



MARITIME FORUM

UK Parliamentary scrutiny of Marine Knowledge 2020

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Background

9.1 According to the Commission, improving knowledge is one of the three main elements of the EU's integrated maritime policy, and is necessary to achieve good environmental status for marine waters, in accordance with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which it describes as the policy's environmental pillar. It notes that, at its meeting in November 2009, the Council encouraged it to make proposals for increasing the use of scientific knowledge, and that this Communication responds to that request by outlining the case for a more coordinated approach to the collection and assembly of marine data, and by indicating how the different EU policy measures can help to achieve that aim.

The current document

9.2 The Commission notes that the majority of marine data are collected by public institutions in the Member States at an annual cost of more than €1 billion and with a specific purpose in mind. However, it adds that those processing the data face a number of obstacles, such as difficulty in discovering the data which already exist, restrictions on access, use and re-use, different standards, formats and nomenclature, and different pricing policies. In view of this, it suggests that the aim should be to reduce operational costs and delays for users, to increase competition and innovation by providing wider access to quality-checked, rapidly available and coherent data, and by providing a sounder basis for managing future changes. It goes on to outline the actions already underway across the EU to collect and make available data, in response to the existing legal framework of Directives and enabling actions, whilst at the same time recognising that these provisions do not address all the current barriers to identifying, accessing and using data, and do not apply to all of the relevant data collecting bodies, such as academic and scientific institutions. The document also highlights examples of where a shared data approach is already being developed or adopted, and the respective strengths and weaknesses of each approach, including the need for proper guardianship of the data.

9.3 The Commission then proposes a number of specific improvements to the existing instruments and actions. These include:

- ensuring that data from EU-supported regional development and marine and maritime research programmes are more widely available for re-use;
- examining what further measures are needed to promote coastal information systems, in response to the EU Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (2002/413/EC);

- supporting demonstrations of GMES[27 [3]] marine services under the Seventh Framework Programme's space theme until 2014;
- full enforcement by Member States of access rules for fisheries data, with options for widening the scope of access to be explored;
- the coupling of data access systems to provide a more efficient use of resources for the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- actions to improve the coverage of data, resolution and range of parameters;
- the Commission itself ensuring that its Agencies regularly release data and encouraging Member States to make available data gathered for a specific purpose, if necessary in an aggregated form; and
- work by Eurostat on the coastal influence in territorial regions.

9.4 The Communication outlines further actions planned by the Commission to bring about increased consistency of approach to data collection and assembly within current initiatives. These include ensuring data received have common standards, bringing data policies progressively into line to enable free access without restriction of use, ensuring that data being gathered for other purposes are relevant to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, expanding data coverage to near-coast waters through a prototype European Marine Observation and Data Network (ur-EMODnet) action, assessing gaps in the monitoring network, and ensuring EU activities can contribute towards a global interoperable marine knowledge system.

9.5 The document also sets out a series of actions the Commission is proposing to take forward for working towards an operational European marine data infrastructure, the final shape of which is yet to be defined. These include looking to the industry to contribute appropriate resources to safeguard and disseminate data, increased communication between national data centres, the piloting of checks on sea-basin data, the prioritisation of data for ur-EMODnet, and the establishment of a prototype secretariat to manage the ur-EMODnet process.

9.6 The Commission says that a formal mid-term assessment of the uptake of data from the prototype ur-EMODnet by scientists, authorities and industry, will commence in 2011 and report in early 2012, and that it intends to establish a Member States' Expert Group to ensure links with existing work in Member States.

The Government's view

9.7 In his Explanatory Memorandum of 29 September 2010, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Lord Henley) describes the Communication as a statement of intent by the Commission to further the creation of marine knowledge. He says that the objectives are clearly set out in terms of reducing costs and delays, improving quality of decision making and strengthening marine research, with the ultimate intention of creating a European marine data infrastructure to enable the integration of data across Member States' borders in a consistent and coherent manner.

9.8 He suggests that the approach proposed is of increasing importance as the demand for good quality evidence on the complex systems of concern in marine management continues to grow, along with the associated costs, and that this is consistent with activities already underway within the UK to identify and provide access to marine environmental data. He also regards it as consistent with the approach of the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI), which sets standards for, delivers access to, and encourages the re-use of public sector information, and the UK Location Programme, which will enable access to spatial and non-spatial data.

9.9 The Minister says that, while strongly supportive of co-ordinating and joining-up access to data across the EU, the Government would like to ensure that any European standards established comply with international standards in order to avoid duplication, and he believes that the oversight provided by both

the planned Member States' Expert Group and the existing independent group of experts should help to keep in check any potential tendency for the project to expand its scope excessively.

9.10 Finally, he notes that the further, planned impact assessment for the end of the period 2011-2013 will provide the opportunity for a more detailed analysis of (for example) the non-linear costs of expanding the sea-basin coverage, and may as a consequence result in higher or lower costs for implementation than are currently estimated. He also points out that some UK data are subject to Trading Fund rules, which would need to be taken into account in the further development of this work., and that, whilst the Government recognises the need for reporting on progress, it would expect any additional reporting to be built on current related reporting requirements, in order to minimise the cost burden.

Conclusion

9.11 Although this Communication does not raise any particularly contentious issues, it deals with an area of some environmental importance. Consequently, whilst we see no need to withhold clearance, we think it right to draw the document to the attention of the House.

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