COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION FROM THE PRESIDENT AND MR BORG

Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union:

A European vision for the oceans and seas

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Oceans and seas are a vital resource for life on earth. They play a key part in our economic, social and cultural life. They are an important source of wealth with great potential for development. Ensuring the sustainable use of the marine environment is a prerequisite for that potential to be fully realised.

1.2. There is growing international recognition that ocean and sea affairs are interlinked and require a comprehensive approach, and there is a clear move towards such an approach in many parts of the world.

1.3. A strong case can be made for Europe to look at ocean and sea affairs in a more coordinated way, rather than in the current sectoral manner. The Strategic Objectives of the Commission for 2005-2009 noted *"the particular need for an all-embracing maritime policy aimed at developing a thriving maritime economy and the full potential of sea-based activity in an environmentally sustainable manner."*

1.4. A Green Paper on a future EU Maritime Policy, to be adopted by the Commission in the first half of 2006, will constitute a first step towards the establishment of an all-embracing EU Maritime Policy, in line with the Commission's strategic objectives.

1.5. The Communication establishes the Maritime Policy Task Force that will bring this process forward and takes note of the decision of the President to create a Steering Group of Commissioners that will direct its work.

2. The case for a holistic approach to oceans and seas

2.1. Oceans and seas constitute about 70% of the planet's surface and account for 98% of its water by volume. They provide key ecological services and support a wide range of human activities. The oceans and seas are of great economic importance, in that they directly or indirectly sustain millions of jobs not only in maritime industries such as transport, ports, fishing and aquaculture, but also in the tourism and energy sectors. No less relevant are the many social, recreational, and cultural uses we make of our oceans and seas.

2.2. The sheer scale of the oceans and seas has traditionally led people to perceive them as an inexhaustible source of wealth. Human exploitation of the oceans has in general been limited only by the degree of technological development and by the resistance to human agency offered by the marine environment.

2.3. The fact that 80% of ocean pollution results from land-based human activities illustrates that ocean problems cannot be seen in isolation from terrestrial affairs. In addition to environmental problems, coastal areas and islands are bearing the brunt of other growing threats such as terrorism, drug and people trafficking, piracy, over-fishing and environmental crime.

2.4. While the growth of coastal tourism and of the aquaculture sector, the development of maritime transport, and the growing use of the energy, mineral and genetic resources of the seas present significant new opportunities for growth and job creation, the effective protection of the resource-base is a precondition for achieving sustainable wealth and generating employment from Europe's oceans and seas.

2.5. The competing uses of the seas must therefore be managed carefully if their full economic potential is to be realised in a sustainable manner. This requires taking stock of all activities that may have an impact on oceans and seas.

3. The international context

3.1. The Preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, to which the European Community is a party, states that '*the problems of ocean space are closely inter-related and need to be considered as a whole*'. This is a critical starting point from which new policy frameworks embracing all aspects of maritime affairs have been designed in recent years. These cover a broad range of sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, offshore oil and gas extraction, tourism, renewable energies and maritime transport.

3.2. The 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) emphasised that: "*Oceans and seas are critical for global food security and for sustaining economic prosperity. Ensuring the sustainable development of the oceans requires effective coordination and cooperation, including at the global and regional levels, between relevant bodies and actions, to promote integrated, multidisciplinary and multisectoral ocean management at the national level, and to encourage and assist coastal States in developing ocean policies and mechanisms on integrated coastal management.*"

3.3. Several countries, including Australia, Canada, and more recently the USA, have been developing new integrated ocean policies.

3.4. These ocean policies are similar in that they recognise the high potential for growth of sea-related activities in the economy. They also demonstrate that the intense development of these activities in a sustainable way is a major challenge requiring a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

4. The case for acting at European level

4.1. The case for effective Union-level action on maritime affairs is strong:

- Europe is surrounded by four seas and two oceans, and has a coastline seven times longer than that of the US and four times that of Russia. On account of its outermost regions the European Union has the world's largest maritime territory.

- The maritime regions of Europe account today for nearly half of the EU's population and GDP. The maritime areas under the jurisdiction of the Member States are larger than their terrestrial territory, and could be extended further in the future.

- Twenty Member States are coastal States. Romania and Bulgaria are expected to join the Union in 2007, extending the EU's borders to the Black Sea.

- Maritime transport is a key link in the trade chain that is Europe's lifeblood. Recognition of the environmental costs of road transport has further raised the importance of maritime transport and of intermodality in the transport chain. This, together with the relocation of manufacturing activities outside Europe, poses a major challenge to the European economy, our ports and the maritime transport sector.

- The challenge for Europe to maintain a competitive commercial fleet and a healthy shipbuilding industry requires proactive industrial policies, based on science, research and innovation, and within a sustainable European maritime policy framework.

- The precarious state of marine ecosystems and fisheries resources in European waters, with the inevitable attendant economic and social damage, cannot be tackled by Member States individually, or in isolation from other factors.

- There is a growing awareness of the need for integrated coastal management and development in Europe's regional policy.

- EU policies that have an impact upon sea activities (fisheries, cohesion policy, environment, transport, maritime safety and security, research, industrial policy, etc) have a strong legal base in the Treaty and have been substantially developed in recent years.

- Considerable resources are needed to develop marine science and research, and to develop new technologies for improved sustainable uses of the seas and for the monitoring of the marine environment. Increased efforts at all levels of the EU are required in order to create synergies and to achieve the necessary critical mass.

