



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**NAT-VI/019**

**123rd plenary session, 11 and 12 May 2017**

## **OPINION**

### **A new stage in the European policy on blue growth**

#### **THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- calls on the European Union to make the sea a new common ambition at the heart of the process of relaunching European integration;
- calls for the next Framework Programme to have a target of 10% of projects making a significant contribution to marine and maritime research objectives;
- takes the view that Europe should also invest heavily in sectors such as renewable marine energy and marine biotechnologies, where the challenge is to attain world leadership;
- supports the Blue Careers and maritime blueprint initiatives, which seek to enhance knowledge of, and the attractiveness of, maritime vocations and to orient the traditional maritime vocations towards new opportunities;
- calls for the establishment of a European blue economy investment fund/mechanism. This fund, a maritime Juncker plan 2.0, could have two complementary intervention methods: direct financing at European level of structural and high-risk projects, and the establishment of regional investment funds;
- intends to encourage better utilisation of regional policy for the benefit of the blue economy, and to promote cross-fund activities and interregional cooperation;
- proposes that maritime affairs become the responsibility of a vice-president of the European Commission, who would be assisted by a task force and would be responsible for the preparation and cross-cutting implementation of the White Paper on "The sea at the heart of Europe".

Rapporteur

Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES), Member of Pays-de-la-Loire Regional Council

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –  
A new stage in the European policy on blue growth**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

1. calls on the European Union to make the sea a new common ambition at the heart of the process of relaunching European integration;
2. calls on the European Union to make the sea the subject of a fully-fledged policy rather than merely a project. Support for the blue economy can be a focal point of this maritime policy, as part of a broad-based, proactive approach covering all sectors and going beyond the five themes initially identified in the blue growth strategy;
3. calls on the European Union to act quickly to adopt an initiative to establish new policies and lay the basis for a new post-2020 maritime vision. The ministerial declaration on European maritime policy to be adopted in Malta on 20 April 2017 can and must be used as an opportunity for this;

**I) THE SEA AT THE HEART OF EUROPE**

4. calls on the European Union to develop a new European maritime policy, which:
  - has the support of the public, local authorities, the Member States and the European institutions,
  - is cross-cutting, mobilising all Community competences,
  - is based on more detailed knowledge of the sea to ensure its sustainable development and exploit its potential more effectively,
  - is able to support the entire value chain across the sectors of the blue economy, including fisheries, both on coastlines and inland,
  - focuses on the symbiosis between the different maritime activities and on consistent planning, from coastlines to international waters;

The sea concerns us all – it is Europe's new challenge and new inspiration

5. stresses that seas and oceans are essential to life on Earth. They produce 50% of our oxygen, play a major role in climate regulation, and are a major store of biodiversity and resources for our food and our health;
6. regrets that the functioning of marine ecosystems is being undermined by climate change, pollution and overexploitation of resources;
7. points out that the blue economy has unrivalled potential for growth and employment. According to the European Commission, the maritime economy is increasingly job rich – it is currently estimated to provide 5 million jobs in Europe. The report entitled *The Ocean Economy*

*in 2030*, published by the OECD in 2016, estimates that the maritime economy contributed EUR 1.3 trillion to the world's wealth in 2010, a figure which could double by 2030;

8. notes that maritime issues are the focus of increased attention at international level. The UN's September 2015 Sustainable Development Goals also specifically refer to oceans. In May 2016, the leaders of the G7 agreed to step up international cooperation on marine research. The theme of the oceans is addressed in the conclusions of COP 21 and 22;
9. points out that Europe is the world's leading maritime power and will remain so after Brexit. Together, the Member States of the European Union have the largest exclusive economic zone in the world. In sectors such as marine energy, the European Union has the most complete and most powerful economy in the world. It also has the highest environmental protection standards;
10. considers that Europe must assert itself in the international arena and make maritime policy an instrument of influence;
11. considers that an ambitious new European maritime policy could garner public support because:
  - the sea is a new and fascinating subject, which is part of the life of most people,
  - borders are of little significance when it comes to maritime affairs, and the European Union's added value is clear,
  - the sea is the focal point of key societal choices in areas like combating climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, health and wellbeing, and food,
  - the potential for growth and jobs linked to the blue economy concerns not only coastal regions but all the regions of the Union because its value chain involves and enriches our whole continent;

