



Summary of the first meeting of the Outermost Regions' Maritime affairs and Fisheries Forum

Brussels, 26 June 2018

As identified by the 2017 EU Strategy for Outermost Regions, the objective of this first edition was to discuss ideas, catalyse approaches and share experiences on the management of marine resources and on opportunities offered by the Blue Economy.

The meeting brought together seventy participants from the private and public sectors and from all outermost regions.

The main topics under discussion were the knowledge of marine ecosystems and the prospects for development of the Blue Economy.

Commissioner Vella opened the Forum by underlining that he saw the blue economy as one of the main assets of the Outermost Regions. The development potential of this sector had to be exploited in a sustainable way, which required a sound understanding of how fisheries and other blue economy activities affect marine ecosystems. He emphasized the need for better coordination between all the different sectors of the Blue Economy (both traditional and innovative ones) and all levels of decision making, from local to European.

In relation to fisheries, Mr Vella highlighted that Outermost Regions are confronted with similar challenges: an ageing fishing fleet and the need for modernisation, the lack of sufficient scientific knowledge to better manage marine ecosystems, and the need to fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. On fleet renewal, Commissioner Vella announced the forthcoming modification of the Commission's guidelines on State aid.

Mr Vella also underlined the link between fisheries and other sectors of the Blue Economy, and the similarity of the framework conditions needed for their development: research, skills, financing and maritime spatial planning. Commissioner Vella also reminded that the overarching goal is to create the options for growth and jobs for future generations. To succeed on this high ambition, the EU would help Outermost regions with new proposals on the post2020 funding programmes, such as the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Fund for Regional Development, Horizon and LIFE.



WORKSHOP 1 – "Addressing the knowledge gaps on Marine Ecosystems"

Opening the workshop, **Ms Hélène Clark (Director for Fisheries Policy in the Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic and Outermost Regions, DG MARE)** emphasized the need to deepen our knowledge of fragile and rich ecosystems given their crucial role from an environmental and a social point of view.

Ms Catalina Perales from the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO, Canary Islands) presented the current state of play of data collection regarding the different fisheries operating in the Canaries, characterised by a wide variety of species and gears, small size vessels and numerous landing places. Highlighting the progress made over the years, she also underlined the different challenges and remaining knowledge gaps. Cooperation between scientists and fishermen was a key success factor. Management measures were still often poorly based on scientific advice.

Mr Olivier Guyader from the French Institute IFREMER (Brest) presented the perspectives offered by new technologies for data collection and good practices for improving assessment of small-scale fisheries in ORs, such as observers on board. He emphasized the need to foster exchanges and cooperation between scientists working on the ORs and stakeholders, as the best way to reach an integrated assessment of fisheries, including from a socio-economic perspective.

Mr Sylvain Bonhommeau from IFREMER (La Réunion) focused on the importance of the knowledge on oceanographic environment and the relevance of working towards standardised/compatible formats for both fisheries and oceanographic data and regional models to share oceanic knowledge. Given the specificities of the ORs, he advocated a multidisciplinary approach to research (physics, biology, ecology, economy, sociology) and mentioned the potential of new assessment approaches based e.g. on big data or on genetics.

The discussion concurred on the importance of the management of ecosystems as the main engine of the blue economy. Most interventions emphasised progress achieved in data collection and scientific knowledge in the context of the CFP in spite of the difficulties inherent to the ORs. However, there was a need to reinforce local capacities (e.g. by setting up local observatories) and to mutualise knowledge between the ORs, identifying and sharing good practices and developing common methodologies. Full use should be made of existing EU level support programmes, including for collaborative projects (EMFF, Horizon, ERDF). The discussion emphasised the challenges represented by IUU and recreational fisheries. The possibility to establish an Advisory Council for Outermost Regions to discuss fisheries issues in ORs was recalled. There was a consensus to foster collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches in research, and to increase cooperation among stakeholders, involving especially the private sector, as well as with neighbourhood countries and regional fisheries management organisations.

WORKSHOP 2 – 'REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF OUTERMOST REGIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE BLUE GROWTH'

To open the workshop, **Mr Bernhard Friess (Director for Maritime affairs, DG MARE)** presented the bottlenecks identified and recently published that hinder the development of the blue economy in ORs: availability of adequate skills, difficult access to financing, translating innovation and sustainability into promising sectors such as renewable energy and tourism.

Mr Pedro Ortega Rodríguez, Regional Minister from the Canary Islands presented the recently developed Blue Growth Strategy in the Canary Islands which fosters in particular the deployment of renewably energy and marine biotechnology in particular.

Ms Rosa Fernández Otero, from CETMAR and **Dr. Filipe Porteiro**, Director for Sea Affairs for the Region of Azores, presented the EU initiative on Blueprint for Skills Development in Maritime Technology. This initiative aims to develop a skilling strategy that addresses the main drivers of change to the maritime industry, in particular shipbuilding and renewable energy. Both sectors require new capacities to succeed in an increasingly digital, green and knowledge-driven economy.

Mr Alain Kauffmann from the European Investment Bank provided preliminary insights to a feasibility study undertaken by the European Investment Advisory Hub with the aim to assess the potential to create Investment Platforms in the Outermost Regions. The presentation touched upon the technical assistance needs and proposed solutions for facilitating investments by SMEs in ORs, especially the role of national or regional promotional banks. He emphasised the role of regional authorities in seizing the opportunities offered by such solutions.

Ms Wioletta Dunin-Majewska from the European Commission DG Energy presented the 'Clean Energy for EU Islands Initiative' and highlighted the important role of the newly established secretariat which aims to provide capacity building services for islands' stakeholders on the design, development and financing of integrated decarbonisation plans.

The key messages of the subsequent discussions included the need to support SMEs and establishing the right framework conditions for Blue Growth, especially via good maritime spatial planning. The importance of including stakeholders in designing regional strategies for the Blue economy was also highlighted. Other cross-cutting themes such as facilitating the mobility of young people in the maritime sector and promoting blue careers have been highlighted. Further discussions may be needed to assess the feasibility of setting up investment platforms with the support of the EIB in ORs.

The workshop was concluded by Bernhard Friess, who thanked the audience for its active participation and suggested to hold further action-oriented meetings focussed on relevant sector-specific issues in the future.

Concluding remarks were presented by **Mr João Aguiar Machado, Director General of DG MARE** with a clear focus on the need to combine environmental protection and innovation in the growing sectors of the blue economy. Mr Aguiar Machado highlighted that progress should be also made on concrete implementation of the actions already included in the renewed EU Strategy for ORs. He encouraged the different regions to cooperate in joint EU initiatives and indicated the readiness of the Commission to organise specific sector-oriented meetings. He also confirmed the commitment of DG MARE to renew the initiative in future editions, taking into account feedback from the participants.