Thematic strategy on the marine environment

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Aldis KUSKIS (EPP-ED, LV) in response to the Commission communication on a thematic strategy on the protection and conservation of the marine environment. The report welcomed the "overarching objective of promoting sustainable use of the seas and conservation of marine ecosystems", but expressed disappointment at the proposed Marine Strategy Directive (see COD/2005/0211) which, it felt, "will not succeed in mobilising the regional and local authorities to take the appropriate measures".

The committee called for the inclusion in the Directive of a common EU-wide definition of 'good environmental status' (GES), understood as "the environmental status when all the marine ecosystems within a given Marine Region are managed in ways which allow them to function in a balanced, self-sustaining way in the face of environmental change, supporting both biodiversity and human activities".

Referring to the Green Paper "Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union", the report warned against too great an emphasis on an economic approach and urged that "a balance be struck between the economic and ecological angles". The Marine Strategy Directive should provide the legal framework for the preservation and integrity of the marine environment and hence for the appropriate management units - the Marine Regions and Strategies - for marine planning and decisions.

On budgetary matters, the committee expressed concern at the lack of financial commitment for the implementation of the Marine Strategies and asked the Commission and the Member States to identify the measures that could be co-financed through LIFE+.

To ensure that the Directive did not create extra layers of bureaucracy, the Commission and Member States were urged to ensure "either that the regional marine conventions have the relevant legal and administrative capacities or that mechanisms for joint implementation of the Strategy are developed between the different regional bodies operating within the same marine region". The Commission was also asked to study the possibility of making the Baltic Sea into a pilot area, with the forthcoming Baltic Sea Action Plan from the Helsinki Convention (HELCOM) acting as a pilot programme to implement the Strategy objectives in the Baltic Sea Marine Region. In addition, the report highlighted the importance of protecting the "extremely fragile ecosystem" of the Arctic waters and called on the Commission to report to Parliament and the Council by 2008 on the possibility of establishing the Arctic as a protected area, similar to the Antarctic, and designated as a "natural reserve devoted to peace and science".

Lastly, the committee recommended that the Black Sea be included in the Marine Regions to be covered by the Marine Strategy Directive, in view of the forthcoming accession of Romania and Bulgaria and the accession negotiations under way with Turkey.