



## Working Group Marine and Water Affairs

# Key challenges for European seas and oceans

*Notes from EEAC event at the European Parliament, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015*

### Introduction

On Tuesday the 14th of April the working group Marine and Water affairs of the European Network of Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) met in the European Parliament. During the meeting several key challenges of the European seas and oceans were discussed.

The participants shared knowledge on the topics of nitrogen as a major problem for the marine environment, the current status of marine management in the Mediterranean sea and Marine protected areas and nature conservation as part of the Integrated Maritime Policy.

Contributions included speeches by Hainz Siemers (European Commission, Head of Unit, DG MARE), Markus Salomon (German Advisory Council on the Environment), Puri Canals (MedPAN, Chair person) and Nicolas Fournier (senior policy advisor at Oceana).

#### **Opening address: 'The Commission's vision on the Integrated Maritime Policy'**

Mr. Hainz Siemers, Head of Unit Maritime Policy Baltic and North Sea, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

Hainz Siemers opened the gathering by referring to the vision included in the Thematic Strategy for the protection and conservation of the marine environment, which was presented by the European Commission in 2005. After adoption, it is the task of the European Commission (EC) to translate this vision into concrete policy measures. Ten years after the vision was presented, it is important to outline that progress has been made, while challenges remain, Mr. Siemers explained.

In light of the increasing concerns in relation to the state of Europe's oceans and seas, the EU's 6th Environment Action Program included a commitment to develop a Thematic Strategy for the protection and conservation of the marine environment with the overall aim *"to promote sustainable use of the seas and conserve marine ecosystems"*.

Mr. Siemers continued his presentation touching upon the core elements of the policy proposals which are submitted by the EC since 2005:

### 1) Marine knowledge/Maritime surveillance

In order to increase the level and accessibility of Marine related knowledge the EC made some investments to inter-connect data and sources. The same goes for maritime surveillance. A lot of knowledge and data is available but due to separate ways of collecting them and the lack of inter-connection challenges remain, Mr. Siemers argued.

### 2) Maritime spatial planning/Sea basins

Maritime spatial planning is a recent policy initiative of the EC in the field of marine affairs. In July 2014, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the legislation to create a common framework for maritime spatial planning.

According to this framework, while each EU member is free to plan its own maritime activities, local, regional and national planning in shared seas is made more compatible through a set of minimum common requirements.

Mr. Siemers particularly mentioned the sea basin management, a process in which neighboring countries share responsibility to realize the aims of sustainable usage of the sea, as an interesting and potentially successful part of the current policy initiative.

### 3) The Juncker's Investment Plan

The latest development, in which DG MARE currently is involved, is the 'Juncker Investment Plan'. Commission staff members are currently looking into the options to utilize the major investment plans of the current Commission for the support of protection and sustainable usage of the sea.

Finally, Mr. Siemers explained that the EU maritime policy has been necessary because of the human uses of the seas. There is a big potential for job creation in blue growth: ocean energy, tourism and aquaculture are beginning to be implemented and blue biotechnology and seabed mining are still under study.

He pointed out that to implement this maritime policy DG Mare has to cooperate with DG Environment, for instance to reduce plastic litter, and that this cooperation can be exemplary to EU countries.

#### Marine pollution: the case of nitrogen

Dr Markus Salomon, German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU)

Reactive nitrogen elements are considered a major threat to the environment. Therefore, this topic deserves increasing public awareness. With this firm statement Mr. Salomon opened his presentation. The threats and a lack of public awareness were also the occasion for the German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU) to issue its report: *Nitrogen: Strategies for resolving an urgent environmental problem*, which was published early 2015.

The SRU positioned the nitrogen challenges in the perspective of the safe operating space concept. The concept was developed by Rökström and other scientist who choose nine environmental problems which have, to their opinion, a clear global perspective. They define safe operating space for nine planetary systems. In three of them these boundaries have already been exceeded: biodiversity loss, climate change and the nitrogen cycle.

Mr. Salomon pointed out that, besides the natural nitrogen circle, the artificial circle causes environmental damage. Regarding the marine environment, he explained that the major problem in terms of marine pollution comes from high nitrogen concentration (produced inland by agriculture, industry and transportation).

