at their meetings. This means that NSC representatives can take part in meetings of OSPAR Committees and working groups and obtain all sorts of important information. This also gives us an important opportunity to introduce issues, which we think should be internationally regulated. One such future issue may be the storage of carbon dioxide in the sea bottom, something which today seems a quite uncertain practice. During 2005 - 2006 NSC representatives took part in three expert meetings within the OSPAR framework.

I would encourage all our members to let your experts take part in the observership at OSPAR – besides giving you influence, it can also give your staff valuable new experience!

The **Transport group** has on several occasions presented NSC policies and activities on Motorways of the Sea (MoS) to representatives of European Commission DG for Transport. The Transport group has also co-operated with the CPMR and the BSC on the MoS issue and has provided input to a CPMR position paper.

On 10 March 2006 the group organised a thematic seminar on MoS in Brussels, attended by about 30 persons from 10 different countries – representing all major stakeholder categories. The big interest for this seminar can be taken as a proof of NSC's ability to facilitate co-operation and partnerships within the field of intermodal sea-based transport.

The group has presented a draft proposal for a CPMR working programme on air transport to the Secretariat in Rennes, on the basis of input from the Seaplane-project.

The **Fisheries group** continues to work closely with the CPMR Fisheries Group (CPMRFIG) to support the Chair and Secretariat and to develop joint working. To this end we held the first joint **NSCFG -CPMRFIG** meeting on 16 February 2006, in Brest. The following actions were agreed at the meeting:

- Safety at Sea through Partnership,
- Fishing Vessel Fuel Costs
- EU Fisheries Training Standard

**North Sea Inshore Fisheries Network** The development of the NSC Inshore Fisheries is still progressing, it is planned to have the First Seminar in October 2006. In a letter from Commissioner Borg, he mentions that Inshore Network could contribute to Cod Recovery Review; it is there fore that we move this forward.

#### **North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC)**

The NSRAC is now into it s second year, which has proved just a busy as the it s first year. Up until the present time it has:

- Given advice on Multi Annual Management- Retention of the Shetland and Plaice Boxes
- Development of an effort management scheme for the Kattegat future management of Nephrops and Flatfish fisheries.
- Development positions on Protected Areas Criteria for any closed or protected areas Cod Recovery Review Plan



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

- Initiated research projects on Long-term fisheries objectives for key fisheries mapping of fishing areas collection of social and economic data on fisheries and fishery dependent areas

Dear friends, what are the challenges ahead?

At the CPMR Political Bureau held in Gozo on 5 May 2006, Mr Paul Nemitz, Deputy Head of the Maritime Affairs Taskforce, gave a briefing on the current status of the Green Paper.

The Green Paper was published on 7 June 2006 and the consultation period will begin. During the Consultation phase, which will last 12 months, it is important that various stakeholders need to communicate their views with each other as well as the Commission. The Green Paper will attempt to avoid falling into a sectoral view of Maritime issues something that all sectors and interests will find a challenge. For example, within governance, the Commission have come to the conclusion that there are too many UN sub-organisations dealing with Maritime affairs and that a horizontal approach may be more effective.

Mr Nemitz concluded by stating that he hoped the taskforce had identified the key future issue. This is the EU budget discussion beginning in 2008, as a more holistic approach to Maritime affairs will depend on restructuring future EU expenditure. Ideally at the end of 2007 the services that the coastal regions provide and the cost of these services in terms of maritime issues will be reflected in the finances of the member states. If successful in this task, and introduced as an element of the 2008 discussion, then this could be the most significant step forward in raising consciousness among politicians of their future responsibilities and needs in terms of policy making and the execution of those policies.

He ended by stating that the Commission were looking forward to an animated and public debate that will lead to an integrated Maritime Policy.

At the event in Gozo I made a number of points to the CPMR Political Bureau and the Deputy Head of the Maritime Affairs Taskforce that are of concern to North Sea Commission members. These included:

- The need for complementarity between future EU Maritime policy and Structural Funds, particularly Territorial Cooperation funds, for example, on the topic of Maritime Safety.
- The role for regions in future EU Maritime policy.
- The work within the North Sea regions on subjects such as Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Short Sea Shipping.

At all the Maritime Policy events over the last 12 months it has been obvious that the member regions of the North Sea Region are best placed to provide a collective and coherent response. The thematic groups of the North Sea Commission have already established a way of working together in a non-sectoral manner. This will be the approach sought by the European Commission in future working on Maritime issues therefore the North Sea Commission can make a significant contribution to the forthcoming debate.

The proposal fits with the North Sea Commission Executive Committee aim for the thematic groups to work in an increasingly co-ordinated manner as well as increase the political influence of the organisation.



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

In the Maritime policy, I agree with the points proposed by CPMR, when they arguing it is vital that the issue of coordination between different levels of government must be clearly debated and result in concrete proposals, particularly with regard to:

- The role of sub-national authorities in formulating and delivering EU maritime policy and related mechanisms;
- The place of the ‘regional seas’ level

We need to be active during the consultation period, and I’m happy that the Head of the Maritime Affairs Taskforce Mr. John Richardson will meet our first delegation in Brussels already on July 4<sup>th</sup>, bringing him our resolution on the Maritime Policy. To continue this active approach to the Maritime policy based on the NSC activity and the CPMR project “Europe of the Sea” I propose to arrange one consultation seminar end 2006 or early 2007

Energy will be an important issue for the future development of our region and Europe. This was already raised as a topic at the CPMR GA in Stavanger in 2004, resulting in the creation of the CPMR energy group. We are already active with our Renewable Energy sub group and their cooperation with the CPMR energy group. The GREEN PAPER ON A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE, COMPETITIVE, AND SECURE ENERGY highlights several priorities., all of them important, but I would like to emphasize one priority; **Priority 5: Encouraging innovation: a strategic European energy technology plan.**

From my perspective this links very well our work on Lisbon and Gothenburg. One example of innovation of use of alternative fuels is a project in Norway called “HyNor – The Hydrogen Road of Norway.

The project aims for use of Hydrogen as an alternative fuel for the transport sector. The project is;

- A unique Norwegian joint industry initiative to demonstrate real life implementation of hydrogen energy infrastructure along a route of 580 kilometers from Oslo to Stavanger during the years 2005 to 2008. The project comprises all steps required to develop a hydrogen infrastructure and includes various hydrogen production technologies and uses of hydrogen, in all cases with an adaptation to local conditions
- A joint project covering varying transport means: buses, taxis and private cars, and varying transport systems: urban, inter-city, regional and long national transports
- A joint project connecting various activities and cities in a common network along one of the major national transport corridors, between the capital Oslo and Stavanger, the major oil- and energy city in Western Norway
- A partnership connecting major industrial and energy companies, transport companies, regional and national public authorities, and R&D institutes
- A project which first of all will demonstrate the commercial viability of hydrogen energy production and use in the transport sector

The cornerstone for the first Hydrogen station was laid in Porsgrunn (Telemark) on July 31, and within 2007 Telemark will have the second largest active fleet of Hydrogen cars in the world.

Dear friends, we are facing an active year with many opportunities and challenges. The maritime policy, the follow up of the Trollhättan declaration, the reorganising of the NSC and the activities in



Fylkeshuset,  
3706 Skien, Norway  
Tel: +47 35 58 42 00  
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44  
nsc@northsea.org  
www.northsea.org

the thematic groups work plans, will all require active participation from all member regions with the effort from their politicians and officers.

I wish to thank Highland Council and our Scottish members for hosting this conference. We have never had such a large event with over 400 participants, it has been busy days for the hosts but they have managed to make this conference a real success.

Thank you.