
	<p>CONFÉRENCE DES RÉGIONS PÉRIPHÉRIQUES MARITIMES CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS</p> <p>6, rue Saint-Martin - 35700 RENNES - France Tel. + 33 2 99 35 40 50 - Fax. + 33 2 99 35 09 19</p>	
<p>NORTH SEA COMMISSION</p> <p>Hordaland fylkeskommune, PB 7900, N 5020 Bergen, Norway Tel.+47 55 23 95 32</p> <p>e-mail/web: nsc@northsea.org / www.northsea.org</p>		

**Assen Declaration
24th NSC Annual Business
Meeting
18th June 2015**

Assen Declaration

A Message to the Dutch Presidency of the European Council January - June 2016

Message

The North Sea Commission of the CPMR requests the Dutch Presidency of the European Union to take a leading role in driving the process for closer strategic cooperation between the member states and Norway on a **North Sea Agenda**. North Sea Commission gives its full support and offers our cooperation to the Dutch Presidency in this ambitious and necessary task. The NSC would like to contribute to furthering the work by facilitating public private partnerships and offering synergies with the regions.

In particular we request that the Presidency:



- Convenes a North Sea ministerial conference to reach consensus on the challenges and opportunities facing the region as a whole in line with the recommendations from the DG Mare stakeholder conference in Edinburgh January 2015
- Takes a leading role within NSCOGI to eliminate the regulatory and legal barriers that currently inhibit the development of a meshed North Sea Grid
- Encourages a financial framework for directing funds for the development of cross-border energy projects and pilots, through EU, national and/or private funding in support of the Energy Union.

Background and context

The North Sea Commission (NSC) consists of 31 regional authorities from 8 countries around the North Sea. Our member base and network of local stakeholders contribute to better integration between the different governmental levels and sectors. The North Sea Commission sees a clear need for enhanced cooperation around the North Sea to bring about an energy transition for Europe and to secure and create jobs and growth sectors while protecting marine resources and the environment. Such cooperation requires formalised and national level leadership and participation.

NSC has examined the Dutch vision document “North Sea 2050 Spatial Agenda” with great interest. We consider this document to be an important step in bringing about better and closer cooperation around the North Sea. Here we outline our response to the Dutch visionary document in the “Declaration from Assen”, adopted by NSC Annual Business Meeting in Assen 18th June 2015.

In 2010 the Committee of the Regions called for a European strategy for the North Sea which could help to develop the region and strengthen the cooperation between the different stakeholders.

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The NSC decided to contribute to this discussion by developing a strategy for the North Sea region. The document “**North Sea Commission Strategy – Contributing to the Europe 2020**” was adopted in October 2011 following an intensive period of consultation. The document provides arguments for a coherent strategy for the North Sea region and demonstrates the added value and benefits such a strategy can bring.

In October 2013 The European Parliament granted 250 000 euros for a preparatory action for the North Sea. The original aim was to analyse the North Sea region’s growth potential and use the findings to investigate the added value of having a future shared macro regional strategy for the North Sea area. The work of this preparatory action is ongoing.

A report from the House of Lords European Union Committee from March 2015 entitled “the North Sea under pressure: is regional marine co-operation the answer? concludes “that no existing body or mechanism has a broad enough remit, or is able, to facilitate the political co-operation required to make the necessary step-change in the management of the North Sea basin.”

NSC2020 and 2050 Spatial Agenda

North Sea Region 2020 Strategy identifies five strategic priority areas which are not dissimilar to the five priority areas under the Dutch visionary document.



These include:

- Managing Maritime Space
- Increasing Accessibility and Clean Transport
- Tackling Climate Change
- Attractive and Sustainable Communities
- Promoting Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability (as a horizontal priority)

The bottom-up process which lies behind the strategy document ensures that NSC members are committed to improving and intensifying cooperation efforts within the North Sea area. We are convinced that such a strategic approach will enhance European integration and intensify cross-border synergies. Such a strategy can also facilitate for cooperation with third countries which border the North Sea but are not members of the European Union.

“North Sea 2050 Spatial Agenda” points to several issues that need to be addressed that have far reaching geographical and economic consequences for the region and for Europe as a whole. These issues include, for example, natural resources, energy, accessibility and safety at sea. The integrated approach proposed by the Dutch government is very much in line with North Sea Commission strategy and processes.

We note in particular the “North Sea 2050 Spatial Agenda” calls for a strategy for energy transition and a master plan for energy for the North Sea between 2030 and 2050/2060. This we very much support for the whole North Sea basin, and requires cooperation with a multi- level governance approach.

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It is especially the integrated approach proposed in the vision document and the interconnectivity of the sectorial issues that is of particular interest and which needs to be addressed as part of the agenda for international cooperation.

The “North Sea 2050 Spatial Agenda” states that “the chairmanship of the Dutch European Union in 2016 could be a fantastic cumulative moment” in the process towards a sustainable future perspective for the entire North Sea. This is strongly encouraged by the North Sea Commission and we offer cooperation with our member regions and stakeholders.