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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area**

(Text with EEA relevance)

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**1. SCOPE**

The Atlantic Ocean, which marks the western boundary of the EU, is the second-largest of the world's oceans. This Communication responds to a request from the Council of the European Union<sup>1</sup> (EU) and the European Parliament<sup>2</sup>. It proposes a coherent and balanced approach that is consistent with the EU 2020 agenda<sup>3</sup> and its flagship initiatives that promotes territorial cohesion and that takes into account the international dimension.

Whilst this proposed approach will largely focus on helping communities living and working on the Atlantic coast deal with new economic realities, it also recognises that the EU shares responsibility for stewardship of the world's oceans. Broadly speaking the strategy will cover the coasts, territorial and jurisdictional waters of the five EU Member States with an Atlantic coastline<sup>4</sup> – France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom<sup>5</sup> as well as international waters reaching westward to the Americas, eastward to Africa and the Indian Ocean, southward to the Southern Ocean and northward to the Arctic Ocean<sup>6</sup>. In addition to actions concerning the five EU Member States, both at a national and local level, engagement is also sought with other EU states that use this space and with international partners whose waters touch it. The implications of Iceland joining the EU need to be considered.

All the proposed actions are to be financed within existing programmes and will not create any additional impact on the EU budget.

**2. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The challenges and opportunities facing the Atlantic Ocean area can be grouped within five themes. However they do not form a disjoint set. Actions in one theme

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<sup>1</sup> Council Conclusions on Integrated Maritime Policy of 14.06.2010

<sup>2</sup> Resolution on the European Strategy for the Atlantic Region, 9.03.2011 (ref B7-0165/2011).

<sup>3</sup> COM (2010) 2020

<sup>4</sup> The somewhat different challenges facing the coasts and waters of the North Sea are not considered here. No decision has yet been made as to whether a separate North Sea strategy will be developed.

<sup>5</sup> Including the Outermost Regions of the Azores, the Canary Islands, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Madeira, Martinique, Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin

<sup>6</sup> A separate EU approach to the Arctic has been developed, see COM(2008) 763

may also contribute to the objectives of another. All will contribute to the overriding objective of creating sustainable jobs and growth.

## 2.1. Implementing the ecosystem approach

Management of human activities in the Atlantic must deliver a healthy and productive ecosystem. It is acknowledged that this approach is best implemented by managing all activities that have an impact on the sea together. The ecosystem approach is the basis for marine management in both the Common Fisheries Policy and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>7</sup>. Both instruments include references to enhanced coherence<sup>8</sup>. However, the implementation processes for ensuring sustainable fisheries and achieving a good environmental status are still largely separate in practice and will require additional effort in the Atlantic Ocean area.

Therefore, the strategy for the Atlantic must focus on developing the following aspects:

- Fisheries have been a central plank in economies on both sides of the Atlantic. They still provide about one third<sup>9</sup> by volume of landings of the EU's fishing fleet. One quarter of the EU's imports of fish by value are from Norway and Iceland. The proposed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform<sup>10</sup> proposes to manage these stocks so as to achieve maximum sustainable yield whilst preserving goods and services from living aquatic resources for present and future generations. Good progress has been made. For instance, in accordance with United Nations resolutions 61/105 and 64/72 both Regional Fisheries Management Organisations for the North Atlantic, the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation have closed fishing areas for bottom trawling not only to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep sea fish stocks but also to preserve vulnerable marine ecosystems including sponges and coral. But this should be taken further. Single species management must make way for multi-species long-term plans that take into account the wider ecosystem. Atlantic Member States must take up the regionalisation opportunities that are created in the Common Fisheries Policy Reform to adopt technical measures for the Atlantic. The Commission intends to propose an appropriate framework as soon as the CFP reform is enacted.
- Aquaculture can satisfy EU demand for healthy and sustainably produced fish products over and above the level that can be provided by capture fisheries. The Atlantic's clean coastal waters washed by strong tides provide an opportunity for meeting this demand, remaining competitive in a global market and respecting the environment. However, shortage of space on the Atlantic seaboard currently limits expansion. While continuing research, new technologies and innovative engineering will allow the industry to move further offshore, the sharing of space with other infrastructure such as wind

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<sup>7</sup> See in particular OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19., art 1(3) Marine strategies shall apply an ecosystem based approach to the management of human activities

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. recitals 39 and 40 of MSFD, and recital 8 and Article 2(4) of proposed Regulation for the CFP.

