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A Strategy for the North Sea Area.

At the Annual Business Meeting 26 June 2009 the ideas of Macro regions was discussed and NSC decided to prepare for a Strategy for the North Sea Area.

A Writing group was established and in September the first draft paper of priorities for a Strategy was presented. The key challenges identified so far are linked to;

- **Managing Maritime Space;** *The North Sea is a very complex and open marine ecosystem, providing a nursery for fish and a migratory and wintering area for many species of birds. It is also one of the most heavily-used seas, supporting fishing, shipping, trade, energy, sand mining, defense and recreation. Increasing economic activity in the sea, such as growing shipping traffic and the development of offshore wind farms, is leading to more and more competition between users of the sea.*
- **Increasing Accessibility and Attractiveness;** *North Sea ports are important hubs for the export/import of goods and provide access to business locations and Europe's hinterland, stimulating economic development in our region. Further globalization of the economy and an increase in the global population is likely to increase traffic. It is essential to ensure free passage in the North Sea and a good flow to the hinterland.*
- **Tackling Climate Change;** *One of the main challenges facing the North Sea Region is climate change, with adaptation and mitigation measures required. Increased precipitation and flooding in the North, coupled with increased temperatures and aridity in the South will cause significant changes to both physical and human geography in Europe. Exhaustion of fossil fuels and the resulting increase in fuel prices will be another challenge for the region.*
- **Promoting innovation and excellence;** *The North Sea Region is a European stronghold in relation to other regions when it comes to innovation capacity and performance. The progression towards a knowledge based society and a strong research base have enabled excellence in sectors such as ICT, renewable energies, marine technologies and creative industries. The future challenges in this context will be to capitalise on the regions excellence and to promote and maintain innovation in existing and upcoming sectors.*
- **Sustaining liveable communities;** *The North Sea area is a diverse region offering both attractive natural and urban environments. The changing population structure brings with it a shift in demands which impacts upon the vitality and sustainability of communities. One challenge will be to continue to support and enhance the strengths of urban and rural areas and their mutual links on the macro regional level. In this way economic growth and attractiveness of the regions communities need to be promoted to sustain liveability.*

At the same time a steering group was established consisting of representatives from NSC, CoR (Intergroup for North Sea/English Channel), North Sea RAC and Interreg North Sea Programme.

The timetable for North Sea Strategy activities in 2010 are as follows;

- **17 - 18 March; Stakeholder Conference in Newcastle** supported by UK Government and NSC. The aim is to ensure harmonisation of all users of the North Sea it will be important to create the opportunity for dialogue by organising a conference where representatives of all users, EU Institutions, Norway, Member States, Local and Regional Authorities, oil & gas, energy, fisheries, shipping, aquaculture and the environment can come together to find the most appropriate method of Managing the Resources of the North Sea. **This conference will start the consultation process to identify what would be the added benefit of a North Sea Strategy?**
- **13 April; "Europe's macro-region: Integration through territorial co-operation"**. Hosted by the CoR in Brussels. A high level political seminar, organized in joint co-operation of the CoR Intergroup and NSC, where the North Sea Strategy will be discussed in several workshops. Results from the March seminar will be presented. The seminar will also discuss strategies for the Danube and Baltic Sea.
- **20 May "Working together to Manage the Resources of the North Sea and Channel"**, starting the consultation process as to whether we need a North Sea Strategy, what would be the added benefit **Workshop in Oviedo** during the Maritime Day.
- **16 - 17 June joint NSC and Interreg seminar in Stavanger** on the North Sea Strategy, working title "From Projects to Policy".