#### In 2017 the European Union must give the sea its proper place in its project for the future

12. points out that the integrated maritime policy and the blue growth policy have laid the foundations of a European maritime policy;
13. considers that the Maltese presidency offers an opportunity to give a new impetus to European maritime policy through the ministerial declaration of 20 April 2017;

#### The sea at the heart of Europe: an ambition and a roadmap

14. calls for the drafting of a white paper on "The sea at the heart of Europe", incorporating a maritime roadmap for each European Union policy;
15. considers that the new phase of the European integrated maritime policy should contribute to Europe's responses to the following issues:
  - the security of Europe's borders,
  - management of migration,

- the development of a maritime policy for the EU's neighbourhood, the regulation of maritime trade and the governance of the oceans,
- protection of biodiversity, combating climate change and a successful energy transition, including the transition to renewable fuels for the various types of ships,
- the development of the blue economy in its various traditional sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, the maritime industries and emerging sectors like marine energy and marine biotechnology,
- the reconciliation of activities and uses,
- a coastal and maritime policy based on the regions and local authorities,
- addressing the specific challenges of Europe's islands and overseas territories;

## **II) THE PARTNER REGIONS OF THE BLUE ECONOMY**

16. stresses that the blue economy takes shape in the regions. Maritime policy should therefore support the mobilisation of regions and cities;

### An organised and coherent maritime territory is the foundation of the blue economy

17. considers that spatial planning is essential, and that it must include land-sea interactions and involve cities and regions as well as all stakeholders, pursuing the sustainable development of all maritime activities;
18. believes that the development of infrastructure in coastal areas, which are by definition outlying areas, must be a priority for Europe. It should therefore be possible, for the benefit of coastal areas in all regions, to draw on Cohesion Policy and Juncker Plan funds specifically to invest in ports and very high-speed broadband;
19. calls for a debate on the recognition of a European maritime area so as to strengthen cohesion in social, environmental and security terms;

### The regions – partners of the European Union in investing in the blue economy

20. considers that the sea basin strategies are essential reference frameworks. They are one of the elements to be taken into account for the development of smart specialisation strategies and the programming of European funds. The ongoing development of the West Med Maritime Initiative should be welcomed;
21. believes that smart specialisation strategies should enable several regions within the same sea basin to establish joint smart specialisation strategies (S3) on their own initiative;
22. underlines that regions and cities are key players in the development of the blue economy. A large number of regions have included blue growth issues in their smart specialisation strategies. The mobilisation of the EMFF and the Cohesion Policy funds has made it possible to finance many job creation projects;

23. proposes, in order to give a fresh boost to investment in the blue economy, that an appendix on the blue economy be attached to smart specialisation strategies and operational programmes, making it possible to present the impact of policy choices on maritime issues and to monitor the relevant projects;
24. suggests that the local communities of islands and coastal regions should be able to make use of all EU funds, including the EMFF, to finance their maritime development strategies within a single framework, based on the model of the Leader programme;
25. believes that the choices reflected in the smart specialisation strategies, which reflect the reality of the maritime economy, based on synergies between stakeholders and sectors, need to be monitored over time and must act as the EU's reference point for guiding its blue growth investments. In particular, the European research policy will need to take better account of these regional efforts to stimulate the blue economy;
26. calls for interregional, national and transnational projects that are consistent with the sea basin strategies and the S3 to be eligible for financing through the pooling of regional, national and European funds within a simplified framework and to qualify for a community bonus, without the need for new calls for projects;
27. considers that the outermost regions should continue to have a specific framework to support their development. These territories form an excellent basis for asserting Europe's maritime dimension and building maritime cooperative ventures around the world;

