

Framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy. Marine Strategy Framework Directive

2005/0211(COD) - 24/07/2007 - Commission communication on Council's position

The Commission accepted totally, in part or in principle 52 of the 87 amendments made by the European Parliament in the first reading. 37 of these 52 amendments are incorporated in the common position.

The following are among the amendments which were accepted by the Commission:

- amendments which led to the recognition of the importance of the ecosystem approach to managing Europe's marine environment;
- the amendment on joint cooperation between Member States and non-EU countries for developing and implementing marine strategies regionally;
- the need to advance environmental integration.

The Commission also accepted amendments which led to clarifications of the text, in particular with regards to definitions; links with relevant Directives (e.g. Water Framework Directive, Birds Directive, Habitats Directive); geographical coverage (extension of the scope of the Directive to the Black Sea); references to relevant international agreements; and inclusion of certain descriptors of "Good Environmental Status".

The Commission rejected certain amendments, and in particular the following:

- amendments which would bring forward the timetable for implementation as this would not be realistic;
- amendments introducing the compulsory designation of marine protected areas in the Directive. These areas should be seen as a means to reaching "Good Environmental Status" rather than as an end in themselves and should therefore be optional.

On the important issue of the introduction of descriptors of "Good Environmental Status", the Commission could accept some of the suggestions made by Parliament, but has a clear preference for descriptors focused on environmental quality elements rather than on specific pressures. The commission states that taking a pressure-based approach only would inevitably lead to overlooking potential risks and threats and would not enable the EU to move away from a fragmented approach to the management of the marine environment.

Lastly, the Commission rejected amendments calling for ad hoc financial support for the implementation of the proposed Marine Directive or granting certain regions a special status.

The Commission goes on to point out that the Common Position contains a number of important changes compared to the Commission's original proposal. It states that these changes regrettably weaken the proposal.

The Commission concludes that the common position is an important step towards the adoption of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. However, the Commission notes that the common position is not

as ambitious as the Commission's initial proposal, in particular as regards its overall ambition, the binding nature of the good environmental status objective, and implementation costs. On this last point, the Commission wishes to recall that good policy depends on high-quality information and current assessment and monitoring programmes at EU level are neither integrated nor complete.

More positively, the Commission is pleased that the common position fully recognises the strong need for a European integrated approach to protect our oceans and seas more effectively. References to the importance of cooperation and coordination between Member

States and non-EU countries for developing and implementing marine strategies regionally are also positive. Finally, the addition of elements to the definition of "Good Environmental Status" is also useful although the Commission would prefer definitions which are focused on environmental quality elements rather than specific pressures.