As a consequence of the high concentration of nitrogen in surface water, the cost of the production of consumption water raised significantly, an economic consequence which adds to the list of economical disadvantages of the current situation. Moreover, the nitrogen in surface waters does not only harm the ecosystem of inland waterways: also seas are increasingly suffering from nitrogen. Most of the nitrogen inputs enter the sea via rivers (two third of the inputs in the North Sea). As a consequence eutrophication is one of the biggest threats for the North and Baltic Sea. In coastal waters and open waters primary production is often limited by nitrogen.

In his presentation Mr. Salomon underlined three recommendations, as made in the SRU report:

- 1) Implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD)
- 2) Reform of fertilizer regulations
- 3) Increase of efforts to make bio-gas production more environmental friendly.

When considering the WFD the SRU as well as Mr. Salomon were critical, pointing out that the existing environmental quality objectives are ambitious, although it is questionable if these objectives can be met, Salomon pointed out. Besides, more compulsory measures are necessary, the designation of water protection areas should increase and more riparian strips needs to be created.

In addition improvements related to the WFD, Mr. Salomon also underlined the central instrument in nitrogen policy, fertilizer regulations. Farmers should be obliged to work with a fertilizer plan, should apply the upper limit of manure application to all organic fertilizer and the enforcement of the Fertilizer Regulation should be improved.

When finalizing his presentation Mr. Salomon stressed the urgent need for the development of a national (German) nitrogen strategy for a better horizontal and vertical integration, for a better public awareness and for a better communication of the problem.

The report of the SRU on nitrogen can be found [here](#) .

#### **The sustainable protection of the marine environment: a Mediterranean perspective for Marine Protected Areas**

Dr. Puri Canals, chairperson of MedPAN (Network of marine protected areas managers in the Mediterranean) and member of CADS

Dr. Canals opened her contribution with a critical assessment of the current state of affairs of marine environment protection in the Mediterranean area. She mentioned that currently 4.5% of the surface is covered by a protected status in the Mediterranean area. This coverage is roughly build-up out of 170 marine protected areas (MPA) and 507 Natura2000 sites. Moreover, currently 55 MPAs are developed.

When assessing the state of affairs a number of critical observations can be made:

- Uneven distribution of MPAs (84% in the Northern basin)
- Lack of MPAs in the open sea (majority are coastal)
- Weak representativity of habitats and species

- Weak connectivity (based on modeling) of MPAs.

Ms. Canals mentioned that MPA suffer from major challenges as well. In most of these areas the management is insufficient. When taking a closure look at 80 MPAs one should conclude that 42% of these areas have a (formal) management structure, 66% of these areas have a management plan and 84% do have management staff. Tough when considering that only 25 % of MPAs have sworn in personnel, with weak enforcement of regulations as a consequence, that most MPAs have weak financial resources to cover recurring cost and that there is a need for capacity-building and socio-economic studies, one should conclude that challenges remain to be major.

One of the organizations which try to deal with the existing challenges is the "Mediterranean Protected Areas Network"(MEDPAN). MEDPAN was created in 1990 during the Monaco Conference with the support of the World Bank. In 2012 the organization hosted the Mediterranean MPA forum 'Marine protection, everyone's business'. The forum main objective was to bridge the gap between field actions, political commitments and science.

The forum published the Antalya Declaration and a 2020 horizon roadmap. This roadmap is intended to establish a constructive dialogue and securing concrete commitments from all stakeholders Ms Canals argued). Moreover, prospects of achieving International targets over the coming years will be possible only if there is renewed, stronger, consistent and strategic commitment to such objectives by riparian nations, NGOs, institutional and scientific institutions, MPA managers and the private sector.

The roadmap can be summarized in 4 strategic objectives, as shown in the table below:

<p><b>Strategic objective 1</b></p> <p>Establish an ecological network of MPAs which is representative and connected.</p>	<p><b>Strategic objective 3</b></p> <p>Develop a Mediterranean MPAs governance which is integrated on a territorial level and with other sectors while promoting the sharing of environmental and socio-economic benefits.</p>
<p><b>Strategic objective 2</b></p> <p>Establish in Mediterranean MPAs an effective, efficient and sustainable management as well as a good governance.</p>	<p><b>Strategic objective 4</b></p> <p>Increase the allocation of financial resources to establish and maintain an ecological network of effectively managed MPAs.</p>

By producing the roadmap the MEDPAN focused both on existing and to be developed initiatives. By incorporating existing initiatives into the roadmap the MEDPAN tried to bundle the knowledge and initiatives available. The philosophy of the roadmap is broader orientated than the biodiversity issue solemnly. The roadmap aims to bring its ambitions under the sustainable development umbrella as a whole.