### **III) SPECIFIC PROJECTS TO ACCELERATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLUE ECONOMY**

#### Reinforcing support for research, development and innovation

28. stresses that the sea has gradually been finding a new place in the Horizon 2020 programme. Initiatives such as the Joint Programming Initiative for Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans have also contributed to European marine research. This method must be extended to all sectors of the blue economy by means of a comprehensive R&D roadmap; The Committee highlights the importance of specific support for SMEs that intend to develop and apply innovative solutions in various sectors, including coastal and maritime tourism;
29. calls for the next Framework Programme to have a target of 10% of projects making a significant contribution to marine and maritime research objectives; The continued implementation of Horizon 2020 should itself allow progress towards this goal;

#### A maritime roadmap in the framework of the New Skills Agenda for Europe

30. calls for the development of a maritime strand for the Skills Agenda;
31. proposes launching a debate at European level on the benefits of financing a pilot project to explore the deep ocean floor and exploit its potential;

32. stresses that in maritime industries, it is often the case that innovation can only be tested once an initial product has been launched on the market. Community innovation policies must enable such demonstration projects to be financed. It is also important to relaunch the public-private partnership on cross-cutting technologies for maritime industries;
33. considers that initiatives such as Blue Careers, launched in the framework of the EMFF, and the future development of a maritime blueprint initiative must be stepped up so as to:
- enhance knowledge of, and the attractiveness of, maritime vocations,
  - improve working conditions and career prospects,
  - foster European mobility for young people in training,
  - offer lifelong further training pathways to bring a maritime dimension to existing vocations and orient the traditional maritime vocations towards new opportunities;
34. calls for the European system for the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications to be strengthened in order to facilitate free movement and provide a framework for posted workers. The system must be supplemented by similar arrangements for the recognition of skills and competences for which there are no formal qualifications<sup>1</sup>;

#### Supporting the key sectors of the blue economy

35. takes the view that Europe should also invest heavily in sectors such as maritime industries and marine biotechnologies where the challenge is to attain world leadership;
36. considers that Europe should also support the blue economy in the digital, environmental and energy transitions, as well as the modernisation of traditional sectors like fisheries and nautical and coastal tourism<sup>2</sup>;
37. stresses that it is important for the European Union to support the development of marine biotechnologies based on the exploitation of algae and micro-algae, fish, shellfish and marine bacteria. Marine biotechnologies offer very significant, emerging economic potential for many European regions. The EU's support must cover research, research infrastructure projects and the creation of networks between such projects and with businesses, as well as access to capital, development and the launch of innovative products on the market;
38. stresses the important role played by fisheries and aquaculture, and activities relating to catching, breeding, processing and marketing of derived products, in supporting Europe's regional economies and in providing food for the European population. Fisheries and aquaculture are also sectors of the future, and the EU's support for them must be based on a positive and ambitious vision for jobs and training, especially for young people. As part of measures to put the new Common Fisheries Policy into practice, the EU should work together

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<sup>1</sup> See SEDEC opinion CdR 2881/2016 on posted workers.

<sup>2</sup> See previous opinions CDR 2645/2014, CDR 5241/2015 and CDR 2898/2016.

with economic operators and public authorities, especially regions, in order to speed up and facilitate implementation of the EMFF, which is experiencing significant delays;

39. stresses the need to pursue an integrated approach to developing marine products, by creating short supply chains including producers and by strengthening industrial processing activities in coastal areas. This strategy of creating value and jobs around marine products in coastal areas must become a priority objective and receive more funding from both the EMFF and the Cohesion Policy;
40. proposes the establishment of a European "maritime start-ups" system to support economic, social and territorial innovation projects;
41. stresses that many activities of the future will have to be based on the development of new infrastructure at sea, away from coasts. A special programme could explore the benefits of new reversible infrastructure projects, and study their environmental impact and any issues relating to their energy autonomy;
42. considers that ports are an essential basis for the development of the blue economy. They require support in order to be able to respond to the needs of new activities and to do this in a networked way, wherever possible. Their balance also depends on the dynamism of trade based on long-sea and short-sea shipping and the development of motorways of the sea;
43. points to the clear positive impact of blue growth on maritime and coastal tourism in the regions. In particular, supports initiatives which successfully promote forms of sustainable and responsible tourism in economic, social and environmental terms;
44. underscores the importance of putting the concept of the circular economy into effect in the blue economy, particularly with a view to reducing waste and pollutants in the seas and converting them into a useful resource;

