

Legoland Declaration - “Building blocks for the future”
Adopted by Annual Business Meeting Billund, 17th June 2016

North Sea Commission declaration from the Annual Business Meeting and North Sea Conference in Billund June 2016

“North Sea Region 2020, North Sea Commission Strategy – Contributing to the Europe 2020” (NSR 2020) has been revised at the half way mark in June 2016. The strategy identifies challenges and opportunities in the North Sea Region and promotes several tools which can be used to tackle the challenges we face:

- Cooperation – increased cooperation and multi-governance
- Innovation – tapping into and fostering innovation
- Building clusters – strong sectoral collaboration, also transnationally
- Promoting new sectors – both blue and green

In order to ensure the region takes advantage of these tools the **North Sea Commission (NSC)** **recommends** that the EU Member States and Norway, together with the European Parliament and the European Commission take necessary steps **to formalise a cooperation platform** for the countries and regions around the North Sea. The review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in 2016 and the work on the post 2020 MFF are key decision points in order to achieve this. NSR 2020 is a good starting point for such a platform and we identify two additional tools for future strategic cooperation:

1. Concrete results and conclusions must be drawn up from the events under the Preparatory Action for the North Sea Region. A report should be presented to the European Parliament and the Member States, outlining concrete action points and/or recommendations to ensure better coordination for future investments, skills and partnerships based on the activities under the Preparatory Action.
2. European Territorial Cooperation, and in particular Interreg A and B programmes, must be continued post 2020. This is where ideas are formulated and tested. Long-term results point to investments as important effects and spin-offs and are crucial results of these types of projects. Interreg is an important funding opportunity and acts as a springboard for other funding and financing instruments for regions and their partners.

Formalised cooperation - tools as building blocks

The NSC Assen Declaration 2015 contained three clear messages for the Dutch Presidency. The declaration from the Annual Business Meeting (ABM) in Billund builds further on these messages. NSC wishes to thank the Dutch Presidency for work which has brought about closer cooperation between the North Sea Countries including the high level event on energy and regional cooperation in February 2016 and the Political Declaration on energy cooperation between the North Sea Countries June 2016.

The strengths of the North Sea Region (NSR) are inherent at sea basin level. Strengths lie in the natural resources the region has to offer. Our manufacturing base adds value and our services sector forms the basis for our standard of living. Our common culture and historical ties makes transnational cooperation a strong tool to face these common challenges. To establish and maintain the region's position globally and in Europe, investment in infrastructure for business, new and relevant skills sets and job creation are needed. Multi-governance and coordinated cooperation are needed to overcome existing barriers and to enhance drivers. There are many examples where this can play a role including the standardisation of new technologies in transport and energy sectors. One example is the installation of fibre cables parallel to transnational energy cables, which could facilitate for the establishment of green data centres with a great potential for sustainable growth and jobs.

Large scale investments such as the development of an integrated North Sea electricity grid is an example of how such coordinated cooperation can work to remove barriers to investments in a new energy sector. This type of investment will create jobs, boost cooperation and produce innovative spin- offs through new clusters and projects. The Energy Union further underpins this position. North-West Europe is now the global leader in offshore wind, which in combination with a surplus of hydro-electric power in Southern Norway could promote sustainable power exchange and innovative industrial development. This could be considered as a new industrial revolution. However there is a continued need to boost private sector innovation, backed with pro-active governmental support in order to build the necessary framework conditions. Incremental steps seem to be the way forward for such large scale investments and this will, more than ever, require coordinated support and drivers.

The North Sea Commission requests the EU Member States and Norway to work towards a formalised cooperation platform where coordinated and streamlined actions can be promoted in order to create the level playing field for private investments.

1. Concrete conclusions from Preparatory Action

The European Parliament granted 250 000 euros for a Preparatory Action for the North Sea at the end of 2013, based on lobby work by the North Sea Commission and its then President, Ole B. Sørensen. The aim of this Preparatory Action was originally 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 revision of the North Sea Commission strategy, North Sea Region 2020 (NSR 2020), has in consultation with member regions, defined the current challenges and opportunities facing the regions around the North Sea¹. The strategy gives a framework for future collaboration and is placed in close proximity to the North Sea Region Programme V-B.

Falling investments, restructuring of the energy sector, clean shipping and transport, protection of our vital resources, an aging population and increased immigration, as well as the need for an adapted and modern skilled workforce are crucial drivers to achieve growth and prosperity for the citizens of the North Sea Region. The challenges we face offer enterprising opportunities for the region and its people.

The activities under the Preparatory Action compliment the NSR 2020 revised strategy and NSC sees a clear need to capture the results from the events funded by the Preparatory Action. What are the conclusions from the work and how can we make use of this information? Which sectors can drive growth and innovation and how should we approach these issues? What kind of cooperation levels do we need to achieve the results we need? We hope that the Preparatory Action will give us some answers and guidelines on future cooperation projects and tools.

¹ Annex to Legoland Declaration (extracted from North Sea Region 2020 revised version June 2016)

North Sea Commission requests DG MARE to collect and collate the results from the Preparatory Action in a format that can be further developed and acted upon.

2. Interreg post 2020

SME support, strengthening of R&D, supporting product and service development are common themes in the national cohesion policy programmes for the countries around North Sea². Regional access to funding will be crucial in the development of new and sustainable business models and products in both new and traditional sectors.

North Sea Commission sees Interreg as a key tool for project development within the identified challenges and opportunities within the NSR 2020 strategy. The NSR 2020 strategy requires tools to deliver its goals, today it is well aligned with the North Sea Region V-B programme. The development of a possible VI-B programme, as well as cross-border programmes will be crucial for the delivery of the strategy and for boosting transnational projects in the regions.

Interreg projects are a catalyst for innovation, they can sometimes act as ‘seed projects’ to test innovative or high risk projects, these may in the long term attract private investment or investment from other initiatives such as Juncker Plan or other funding sources. An example is the project Pro-Tide from the North West Europe Programme IV-B where the regions of Zeeland and Zuid Holland were able to scope and pave the way for Tidal Power projects. A Tidal Technology Centre will be opened in 2017. The planned long-term investment for a large scale tidal power plant is deemed viable and is looking for further financial support. The combination of loans and grants (from Structural Funds for instance) is a very powerful tool for regional projects and investments where Interreg plays a crucial role.

North Sea Commission requests DG REGIO to ensure that the benefits of regional funding from Interreg are clearly set out in the 7th Cohesion Report next year with a view to continued Interreg funding post 2020.

² North Sea in Numbers: North Sea Region 2020, Irene McMaster, March 2016