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Maritime Policy: your opinion counts

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Dear President Bresso, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation to speak about the future of our maritime policy. It is a pleasure for me to be here today.

As Commissioner for maritime affairs, I often have to spend much of my time arguing the case for an integrated approach to the sea.

But I don't need to do that today.

Regional and local authorities have always known that this is the case. You know best that everything is connected.

You know, for example, that we can extend a harbour to improve facilities for tourists. But at the same time, it affects the distribution of sand on the beaches, that the tourists come to enjoy.

You don't have to be told that enterprises, dealing with innovative underwater technologies, are more likely to flourish in the vicinity of higher educational establishments.

You can see that there are savings to be made, if the different agencies responsible for monitoring or enforcing activities on the sea, could be persuaded to share information or duties more effectively.

You are also aware that the seas and coasts are changing faster than ever before. And the people who live from the sea have had to adapt to these changes.

Sons are not following their fathers and grandfathers to sea. It requires fewer people to catch the same number of fish and there are fewer fish to catch, anyway.

Cheap air travel means that holidaymakers are deserting traditional European resorts in favour of easy-to-reach sunnier climates. These towns have to find new activities to attract visitors – water sports, museums, cultural festivals.

Coastal regions have to react to global economic forces. Fierce competition means that the marine engineering industry has to specialise and innovate. We need to take advantage of new opportunities, such as offshore energy to generate growth and jobs.

These common challenges mean that regional authorities, from coastal areas have more in common with each other than with inland regions in the same country. You can put together an opinion that reflects the collective wisdom, of those who are at the front line of the challenges, to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for our maritime economy and our coastal communities.

The actions, put forward in the draft Regulation on integrated maritime policy and on marine knowledge, are, to a large extent, aimed at solving the problems identified by yourselves during our extensive consultation process.

Your positive opinion on our latest two Communications suggests that we are on the right track. I am here to declare that your opinion really counts.

You are completely right when you point out that the estimated **€300 million savings**, from a better marine knowledge, will disproportionately benefit regional administrations. First, it will benefit them directly, when they draw up plans to manage their marine space or protect their shorelines. Secondly, it will benefit them, when researchers use the information to estimate global parameters with a local impact such as sea-level. We estimate that a 25% reduction, in uncertainty in future sea-level rise, will save €100 million per year in coastal defences. And thirdly, it will increase the productivity of the local industries in domains such as coastal tourism or offshore energy production.

However, we are not only talking about savings. Your thoughtful opinion on "Marine Knowledge 2020" points to the direction, we should move when taking our next steps. Studies have repeatedly shown that the opening up of public information leads to **new products and services** that we could not have imagined beforehand. For instance early warnings of jellyfish swarms or algal blooms would be invaluable to aquaculture managers. This stimulus to innovation and growth is the integrated maritime policy's major contribution to the Europe 2020 initiative for smart and sustainable growth.

You think we should pay more attention to the needs of **local authorities**. You are right that many of the issues do fall within their competence.

For instance, we are aware that certain authorities, who are preparing projects to protect coastlines or replenish beaches, cannot easily access the long-term meteorological and oceanographic records on winds and tides, which they need in order to understand the degree of protection needed. We have been asked to set up a mechanism for authorities, who collect data for a specific use, to make them available for a wider use afterwards. We will consider how to do this.

The same goes for the industry. You say we should put greater emphasis on **cooperation with private entities**. We now work on it. For example, we have heard encouraging news recently, from a leading company, that has won a licence to develop offshore wind farms in the North Sea. This company welcomes the easier access to publicly owned data that we propose in our Communication. But they are also open to contributing detailed survey data, that they collect in the course of their development to the common good. Again, we need to explore how this voluntary cooperation can be achieved simply and effectively.

The measures outlined in "Marine Knowledge 2020" cannot of course be implemented, without the adoption of the Regulation to **finance** it during the **period 2011-2013**.

This does not only cover maritime knowledge, but also other activities such as maritime surveillance, spatial planning or the preparation of sea-basin strategies.

Your insistence that sufficient funding be made available for this Financial Regulation is extremely helpful.

Your point about the importance of **involving non-EU partners** in these actions is welcome.

The sea belongs to all of us and we can only preserve it by involving everybody.

For that reason, we are working together with Russia on common concerns in the Arctic and the Baltic, with Balkan, North African and Middle Eastern countries on the Mediterranean and with Russia and Turkey on the Black Sea. I have already visited these countries to establish the dialogue at the proper level. We aim to involve regional authorities from these countries as well.

A representative of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly attended our last meeting of the Working Group on integrated maritime policy in the Mediterranean. We appreciate your help in getting this organisation off the ground. Moreover, I would like to generally encourage you to develop close links with your local authority counterparts in neighbouring countries.

2011 will be a busy year for all of us. We will follow the adoption process for the Regulation financing the IMP, through Council and Parliament and assess the preparatory actions for marine knowledge. But we will also aim to make proposals that can help local and regional authorities to work more efficiently and to realise opportunities for growth. This will include a **Communication on Maritime Spatial Planning** and a **Strategy for the Atlantic**. The Maritime Spatial Planning will fully

respect the principle of subsidiarity. It needs your involvement and full cooperation from the beginning, in order to conciliate the different and sometime conflicting requests for the use of the sea.

Support for taking action in these areas has always been strongest at a regional level, because it is you who see the consequences of doing nothing.

We are also aiming to increase our emphasis on the **cultural heritage** and **nautical sport** aspects of maritime policy. We feel that this can revitalise waterfronts, reverse the emigration of young people and create employment that is less precarious or seasonal.

I would like to thank you for your constructive support and I will be most pleased to take account of all your remarks.

Please continue to provide the good ideas that have served us so well up to now.

Thank you.