#### Making the most of European leadership in marine energy (offshore wind and ocean energy)

45. considers that the European Union must give priority to the industrial development of renewable energies. To that end, the objectives of renewable energy production in Europe must go beyond the 27% by 2030 target currently proposed by the Commission. The principle of technological neutrality needs to be made more flexible in order to give specific priority to the industrial development of the renewable energy sector, in which Europe is capable of attaining global leadership, thus creating many jobs;
46. would like funding measures (such as NER300) for R&D and demonstration projects to continue, and calls for improved financing of the initial stages of marketing;
47. emphasises that development of marine energy is based on a core set of cross-cutting skills and technologies which have been passed down from major, well established industries, such as oil and gas and shipbuilding. There is a need for stronger support for innovation and diversification in these industries. In this respect, the "LeaderSHIP 2020" policy paper on shipbuilding and



maritime industries must lead to a European roadmap being drawn up which cuts across the various Community policies;

48. would like the European Union to focus on the following objectives over the next five years:
- The competitiveness of the offshore wind energy sector and its progress towards becoming profitable without relying on subsidies;
  - The development of the floating wind turbine market, the international mass market and the tidal power market - a niche sector in which Europeans are very well placed;
  - Technologies promoting the development of energy autonomy in islands and remote regions, especially in tropical zones and overseas territories;

Maritime platforms for supporting and financing projects and a European fund for investment in the blue economy

49. welcomes the fact that the Juncker plan has already made it possible to finance many blue economy projects;
50. considers it necessary to expand this support to fill the investment gap for the many potential projects in the regions, to develop methods for more effective risk financing, which is important in an innovative sector like the blue economy, and to give priority to SMEs and start-ups;
51. proposes the establishment of regional or inter-regional blue economy platforms. These platforms would provide a mechanism for identifying projects, providing support for their implementation, and for the mobilisation of local, national and European financial tools. They would be managed by the regions, with the involvement of the maritime economy sectors, the Member States and the European Union, and their operation could be financed by these three actors, as well as by private partners. These platforms could be important partners in the deployment of the Juncker plan 2.0;
52. calls for the establishment of a European blue economy investment fund/mechanism. This fund, a maritime Juncker plan 2.0, could have two complementary intervention methods:
- direct financing at European level of structural and high-risk projects covering, for example, the initial phases of marketing for marine energy projects,
  - the establishment of regional investment funds, at the level of regional or interregional blue economy platforms, fed by European funds and local partners, including banking and financial partners. In the framework of these funds, the EFSI must contribute significantly to risk financing and not offload this on local partners;

#### **IV) A POLITICAL AND CITIZENS' MARITIME EUROPE**

##### A European mobilisation programme – The Citizen and the Sea

- 53. considers that Europe must discuss the sea more directly with the public. Debates on issues concerning the sea will held in the framework of the European Committee of the Regions' dialogue with the public;
- 54. calls for a programme to be set up to research the cultural and maritime heritage of Europe and its coastal areas and to raise awareness of it;
- 55. proposes that a European programme – Children and the Sea – be developed in order to foster a common awareness of maritime issues and to arrange exchanges between children of coastal and non-coastal regions;
- 56. considers that a new debate should be launched on the appropriateness of funding one or more European ocean exploration centres, which would be both scientific missions and a symbol capable of galvanising public interest in our oceans;

##### Reinforcing knowledge of the sea and the blue economy

- 57. stresses that there is a great need for knowledge of coastlines and oceans. Such knowledge is essential to drive sustainable maritime development aimed at increasing economic, technological, environmental, human and social capital;
- 58. reminds the European Commission about its call to create a knowledge and innovation community focused on the blue economy, which would encourage the transfer of ideas from marine research to the private sector<sup>3</sup>;
- 59. proposes that the EU sponsor a "European maritime exhibition", straddling culture, science, the environment and the economy, for example along the lines of the "La Mer XXL" exhibition due to take place in Nantes in 2018;
- 60. considers it necessary to integrate into Horizon 2020 and the future Framework Programme a European strategy for knowledge of marine biodiversity and the ocean floor, and for the acquisition of maritime and coastal data, e.g. bathymetric data;
- 61. notes that, following studies carried out by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions on the knowledge deficit regarding the blue economy, it is now necessary to set up a European resource centre on the blue economy in partnership with the Member States, the regions, Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre;

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<sup>3</sup>

CdR 4835/2014.

