

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

2005/0211(COD) - 24/10/2005 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: The establishment of a Marine Strategy Directive.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: Securing an ecologically sound marine environment is a key feature of EU environmental policy. Indeed, the EU's 6th Environmental Framework Programme devotes a single Thematic Strategy to the protection and conservation of the marine environment. The European Council has stated its wish to see the outlines of an ambitious Marine Strategy in the course of 2005. In presenting this proposal, the Commission is fulfilling its obligation to establish just such a strategy.

The need for Community action is borne out by numerous scientific studies and has the support of all interested parties. (An open and transparent consultation process was held over a two year period prior to the adoption of this proposal). Experts have identified numerous threats to the marine environment. The principal ones being over-fishing, the discharge of pollution from land-based sources, oil spills, discharges from off-shore oil and gas exploration, pollution from ship dismantling, noise pollution, climate change, nutrient enrichment and associated algal blooms, the illegal discharges of radionuclides and noise pollution.

The marine environment does not accord with existing geo-political boundaries. By its very nature it is trans-boundary and in order to secure an effective implementation of environmental measures to combat the threat outlined above, a co-ordinated response at an EU level is needed. Applying a purely national approach would lead to a patchwork of disjointed activities. Member States, for example, could apply contradictory policies with differing time-frames and routes, the result of which would be the ineffective protection of the marine environment.

Bearing the above in mind, the objective of this Directive is to achieve a sound environmental status of the marine environment by 2021. The Directive will only define common objectives and principles at the EU level, leaving the Member States free to plan and execute measures at a regional level to take account of diverse conditions. European Marine Regions will be established as a basic unit for managing the marine environment. Member States will be expected to develop a strategy for each of their Marine Regions and to actively co-operate with one another. Only under certain conditions and in certain specific waters would the overall objectives of the Directive not apply.

The proposal has no implications on the Community budget. The administrative burden of the proposal has been estimated at approximately EUR 90 million per annum for the EU as a whole in the first two years, EUR 70 million thereafter. Significant efficiency gains will be seen by avoiding duplication in monitoring and assessment activities.