4.2. A policy framework at European level that takes all of the above arguments into consideration while fully respecting the principles of the Treaty, including that of subsidiarity, is vital if Europe is to make the most of its maritime potential.

5.   Working towards an EU Maritime Policy

5.1. It is against this background that President Barroso, in defining the remit of the Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, asked him "*to steer a new Maritime Policy Task Force with the aim of launching a wide consultation on a future Maritime Policy for the Union.*"

5.2. The mobilising effect of this decision is already visible. Member States and regional authorities, stakeholder groups and international partners have already submitted numerous positive reactions and suggestions for this future policy.

5.3. Valuable work has already been done by the Commission in areas such as industry, the environment, transport, fisheries, energy, research, regional policy, space based infrastructure and others. Any future maritime policy will have to build upon this work and will have to address all relevant horizontal issues relating to seas and oceans.

5.4. A valuable input to the future Maritime Policy is the work that has been done in relation to the Thematic Strategy to Protect and Conserve the Marine Environment which is to be adopted in 2005. The Environment Council in its conclusions of 20 December 2004 stressed "*the need for synergy between the thematic strategy for the protection and the conservation of the marine environment and the Green Paper on Maritime Affairs, and the need to more fully address the importance of a strong integration and coherence of policies relevant to the marine environment, required at all levels of management and for all programmes and activities impacting on the marine environment.*"

5.5. In its strategic objectives (2005-2009) the Commission noted "*the particular need for an all-embracing maritime policy aimed at developing a thriving maritime economy and the full potential of sea-based activity in an environmentally sustainable manner. Such a policy should be supported by excellence in marine scientific research, technology and innovation.*"

5.6. Due to its cross-cutting nature, such a policy can be seen as a concrete step towards the realisation of the key objectives set at the European Councils in Lisbon, Gothenburg and the Hague. By following this agenda the Commission is proactively and visibly pursuing its strategic objectives of prosperity, solidarity and security.

6. The Green Paper on a future EU Maritime Policy

6.1. A Green Paper on a future EU Maritime Policy, to be adopted by the Commission in the first half of 2006, will constitute a first step towards an all embracing EU Maritime Policy, in line with the Commission's strategic objectives. The role of the Maritime Affairs Task Force established by this Communication is to produce this Green Paper and to launch a wide public debate on the subject. Even during the preparation of the Green Paper, stakeholders will be consulted.

6.2. The Task Force should build upon existing EU policies and initiatives without delaying their planned implementation. It should seek to identify the potential for beneficial interfaces and synergies between the sectoral policies, and how they could be made useful. It should aim at striking the right balance between the economic, social, security, safety and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, ensuring the preservation of the resource-base, which is a key element for improving the EU's competitiveness, long-term growth and employment in the maritime sector.

6.3. The work of the Task Force should be broad in scope, should explore the value of a maritime policy and the issues it needs to address, and should be based on a clear understanding of the value of the oceans and seas to Europe, their future potential and the risks and challenges attached to them. This will require a sound analysis of the geographical, ecological, economic, social and legal realities. The development of an integrated maritime information system comprising relevant data on status, pressures and trends in relation to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of our seas and oceans may be explored. Attention will also be paid to the added maritime dimension given to the Union by its outermost regions.

6.4. The work of the Task Force must also take inspiration from current best practice in relation to the development and implementation of maritime policies.

6.5. It would look at ways to further strengthen the European Research Area in the maritime field, achieve European leadership in marine science and technology and better integrate science, technology, research and innovation with industry and policy making. The Task Force should look at ways to promote high quality education and training in order to ensure a successful development and dissemination of marine science, technology and innovation.

6.6. It should address the international dimension of ocean and sea affairs, including the relationship between the Law of the Sea and Community policies, and taking account of other international initiatives relating to oceans and seas. It should also set out options to pursue international leadership by promoting EU principles and objectives in international fora, including in the ILO and IMO, in relevant regional organisations, and towards third countries, especially neighbouring countries.

6.7. Options for good governance should be considered. These must take into account the principles set out in the Treaty and in the draft Constitution in relation to policy areas and the distribution of competences between the EU institutions, the Member States, the regions and local authorities. Consideration must also be given to sectoral and regional specificities.

6.8. As a result, the Green Paper should identify the benefits which could result from an integrated Maritime Policy in the medium and long term in relation to economic growth and competitiveness, employment, environmental protection and security. It should thus identify and assess the contribution of Europe's maritime dimension to achieving the objectives set out by the European Council in Lisbon, Gothenburg and The Hague.

6.9. It should also identify challenges arising for the implementation of such a policy and propose options to tackle them. This would include strategies to prevent and be prepared for sea-borne risks, whether resulting from nature or human activity.

6.10. By doing so, the Green Paper would stimulate a broad open debate at all levels of governance and amongst stakeholders. The Commission should encourage and help organise this debate.

6.11. Taking account of the public debate which will follow the adoption of the Green Paper, the Commission should decide on the further steps to be taken.

7.   Organisation of the Maritime Policy Task Force

7.1. The Maritime Policy Task Force will be directed and given political guidance by a Steering Group of Commissioners that will periodically review its work.

7.2. This Steering Group of Commissioners will be composed as follows:

- Vice-President for Enterprise and Industry

- Vice-President for Transport

- Commissioner for Environment

- Commissioner for Regional Policy

- Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs (Chair)

- Commissioner for Research

- Commissioner for Energy

The Commission takes the necessary organisational steps for the work of the Maritime Policy Task Force.