Thematic strategy on the marine environment

2006/2174(INI) - 14/11/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 573 votes in favour to 8 against with 13 abstentions, a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Aldis **Kušis** (EPP-ED, LV) and welcomed the Commission's Thematic Strategy. It felt, however, that the proposal for a Marine Strategy Directive in its present form would not succeed in mobilising the regional and local authorities to take the appropriate measures. It called for the inclusion of a common EU-wide definition of good environmental status (GES) in the Marine Strategy Directive. This should be 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. The Marine Strategy Directive must include a legal obligation for Member States to achieve GES, and must also result in binding supranational obligations which might involve common commitments in third countries. In addition, it was important that the objectives, measures, language and concepts used in the Marine Strategy Directive and other directives concerning the marine environment, such as the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive, be harmonised to facilitate coordination between those directives. Parliament emphasised the need to bring the timetable into line with the timetable for the Water Framework Directive. Parliament went on to welcome the Green Paper "Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union" (COM (2006)0275) but warned against too great an emphasis on an economic approach, instead urging a balance between the economic and ecological angles.

Turning to budgetary matters, Parliament expressed concern over the lack of financial commitment for the implementation of the Marine Strategies, and asked the Commission and Member States to identify the measures that could be co-financed through Life+ due to their particular importance for the achievement of GES in the European marine waters. It also advocated coordinating the timetable for the marine strategy with the next programming period for the EU's agricultural fund (from 2014). This would be of particular importance for those regions in which agriculture accounted for a substantial proportion of the discharges into the marine area.

On data sharing, a new approach to marine assessment was recommended, based upon existing programmes including the Data Collection Regulation under the CFP, and tailored to ensure full consistency with new Commission initiatives on spatial data infrastructure and GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security), in particular the marine services.

Parliament welcomed the excellent contributions to marine protection of a number of regional marine conventions and expected them to become a key partner in delivering the Marine Strategy Directive. In order to avoid a double bureaucratic burden on the effective delivery of the Marine Strategy Directive, the Commission and Member States were asked to ensure that the regional marine conventions had the relevant administrative capacities or that mechanisms for joint implementation of the Strategy were developed. In either case, this must include the widest possible cross-sectoral and stakeholder involvement. Parliament asked the Commission to study the possibility of making the Baltic Sea into a pilot area, in view of the fact that it was an especially sensitive sea area. The Member States surrounding it were likely to agree on faster implementation of the plans through the work within the Helsinki Commission.

Parliament moved on to point out the fragility of other marine waters:

- the protection of the Mediterranean sea lacked either the necessary environmental legislation or, where such legislation does exist, the political willingness to enforce it;

- the Commission must propose relevant measures for the protection of the Arctic waters, and support programmes on the rights and needs of indigenous peoples in tackling sustainable use of the Arctic's natural resources;

- the Black Sea was recommended for inclusion as one of the Marine Regions to be covered by the Marine Strategy Directive;

- there was no environmental guarantee in connection with the construction of the North European gas pipeline to prevent a potential environmental disaster in the Baltic Sea region.

In all cases, there should be prior consultation of adjoining countries and other countries concerned where projects may have an impact on the common environment, even when the project is carried out in international waters. Experience showed that environmental impact assessments often had shortcomings and that they were not carried out in consultation with other States. Parliament urged the Council to act at international level to develop mandatory environmental impact assessments in relations between the EU and third countries.

It should be noted that this report is relevant to the amendments adopted in the Marine Strategy Directive (please refer to COD/2005/0211.)