<sup>9</sup> Excluding North Sea

<sup>10</sup> COM(2011) 417 Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

turbine platforms is an opportunity that should be considered at the outset of any licensing process. The strategy must therefore promote spatial planning as a tool for implementing the ecosystem approach in the Atlantic Ocean area. Such a process should strengthen coherence, connectivity and resilience of marine protected areas in the Atlantic in line with the EU biodiversity action plan.

EU instruments for an integrated maritime policy and territorial cooperation are already supporting pilot projects on spatial planning and coastal zone management in the Atlantic. The European Commission is currently examining options for a more structured approach towards these mechanisms that will allow the Atlantic Member States and stakeholders to implement the ecosystem approach.

- Finally, Atlantic oceanic circulation drives changes in European terrestrial as well as marine ecosystems. Forecasting future changes in Europe's climate and adapting to these changes will never be achieved without better understanding of the Atlantic. This calls for sustainable observation systems, from space and at sea, of key marine variables. European and North American partners contribute to the Argo programme that has already deployed an array of 900 floats that continuously monitor the temperature and salinity of the upper Atlantic Ocean. The Commission intends to examine options to support this ocean observing system and prepare, together with partners, its extension to greater depths and biogeochemical as well as physical parameters.

## **2.2. Reducing Europe's carbon footprint**

As climate change mitigation is an integral part of all EU policies, the strategy must focus on the following elements:

- The Atlantic has stronger winds than the other seas that wash Europe's shores. Not only does this offer clean energy but it can also contribute to reducing dependency on distant sources of fossil fuel. Wind turbines are included in EU's Strategic Energy Plan and already moving offshore<sup>11</sup> in order to benefit from stronger winds and reduced landscape impact. The expansion of offshore wind farms in the Atlantic will offer key industrial opportunities for the ports that service them. By 2020, around 20% of the European offshore wind installed capacity could be located in the Atlantic basin.
- The potential of the Atlantic's powerful waves and strong tides needs to be exploited as well. The predictable nature of energy from tides can complement the fluctuating energy from wind. Islands can receive a high proportion of their energy from the sea. However successful deployment of large scale offshore renewable energy will only happen if grid connections are ensured to link the main production centres to the consumption. Ten European countries agreed in December 2010 to develop an offshore electricity grid in the adjacent North Sea. In its new guidelines for implementing Europe's energy infrastructures the Commission will propose that the Irish Sea be included along with the North

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<sup>11</sup> COM (2008) 768 , 13.11.2008).

Sea and the Baltic in a "Northern Seas offshore grid" that will be considered as an "energy infrastructure priority". This will speed up the process for granting of permits.

The Commission intends to implement the Council request<sup>12</sup> to explore synergies between the European Energy Policy and the integrated maritime policy in order to promote more energy generation from the sea, in particular wave, tide, currents and thermal gradient sources, including from the Atlantic.

- Changes in maritime transport will also contribute to the carbon footprint reduction in the Atlantic.

Negotiations under the auspices of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) are underway to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from international shipping. The adoption of the Energy Efficiency Design Index will reduce emissions from ships built after 2013. As well as favouring more fuel-efficient ships, emissions targets may influence the routing of Atlantic shipping. The Atlantic strategy should reflect how Atlantic shipping would operate under the constraints of increased volume of shipping and lower emissions of carbon dioxide.

Shifting freight from road to sea will also lower emissions. In line with the recent EU White Paper on transport, actions aimed at integrating waterborne transport into Europe's transport network are underway. The Atlantic does not host any of Europe's megaports but rather a number of significant smaller ports. The EU "motorways of the sea" projects already contribute through existing routes between Bilbao and Zeebrugge, between Sines and La Spezia and a new route between Gijón and Saint-Nazaire route that will soon be upgraded to provide a higher frequency. A route is planned between Nantes-Saint-Nazaire and Vigo, to be extended at a later stage to Le Havre and Algeiras. A line between Brest and Leixões should begin operations in 2014. Atlantic regional authorities, are considering further development of multimodal transport corridors, as part of the European Transport Network (TEN-T). Other EU actions to increase the efficiency of short sea shipping in the Atlantic include the implementation of the "European Maritime Transport Space without Barriers"<sup>13</sup> and the "Blue Belt" pilot project to reduce administrative burdens such as customs procedures for intra-EU cargo traffic. The Commission will assess progress by 2012. A maritime transport dialogue with the United States maritime administration has resulted in a memorandum of cooperation on short sea shipping signed in 2011. Results from the regional authorities reflection, the Commission's progress report and lessons learned from cooperation with other maritime authorities will feed into the Atlantic strategy's efforts to increase the volume of short sea shipping.

