



Joint Statement

The NGO networks which deal with the protection and restoration of Europe's oceans and seas represent hundreds of organisations from all European Union Member States, as well as from neighbouring and candidate countries. Our membership basis is thus made up of millions of EU and non-EU citizens.

These citizens and organisations have different concerns, and Europe's regional seas possess specific characteristics which make them unique in their ecological, social and political contexts. However, many of the environmental challenges faced in each region are common, and the need for cooperation between the NGO networks dealing with the various aspects of the marine environment in different European regions was identified more than a decade ago.

In 1996, the first European Seas Environmental Cooperation (ESEC) conference took place in Lisbon, with the participation of Seas at Risk (SAR), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) and the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN). The goals of the meeting were to increase communication between the several regional networks and find possible ways to address common concerns, as well as to coordinate action in EU and international policy fora. A second ESEC meeting was held in Helsinki in 1997.

New policy developments have made a renewal of this cooperation timely and desirable. The recently adopted Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the EU's Maritime Policy (MPU), of which the MSFD is the environmental "pillar", pose new challenges and opportunities for the environmental movement, with a focus on the regional dimension of these policies.

The organisations Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), Mediterranean Information Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), and Seas At Risk (SAR) have thus gathered in Brussels on the 24th of September 2008 and have discussed the EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Maritime Policy, having reached the following conclusions:

General:

1. Despite its shortcomings, the recently adopted Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is the most important tool for improving and protecting the marine environment in Europe and conserving its resources in the next few decades. Its regional approach places regionally-based NGO networks in a good position to follow-up on the implementation process, through their knowledge of regional specificities and their observership status and active participation in Regional Seas Conventions.

2. The Maritime Policy of the European Union will be significant in relation to the development of maritime economic sectors. It mentions the concept of sustainability, but it is at its core an economic agenda where the environment simply plays a role. The NGO networks however are confident that the MSFD, as the environmental “pillar” of this policy, will effectively serve as the benchmark for the implementation of the Maritime Policy actions.
3. The compliance with all Good Environmental Status (GES) descriptors included in the MSFD will be a difficult task for Member States and will require cooperation from all stakeholders. Sound methodological standards will be determinant and NGOs are willing to cooperate throughout the entire process, from the drawing up of those standards to their implementation on the ground.
4. The first implementation deadline of the MSFD is coming up in less than two years. Work must therefore begin right now, at national, regional and Community level. Stakeholders are engaged in participating in this process from the beginning, and as such offer their expertise and commitment for the next twelve years and beyond, in order to make sure that intermediate deadlines are not missed and that the goal of achieving GES in the marine environment by 2020 is attained.
5. The Directive clearly states that stakeholders must be involved at all stages of the implementation process. Regional environmental NGO networks expect therefore to be given early and effective opportunities to participate in the implementation of the MSFD, as they possess valuable bridging capacity to exchange and disseminate information at several levels (local, national, regional and European).
6. The presence of regional NGO networks as observers to Regional Seas Conventions will continue to be precious in facilitating information flows at different levels and between different stakeholders.

Points of Concern

7. NGO networks are concerned about the efficiency of the integration of policies, and of the integration of environmental considerations into sectoral policies. The upcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) can be an important opportunity to make this policy more sustainable, and NGO networks would like to see the principles of the MSFD fully applied to fisheries policies. The maritime policy should provide a framework for this, and NGO networks will be available to provide input as necessary.
8. Coherence and policy integration are important in the fisheries sector, but many others deserve the attention of NGO networks. The extension of the Natura 2000 network to the marine environment and the establishment of a coherent network of Marine Protected Areas by 2012, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its links to water pollution and eutrophication, the application of the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, the attainment of the 2010 biodiversity target, and issues relating to maritime transport are high on the NGO agenda, and NGO networks appeal to all actors involved to work towards true integration of environmental considerations in all these policies and processes.

9. Regional NGO Networks are particularly aware of and concerned with transboundary effects of pollution or human extractive activities. Although the MSFD contains some provisions to deal with this matter, it is important that EU Member States sharing a marine region with non-Member States be supported in their efforts to cooperate with their neighbours. Harmful action or inaction from neighbouring countries can discourage action on the part of EU Member States, or provide the latter with an excuse for not achieving GES in their waters.
10. The mention of “disproportionate costs” in the text of the MSFD as an escape clause for Member States to be free of their obligations to take all necessary measures to achieve GES has dismayed NGO networks. However, attention must be drawn to the fact that Member States will have to carry out a careful analysis of the cost of inaction, if they wish to be exempt of their obligations under that clause. NGO networks will remain vigilant of such instances and appeal to the Regulatory Committee to provide guidance on the concept of “disproportionate costs” as one of their priorities.
11. NGO networks would like to draw attention to the need to ensure coherence between the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, the implementation of the Community Guidelines on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and the future implementation of the MSFD. Coastal areas and corresponding natural values represent environmental resources of special importance for EU-citizens, and consequently need a focused attention to guarantee a sustainable development from different EU-policies in an integrated way.

Role of NGOs

12. As observers to and active partners of Regional Seas Conventions, NGO networks are in the right position to bring input from their members to these fora and to disseminate information and decisions taken at RSCs to the wider public. This role must be maintained and enhanced during the next critical implementation stages of the MSFD, to ensure that it is done in a consistent manner at a biogeographic scale and that, simultaneously, Member States and national authorities are reminded of their obligations under the Directive.
13. NGOs and their networks have played and will continue to play an important role in facilitating the dissemination of information to the public, including scientific information. This dialogue between NGOs, the scientific community, the general public, national authorities, Regional Seas Conventions and EU institutions will be determinant in achieving a timely and effective implementation of the MSFD in the whole territory of the European Union.