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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

An Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union

IMPACT ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Executive summary

In June 2006 the Commission adopted a Green Paper on a future Maritime Policy for the EU. This Paper pointed out the strategic importance of the seas and oceans for the European economy. It highlighted the urgency of ensuring that future developments take account of the need to maintain this competitiveness while safeguarding the marine environment and protecting the well-being and livelihoods of those who depend on the maritime economy or live on the coast. This was then followed by a one-year consultation period, which saw some 230 events and over 490 written submissions. Many of these written contributions — from national governments, industrial groupings, and environmental NGOs — were themselves the outcome of extensive internal consultation processes.

The stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that the EU could not continue to manage its policy towards the oceans and seas through a series of unconnected sectoral policies. Decision-making is slow, potential synergies are not exploited and no-one has a clear authority to resolve conflicts across sectors, to deal with cumulative effects or to look at the wider picture. EU trade and the competitiveness of EU ports are threatened by a planning process that proceeds at a glacial pace, the marine environment is endangered by intensive and accelerating growth in shore- and sea-based economic activities, Europeans are deserting the maritime professions, data collected on the state of the marine environment, human maritime activities and the health of the coastal economy are fragmented and largely inaccessible, and the different authorities entrusted with protecting our seas against pollution, illegal fishing and traffickers are independently developing similar systems to detect and identify anomalous behaviour.

Taking account of these reactions, the Commission has therefore proposed an overarching Maritime Policy with the following goals: (1) maximising the sustainable use of the oceans and seas; (2) building a knowledge and innovation base for the maritime policy; (3) delivering the highest quality of life in coastal regions; (4) promoting Europe's leadership in international maritime affairs; and (5) raising the visibility of Maritime Europe.

In the immediate term, the Commission aims to achieve these goals through first, introducing a governance framework that applies the integrated approach and, second, through horizontal and cross-cutting tools for integrated policy-making. The Commission will create an internal function to enhance coordination between the sector-specific policy initiatives related to maritime affairs. Moreover, an Action Plan lists a range of concrete initiatives that will be taken as first steps towards a more consistent, integrated EU Maritime Policy.

By the end of 2008, a number of benefits would accrue — greater mutual awareness among policies and sectors, early flagging of potential conflicts in sectoral initiatives, the exploitation of synergies, faster exchange of ideas for good practice between different regions, greater confidence that individual sectoral policies are based on best available knowledge about the maritime sector, and greater opportunities for individuals and interest groups to make their voices heard.

The particular benefits to be gained from the preparatory actions on marine data, spatial planning and maritime surveillance would not accrue immediately but only once further measures are implemented. However, the scale of these potential benefits justifies the modest spending. These longer-term benefits are: accelerated development of value-added commercial services based on easily accessible data; improvement of the efficiency of public

institutions, including European marine research laboratories and academic bodies; significant reduction in the current uncertainty surrounding global environmental change; integration of a number of currently fragmented, limited-duration data access initiatives into a consolidated effort; clearer rules for rights and restrictions in marine waters; easier resolution of trans-boundary planning issues; more effective use of existing reporting and surveillance resources; and the possibility to share future jointly-owned surveillance assets.

The short-term benefits from policy coordination and collective learning as well as the potential longer-term benefits of the preparatory actions will all have a positive impact on the main aims of the Maritime Policy — maximising the sustainable use of the oceans and seas, building a knowledge and innovation base for the maritime policy, improving the quality of life in coastal regions, promoting Europe's leadership in international maritime affairs, and raising the visibility of Maritime Europe.