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<sup>12</sup> General Affairs Council, 16 November 2009

<sup>13</sup> COM(2009) 10, January 2009

### 2.3. Sustainable exploitation of the Atlantic seafloor's natural resources

This strategy should aim to focus on the following aspects in order to develop the sustainable exploitation of the Atlantic seafloor's natural resources:

- The recent Commission Communication on tackling the challenges in commodity markets and on raw materials<sup>14</sup> emphasises the need to increase investment in Europe's natural assets whilst ensuring that minerals are extracted under safe conditions that respect the environment and work force. In 2010 the International Seabed Authority adopted regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules<sup>15</sup> and in July 2011 issued a licence for prospecting an area in the northern zone of the mid-Atlantic ridge. The efforts of current contractors with the Authority are primarily directed at long-term geological and environmental studies, financed through government funding rather than commercially driven exploration. The European Partnership on raw materials planned by the Commission within the framework of the EU2020 Flagship on Innovation Union<sup>16</sup> will include promotion of research and innovation for sustainable access to marine raw materials.
- Marine research institutes on both sides of the Atlantic are well placed to deepen understanding of what the rich biodiversity of the ocean can offer further for food, fuel and pharmaceuticals whilst preserving its ecosystem functions. Increasingly they are working together. The five EU Atlantic states and other EU Member States as well as Norway and Iceland are already cooperating under the umbrella of the Seventh Framework Programme<sup>17</sup> SEAS-era coordination action<sup>18</sup> and are currently preparing the new Joint Programming Initiative "Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans"<sup>19</sup> to share work amongst national marine research programmes. While it has been hard to construct transatlantic partnerships because of the need to align the timing of funding opportunities, the Commission will seek to define arrangements allowing organisations on both sides of the Atlantic to contribute to joint projects .
- Access to the data produced by research institutes and other public authorities has not always been easy in the past. The EU's marine knowledge 2020 initiative<sup>20</sup> will support business and conservation authorities by providing a unique access point for marine data harmonised over sea-basins, so reducing the cost of assembling the data necessary to design, build and operate coastal or offshore infrastructure. Unlocking the patrimony of marine data will not only make existing business processes more competitive but will stimulate innovation by opening access to previously-excluded researchers and small businesses.. It is intended that the EU efforts also contribute towards global

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<sup>14</sup> COM (2011) 25 , February 2011.

<sup>15</sup> ISBA/6/A/18, annex

<sup>16</sup> COM(2010) 546 final

<sup>17</sup> EU chief instrument for funding research and technology development

<sup>18</sup> SEAS-era: Towards Integrated Marine Research Strategy and Programmes – <http://www.seas-era.eu>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.jpi-oceans.eu>

<sup>20</sup> Commission Communication "Marine knowledge 2020: marine data and observation for smart and sustainable growth" (COM (2010) 461, 8.9.2010).

open access initiatives such as GEBCO<sup>21</sup> and OneGeology<sup>22</sup>. The strategy should reflect on the opportunities these developments open up for the Atlantic Ocean area.

## 2.4. Responding to threats and emergencies

The EU needs to be prepared for threats and emergencies in the Atlantic whether they are caused by accidents, natural disasters or criminal activity. The following aspects are priorities for the Atlantic Ocean area :

- The adoption of important legislative measures on maritime safety, the latest being the third maritime safety package in 2009<sup>23</sup> has reduced the risk of shipping accidents. The Bonn and Lisbon Agreements<sup>24</sup> have driven coordination between Member States on marine disaster preparedness and response. The Paris Memorandum of Understanding, has led to more than 24.000 ship inspections annually. However accidents can still happen and the Atlantic seaboard remains vulnerable to natural events such as the storms which struck the Vendée in 2010. The changing climate added to other human impacts on the sea means that past behaviour may not be a guide for the future. The unexpected must always be expected

The first hours in a crisis are vital and events with a local impact need help from neighbours. Mechanisms must be in place before storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, nuclear accidents, invasions of alien species, or oil spills. Early warnings require continuous monitoring of the sea, fast transmission of information, coordination of response teams and mobilisation of expert advice. The Commission is leading work on prevention and preparedness including a risk management policy<sup>25</sup> linking threat and risk assessment to decision making and the development of scenario planning for cross-border disasters. In the event of a major emergency the EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates coordination and transportation of assistance from Member States and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA).. Accurate marine forecasting built on the marine core service of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme can contribute. It delivers separate forecasts for the North West shelf and the Iberian and Biscay area. National and regional authorities responsible for protecting the Atlantic coastline and the people who live there should consider projects for testing readiness under the EU's territorial cooperation programme and take active engagement in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

- The Atlantic is Europe's lifeline for trade. Europe's security of supply must be absolutely secure and the trafficking of arms, people and drugs must stop. The EU and US economies account for about half the world's GDP and nearly a

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<sup>21</sup> General bathymetric chart of the Oceans

<sup>22</sup> an international initiative of the geological surveys of the world launched in 2007 to contribute to the 'International Year of Planet Earth',

<sup>23</sup> Regulations of 23 April 2009 (OJ L 131, 28/05/2009) and subsequent related Directives..

