

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

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This is a Commission Communication to the Council and European Parliament on the Thematic Strategy for the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment and accompanies the proposal for a Directive covering this subject. It gives a detailed outline of the strategy; examining in detail its *raison d'être*, objectives, purpose and preferred route of implementation.

The thematic strategy states that its overall aim is to promote a sustainable use of the seas and to conserve marine ecosystems. The primary scope of the Strategy applies to the regional seas bordering EU countries although account is also taken of international waters and of the High Seas in particular. Evidence of a deteriorating marine environment has accumulated over the past three years. Marine habitats are being destroyed, degraded and disturbed. The principle threats identified are both alarming and varied. They include climate change, pollution from land sources, litter, microbiological pollution, oil spills as a result of accidents, ship-source pollution, leaks from offshore oil and gas explorations, pollution from ship dismantling, commercial over fishing, the introduction of non-native species, nutrient enrichment and associated algal blooms, noise pollution and the illegal discharges of radionuclides.

The marine environment does not accord with existing geo-political boundaries. By its very nature it is trans-boundary and as such any environmental pollution will have trans-boundary consequences. Due to their diverse nature, national measures hinder, rather than promote improved environmental conditions. This is largely because marine pollution is dealt with on a sector by sector basis rather than being treated as an individual policy challenge. The various international conventions on marine protection add to the lack of impetus in that they have few enforcement powers thus compromising their effectiveness in achieving the agreed goals. A single over-arching Strategy would undoubtedly contribute significantly to a co-ordinated and effective approach in dealing with the problems associated with marine pollution. In other words, a strong EU policy on marine protection will complement and bolster the current patchwork of institutional arrangement by providing a legally enforceable framework within which Member States can operate.

An additional feature of the Marine Strategy will be to offer a new approach to the monitoring and assessment of scientific information in order to plug the gap for high quality information. This new approach to marine assessment and monitoring will be based upon existing programmes including the Data Collection Regulation under the CFP and will be tailored to ensure full consistency with relevant Commission initiatives such as INSPIRE and GMES.

A number of key elements in building the Strategy have been identified and include:

- Adopting a dual approach. This approach will set targets common to all EU Member States, whilst leaving the planning and execution of the set targets to regional actors. This approach takes account of diverse conditions and the need for tailor-made solutions.
- A knowledge-based approach in order to achieve informed policy making.

- An eco-system approach, whereby human activities affecting the marine environment will be managed in an integrated manner through the promotion of conservation and sustainable marine use.
- A co-operative approach, providing for broad agreement with all relevant stakeholders and enhancing co-operation with existing regional sea convention.

To accompany the Thematic Strategy the European Commission is proposing a Marine Strategy Directive. Its objective will be to achieve a good environmental status of Europe's marine environment by 2021, to coincide with the first review of River Basin Management Plans under the EU Water Framework Directive. The Marine Strategy Directive will define common objectives and principles at an EU level, whilst simultaneously establishing European Marine Regions to act as management units responsible for applying the Directive's provisions. No specific management measures will be set down at the EU level. The Directive requires Member States to work together closely and to co-ordinate their policy measures.

Finally, the Strategy will seek synergies with other related EU policy initiatives, such as the Urban Waste Water Treatment and Nitrates Directive. At the same time it does not over-ride or obviate obligations under the Habitats and Birds Directives. Considerable synergy will be achieved between the Strategy and the implementation of other thematic strategies developed under the 6<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme, namely air, soil, pesticides, recycling, resources and the urban environment.

To conclude, the Report restates that Europe's marine environment is under threat. This requires effective EU action. The strategy is to be reviewed in 2010 and will feed into the final evaluation of the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.