#### A new governance for European maritime policy

62. proposes that maritime affairs become the responsibility of a vice-president of the European Commission, who would be assisted by a task force and would be responsible for the preparation and cross-cutting implementation of the White Paper on "The sea at the heart of Europe".
63. considers that maritime affairs should be the subject of biannual meetings of a Council formation dedicated to the sea. The European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions should together consider changes in their governance of maritime issues;
64. considers that the political priority given to the sea should be reflected in the multiannual financial framework, through the EMFF insofar as it relates to fisheries, maritime policy and the territorial approach, but also more broadly within the different European policies and programmes;
65. considers that the pursuit of a new EU maritime policy calls for greater recognition of maritime stakeholders as well as a bigger role for them in debates and decisions. Where appropriate, the framework for these stakeholders at European level would also need to be supported. The cross-cutting approach specifically adopted by regional, national and European clusters should be promoted;
66. calls on the regions and cities to mobilise to demonstrate the potential of the blue economy and the existence of a significant number of realistic, value-creating projects to be financed over the next few years;

#### The UK's exit from the EU will require the EU to be more ambitious in maritime affairs

67. stresses that a UK exit from the EU would directly affect European maritime policies. It will be necessary to accurately measure its impact on the cities and regions most affected and on the Union's public policies, and to develop the necessary adaptation measures. It will in particular be necessary to adapt national and European sovereignty and security mechanisms to the emergence of new European Union sea borders;
68. requests that, in the framework of the negotiations, the European Union protect the interests of its economy and its maritime areas. It must prevent the appearance on its borders of a platform for social and tax dumping and deregulation which would affect the economy and maritime resources. It must also work to safeguard the interests of its fishermen within the framework of international law;

69. with this in mind, considers that it would be particularly useful for maritime stakeholders in Europe to continue cooperating closely in light of the shared maritime area and the shared interest in the protection and conservation of marine ecosystems, and to promote a global market economy that is fair and accessible to everyone, provided that this is feasible in the context of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU and respects its overall coherence.

Brussels, 12 May 2017

The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Markku Markkula

The Secretary-General  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

## II. PROCEDURE

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Title</b>  | <b>A new stage in the European policy on blue growth</b>  |
| <b>Reference(s)</b>   |   |
| <b>Legal basis</b>  | Article 307(4) TFEU   |
| <b>Procedural basis</b>                                       | Own-initiative opinion  |
| <b>Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter</b>  | N/A   |
| <b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>                    | 6 December 2016   |
| <b>Section responsible</b>                                    | Commission for Natural Resources  |
| <b>Rapporteur</b>   | Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES)  |
| <b>Analysis</b>   | December 2016   |
| <b>Discussed in commission</b>                                | 2 February 2017   |
| <b>Date adopted by commission</b>                             | 30 March 2017   |
| <b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b> | Unanimity   |
| <b>Date adopted in plenary</b>                                | 12 May 2017   |
| <b>Previous Committee opinions</b>                            | <p>CDR 2645/2014 – <i>European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism</i>, rapporteur: Vasco Ilídio Alves Cordeiro (PT/PES)</p> <p>CDR 4835/2014 – <i>Innovation in the Blue Economy; Realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth</i>, rapporteur: Adam Banaszak (PL/ECR)</p> <p>CDR 2712/2015 – <i>The future of European aquaculture</i>, rapporteur: Jesús Gamallo Aller (ES/EPP)</p> <p>CDR 1693/2015 – <i>Developing the potential of Ocean Energy</i>, rapporteur: Rhodri Glyn Thomas (UK/EA)</p> |
| <b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>           | -   |