<sup>24</sup> The Lisbon Agreement sets the implementation of the International Action Centre for Pollution Incidents Response in the north-east Atlantic (CILPAN).

<sup>25</sup> Risk assessment and mapping guidelines for disaster management SEC(2010)1626

third of the world's trade flows. In June 2011 these two partners agreed to mutually recognise standards in order to reduce regulatory bottlenecks to trade whilst ensuring security of the transatlantic lifeline. The strategy for other critical maritime routes is to build capacity in coastal states. A needs assessment is underway to determine what measures under the instrument for stability could reduce piracy, armed robbery at sea and hostage taking in the Gulf of Guinea.

The European Maritime Safety Agency's SafeSeaNet already provides an integration of mandatory declarations from ships and a gateway to signals from their Automatic Identification System (AIS) picked up by coastal stations. Fishing vessels are tracked through the Vessel Monitoring system and the Long Range Identification and Tracking system allows all passenger and cargo ships above 300 tonnes within one thousand nautical miles of the European coast to be monitored. Tracking of ships even further away with other technologies<sup>26</sup> has also been demonstrated. However those fighting threats such as smuggling, illegal fishing or trafficking do not yet have access to the complete picture because data sharing agreements between different authorities are not yet fully in place. Atlantic regions will therefore benefit from ongoing EU-level measures to promote the development of Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) which will link systems such as the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), for the exchange of information on irregular migration and cross-border crime and the SafeSeaNet system. Sharing of information is not a purely internal EU concern. For instance in September 2011 the United States and the European Union agreed to share information on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The focus of the Atlantic strategy must be to maximise the benefit from sharing.

## 2.5. Socially inclusive growth

Whilst there is considerable variation along the Atlantic coast, many communities need to cope with a decline in employment in fisheries and shipbuilding, the shift of mass tourism to sunnier climes and the tendency of elderly people to choose the coast for retirement. The challenge is to ensure that new high-added value jobs are created at the coast and at the same that those who seek employment in the new economy have the right skills to do them.

- Wider mutual recognition of training, including the next generation of marine scientists<sup>27</sup>, re-training and professional qualifications are required to retain maritime expertise and restore the attractiveness of maritime professions. There is a need to make better use of the experience of people retired from maritime professions and to attract young people to maritime careers. Dialogue with social partners on working conditions for fishermen and seafarers should continue. The Commission has begun work on evaluating the 2005 Professional Qualifications Directive which will culminate in a Green Paper in

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<sup>26</sup> For instance using satellites to pick up signals from ships' Automatic Identification Systems

<sup>27</sup> European Maritime Day 2010 workshop "Towards a European Young Marine Scientists and Technologist Forum": [www.eurocean.org/euymast/](http://www.eurocean.org/euymast/)



2011 and a revision of the Directive in 2012. The strategy should aim to include input from Atlantic maritime industries in these efforts.

Regional clustering of maritime industries with educational establishments can ensure a skilled workforce and promote labour mobility within sectors. For instance the Brest offshore industry benefits from the vicinity of institutions providing teaching and research on the sea. And the Irish Marine Institute's SmartOcean initiative engages multinational information technology companies and small enterprises in the development of high-value products for the marine industry. The advent of new communication technologies means that a critical mass of industries and researchers in geographically separate locations can set up virtual clusters. The strategy should focus on encouraging the development of these clusters through territorial cooperation projects.

- A discerning tourism<sup>28</sup> can help regenerate some Atlantic coastal areas but it needs to attract all-year round trade rather than summertime only in order to support quality jobs. The Atlantic's rough natural beauty, rich biodiversity, traditional seafood cuisine and Celtic culture are assets that can be readily exploited. Nautical activities are an important source of revenue and a creator of high-value jobs, however the Atlantic coast has a major deficit in berths especially for large recreational vessels. The cruise industry's dramatic growth elsewhere has not yet been replicated in the Atlantic. The Atlantic strategy should incorporate the opportunities for development in this field.

