

## **Ecosystem-based management: from principles to implementation**

### **The EU context**

**Last year the European Commission proposed a Thematic Strategy for the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment, including proposals for binding legislation. On 7 June this year it adopted and put out for public consultation a Green Paper on a future Maritime Policy.**

**This Green Paper is a consultative document. It is available in this room. And we shall be receiving and digesting comments on it throughout the next twelve months before we move forward with action proposals.**

**It is my intention today to share with you some thoughts on its potential relevance for ecosystem-based management. I wish to emphasize that it does not yet represent EU policy. In the conception of the Commission, the Marine Environment Strategy represents the environmental pillar of a future maritime policy.**

**The detailed assessment of the state of the marine environment which the Marine Strategy will provide will be particularly valuable to devising the frameworks through which all uses of the oceans can be regulated.**

**Conversely the regulation of maritime activities on the basis of an integrated analysis will provide the means to achieve the aims of the Marine Strategy.**

**The key aim is to achieve good status of the EU's marine environment by 2021.**

**It introduces the principle of eco-system based spatial planning to be implemented at regional level.**

**Without this, we will soon be unable to manage the increasing, and conflicting, uses of the oceans.**

### **The ecosystem-based approach: principles and problems**

**If we are to succeed in implementing the ecosystem-based approach we would do well to keep the presentation of the concept simple. This is imperative in order to both explain it to our citizens and gain the necessary political and public support.**

**We define it as: "the comprehensive integrated management of human activities based on best available scientific knowledge about the ecosystem and its dynamics, in order to identify and take action on influences which are critical to the health of the marine ecosystems, thereby achieving sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services and maintenance of ecosystem integrity."**

**This is not exactly a sound-bite.**

**So from the very beginning let us retain as important the need to work at communicating, at simplifying, at educating.**

**If ecosystem-based management remains the domain of experts we will never be able to bring about the transformation of modes of thought in our societies which will be necessary over the longer term for its success.**

**A working definition of the ecosystem-based approach is generally understood as encompassing the following elements:**

- 1. Sustaining ecosystem health and the activities it supports,**
- 2. Obtaining and maximizing in the long term the socio-economic benefits resulting from these activities without compromising the ecosystem,**
- 3. Generating knowledge about the marine environment itself and the impact human activities exert on it.**

**Each of these elements poses problems for implementation. So let us have a look at some of these.**

**The first problem posed by ecosystem-based management is surely that real systems are complex and at best we can model them incompletely.**

**We have looked in the EU at the different elements of our marine ecosystems, we have begun to assemble information on their spatial distribution, we have analyzed the many, and increasingly important economic activities which affect them, and we have identified the many government agencies which deploy their efforts on our coastal waters in order to monitor and enforce the rules on their behaviour.**

**What we have found is at best an approximation to reality. But what is clear is the fragmentation of our efforts to influence it.**

**Currently, our marine ecosystems are dealt with by a plethora of instruments, not by a coherent system of governance.**

**Our second problem is linked to the concepts of restoring systems to a state of health or maintaining their pristine nature.**

**And yet the world is changing.**

**The climate shifts we are bringing about by our profligate emissions of greenhouse gases are causing changes, some subtle, some massive, to ecosystems.**

**We can hardly ignore these changes and base our immediate ecosystem goals on a denial of this reality.**

**Nor can we adopt a baseline of zero human influence.**

**Our goal is sustainable economic development on the oceans.**





**There will therefore be no substitute for decision-making through democratically legitimated public processes.**

**We believe that the legitimacy and acceptability of decisions can be increased by the extensive involvement of stakeholders in these processes.**

**And the more they can be decentralized, the stronger this involvement can become.**

**Third, we must be aware that no form of decision-making can make the reality of sometimes conflicting interests of economic operators disappear.**

**And there will be cases in which we will have to decide between a better environment and more economic activity.**

**But experience in countries which have taken the road of integrated decision-making suggests that the integration of the best scientific knowledge into the equation, and its careful spelling out to stakeholders, can take the steam out of conflict and bring about a readier acceptance of the necessary decisions.**

**So science serves not just to define our goals and our measures but also to increase their acceptance, and the level of ownership of citizens in the rules they must respect.**

**These ideas underlie some of the provisions of our Marine Strategy.**

**In identifying the ecoregions, within which it should apply, we have tried to draw the boundaries of the appropriate management units for the seas surrounding Europe.**

**It has proven to be more difficult than expected, and we have to recognise that, although detrimental to a pure ecosystem view, social and political realities must be respected.**

**There are however, clear management units emerging like the Baltic Sea, North Sea or Black Sea.**

**The involvement of regional actors - in the sense of transnational organizations -has to be promoted (where they do not exist) and/or empowered.**

**Exchanges of best practice between these actors should be actively promoted.**

**Thus the efforts undertaken by the Baltic Countries to advance in the implementation of the ecosystem approach in the Baltic Sea, joining forces within HELCOM, as well as the activities carried out within OSPAR by North Sea countries with the same aim, should be highlighted.**

**I have already referred to the necessity we see of achieving ownership of agreed rules by stakeholders through their participation in decision-making.**

**But, of course, this is not enough for effective implementation.**

