Marine knowledge 2020: seabed mapping for promoting sustainable fisheries

2013/2101(INI) - 29/08/2012 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to launch a debate on the best strategy to adopt to deliver an accessible, sustainable digital mapping of European sea-beds by 2020 and to provide timely information on the marine environment (Commission Green Paper).

BACKGROUND: in its September 2010 Communication entitled "Marine Knowledge 2020", the Commission highlighted the need to unlock the economic potential of Europe's wealth of marine observations. It showed this would provide the knowledge base to **facilitate the growth of a sustainable, job-creating 'blue economy' in marine and maritime sectors** by improving the competitiveness and efficiency of industry, public authorities and researchers.

The "Marine Knowledge 2020" initiative is based on the concept of a European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet), a network of marine organisations that would provide a single entry point for accessing and retrieving marine data. Since its adoption, progress has been made. Preparatory actions under the integrated maritime policy have delivered prototype thematic portals for EMODnet for selected sea-basins. A second phase of EMODnet has begun and should provide access to a digital map of all European waters by the end of 2014.

The Commission aims to work together with Member States to bring together available resources and mechanisms to deliver that knowledge for the benefit of industry, public authorities, researchers and society.

CONTENT: the Commission's flagship project involves the **preparation of a seamless multi-resolution digital seabed map of European waters by 2020**. This map should be:

- of the **highest resolution possible**, covering topography, geology, habitats and ecosystems;
- accompanied by **access to timely observations and information** on the present and past physical, chemical and biological state of the overlying water column, by associated data on human activities, by their impact on the sea and by oceanographic forecasts.

All this information should be **easily accessible, interoperable and free of restrictions on use**. It should be nourished by **a sustainable process that progressively improves its fitness for purpose** and helps Member States maximise the potential of their marine observation, sampling and surveying programmes.

While the Commission considers that the EU can provide support through the Common Strategic Framework for structural funding, including the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, **commitment from Member States and the private sector is needed** to achieve this goal.

There are a number of new challenges to be faced:

- major EU initiatives, especially EMODnet and GMES, have so far been implemented through limited-duration projects that will finish by 2014;
- the prolonged financial crisis has focused attention on public spending. There is an even greater need to ensure that some one and a half billion euro spent annually by EU Member States on Europe's marine monitoring network is cost-effective;
- easier access to fisheries data has not happened;
-

- the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami tragedy in Japan, followed by the nuclear accident at Fukushima, highlighted the benefits of bringing near-real time information on the state of the marine environment into the public domain;
- uncertainty as to the present and future impact of climate change on Europe's seas and coasts is stalling local and regional authorities' efforts to adapt.

There are also some new opportunities:

- a study has shown that private companies collect even more data than public authorities, but these have not been incorporated within EU initiatives so far;
- the digital terrain model of the European seabed will be delivered at a resolution of about 250 metres; four times better than what was previously publicly available on a pan-European scale;
- the 2014-2020 financial framework for the EU offers an opportunity to develop a more sustainable governance structure in which the collection, assembly and dissemination of marine data moves from being a set of projects defined by the Commission to a continuous, integrated process with priorities based on the needs of users in industry, public authorities and the research community;
- the rapid expansion of offshore wind power will require better access to marine data;
- the new Horizon 2020 research programme offers an opportunity to improve technologies for gathering and processing marine observations;
- Member States and Associated Countries have agreed to pool resources in a Joint Programming Initiative 'Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans' that can provide a framework for coordination of observation programmes.

This Green Paper takes stock of what has been done. It then opens a debate on the best strategy for moving forward to a new phase that meets the challenges defined in this document and profits from the opportunities to deliver an accessible, sustainable digital mapping of European sea-beds by 2020. It would also provide timely information on the present and past physical, chemical and biological state of the overlying water column and forecasts, together with a process that helps Member States maximise the potential of their marine observation, sampling and surveying programmes.

The consultation is open until 15 December 2012.