### 3. EU TOOLS

EU legislative instruments with important impacts on the sea and allowing considerable local autonomy are at an early stage of maturity and financial instruments for the EU's programming period 2014-2020 are being prepared. Programming decisions made now and in the near future will have an impact throughout this period. It is therefore essential that the Atlantic stakeholders are ready to use these instruments to meet the challenges identified here. The main tools are:

- a Common Strategic Framework for structural funding that will translate the targets and objectives of Europe 2020 into key actions and focus on areas such as energy and the environment. It will identify key actions needed in relation to headline targets and flagship initiatives. The Common Strategic Framework will encompass the actions covered today by the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and identify linkages and coordination mechanisms with other EU instruments such as programmes for research, innovation, lifelong learning, and networks
- Horizon 2020 - a Common Strategic Framework for research, innovation and technological development which will link strongly with national research

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<sup>28</sup> COM (2010)352 , 30.06.2010

programmes to promote excellence, tackle societal challenges and boost competitiveness. Research, technological development and innovation can create sustainable growth opportunities that compensate for the relative decline of traditional maritime industries. The ongoing SEAS-ERA project will deliver specific priorities for the Atlantic basin that can feed into the work programmes of the new Framework.

- a reformed Common Fisheries Policy. The Commission has proposed<sup>29</sup> an agenda with ambitious regionalisation and simplification targets. While key decisions on objectives, targets, minimum common standards, results and delivery timeframes remain at EU level, Member States should have the flexibility to decide on other measures for fisheries management, under the supervision of the Commission and in full compliance with EU law. Member States from the Atlantic have welcomed this devolution and expect it to lead to a fisheries management that is able to react more quickly and efficiently to changing ecological or economic conditions.
- the Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>30</sup> which establishes a framework to achieve or maintain good environmental status in the marine environment by the year 2020 at the latest. Good Environmental Status is at the level of the marine region<sup>31</sup>, so cooperation between coastal states in defining, monitoring and assessing good environmental status is necessary.
- the maritime policy flagship initiatives on maritime surveillance, marine knowledge and maritime spatial planning. These will set standards at an EU level but will also include measures specific to the Atlantic. For instance the process to improve marine knowledge includes separate "checkpoints" to determine gaps, duplications and priorities in marine monitoring programmes for the Bay of Biscay, the Celtic seas, the Iberian coast and Macaronesia.
- foreign policy instruments such as the EDF (European Development Fund) and the EU's Critical Maritime Routes programme to engage third countries in protection of Atlantic shipping, but also through international (through IMO) and bilateral dialogue with partners in the Atlantic region.
- There is a need to prioritise research, pilot projects, dialogues, partnerships and investments in strategic and programme proposals within this framework in order to deliver the most effective package for the benefit of the Atlantic.

#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY**

The Atlantic strategy will not work only with action from the EU institutions. It requires engagement from Member States, regions, local authorities and private

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<sup>29</sup> COM(2011) 417

<sup>30</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC of 17 June 2008

<sup>31</sup> According to Article 4, the north east Atlantic marine region is divided in the following sub-regions: (i) the Greater North Sea, including the Kattegat, and the English Channel; (ii) the Celtic Seas; (iii) the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Coast; (iv) in the Atlantic Ocean, the Macaronesian biogeographic region, being the waters surrounding the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands.

industry as well as think tanks. Developing the strategy for the Atlantic Ocean area is therefore based on the following methodology:

- building on the active engagement and initiative of Atlantic Member States, regions and other stakeholders in designing and implementing actions including input from Local Action Groups. These are groups of public and private partners who receive specific support from the European Fisheries Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in order to identify investments by the EU. This self-help bottom-up approach has provided local communities with the means to develop new economic activities in areas where traditional opportunities are declining and should continue in the new post-2013 structural funding.
- promoting international cooperation on issues such as observation, data sharing, marine assessments, research, reducing emissions and pollution from ships, safe and secure navigation, port security, the fight against piracy, and countering illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing
- adopting an Action Plan for the strategy by the end of 2013, indicating specific projects and actions recommended for support.
- "Smart governance" to implement the strategy, building on current structures

The tools to implement the strategy are:

- enhanced cooperation - meetings, conferences, workshops, on-line discussion and information sites.
- targeted actions within existing agreements and structures such as the OSPAR Convention, regional fisheries organisations and the International Maritime Organisation.
- a strategic combination of the EU's financing and legislative instruments defined in section 3 to achieve Atlantic objectives

As a first step, an Atlantic Forum will be set up that will allow Member States, Parliament, regional authorities, civil society and representatives of existing and emerging industries to contribute. It will include a set of workshops focused on the challenges and opportunities outlined above and a think tank to suggest options for achieving the objectives. The Forum is expected to commence work in 2012 and be dissolved in 2013.