Besides the specific Mediterranean challenges Ms Canals pointed as well at a topic which is repeatedly mentioned during the EEAC Marine Working Group meeting: the wish for coherent use of criteria in Marine research. In here final remark she underlined the next steps which will be taken by MEDPAN, the *Ad hoc* Meeting for the elaboration of the 'Roadmap towards a comprehensive, ecologically representative, effectively connected and efficiently managed network of Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas by 2020'.

## Marine protected areas and nature conservation at the center of the Integrated Maritime Policy the perspective of NGOs

Mr. Nicolas Fournier, senior policy advisor at Oceana

Mr. Nicolas Fournier started his presentation with a positive note, stating that Europe has a strong environmental legislative framework in place. The EU is pioneering when it comes to environment & health standards, by producing its environmental action plans and nature directives. Though there is a looming problem; all these legislative input by the EU is not designed for marine biodiversity protection, while key marine fauna and flora continue to disappear, Fournier argued.

More effort needs to be made in order to reach the objectives as laid down in the integrated maritime policy. Currently there is a worrisome implementation gap and conservation policies do not deliver their full potential. Answering the question about the cause of the situation Fournier pointed at several causes:

- Poor implementation of legislation, many infringements (the biggest number of reported infringements are in the field of marine and water policies)
- Lack of political will
- No integration into relevant sectorial policies, including funding for biodiversity
- Difficult economic/political context (the crises drained public funding while the new European Commission seems to shift priorities. The regulatory approach is focused on major issues. Environment and maritime policies appear not to be considered major, at least the topic is not part of the ten identified head regulations )

Fournier stated that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) should be the central pillar of Integrated Maritime Policy as a whole. One should take an integrated vision as a starting point, which should state that: sustainable maritime activities rely on healthy and productive marine ecosystems. Moreover, policy should have a strong ecosystem-based- and precautionary approach as well as regional focus.

When considering the current situation vis-à-vis the aims of the MSFD policy measures the conclusion is worrying. When the EU assessed the first phase of the implementation the following issues were identified:

- Limited precise definition of Good Environmental Status and targets
- Low level of ambition: “business as usual”
- Limited coherence between Member State and EU regions

Besides the MSFD, Mr. Fournier shared his concerns about the mainstream thinking when discussing the opportunities of the *Blue Economy*. In his statement he made clear that ‘blue growth’ is potentially harmful for the Good Environmental Status of the seas and oceans: the socio-economic imperative dominates while there seems to be limited wider societal considerations and there is a lack of appropriate environmental/sustainability checks.

In order to integrate Good Environmental Status as a prerequisite to Blue Growth oceans abundance and health should be restored before engaging in new potentially disturbing activities. For example marine ecosystems are the foundations to prosperous maritime activities (e.g. fisheries, tourism).

When bringing the third topic of his presentation on the agenda M Fournier pointed out that the Marine Protected Area’s (MPA) Network is not ecologically coherent, as was mentioned by Ms.

Canals and that further implementation of these MPA should pick up pace. Currently Europe is lagging behind its own aims. Fournier gave a short overview of the current situation:

- Uneven coverage by Member States
- Delays in designation/management
- No fisheries management
- Unregulated activities
- Lack of strict marine reserves (only 1%)

Finalizing his presentation Mr. Fournier established, amongst others, a relation between the MPA's and the MSFD. He stated that the MSFD requires more comprehensive measures, and there should be new and additional conservation measures. Moreover, greater efforts are needed to reach the 2020 EU goal for healthy and productive European seas. Immediate opportunity: MSFD Programs of Measures in 2016, Fournier argued. As a final remark Fournier said that the MPAs 'are low-hanging fruit: complete and manage the N2000 marine network as soon as possible.

### **Registered Participants**

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António Abreu	Portuguese National council for Sustainable Development
Arnau Queralt	Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia
Dirk Uyttendaele	Flemish Environmental Council
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