European Marine Strategy

WWF welcomes the Commission Communication *Towards a strategy to protect and conserve the marine environment* (COM (2002) 539 final) and believes that such a Communication, which summarises the present situation with regard to development and implementation of policies to control threats and sets environmental, operational and institutional objectives, is long overdue. The Communication represents the first step towards the building of a thematic strategy for the protection of the marine environment. The loss of degradation of biodiversity resulting from overexploitation of fisheries, changes in structure, loss of habitat, contamination by dangerous substances and nutrients are of such severity that it is essential this work is progressed with the greatest possible speed, and that the necessary resources are made available for development and implementation of the Strategy.

WWF broadly welcomes the objectives and believes that ensuring these are implemented across Europe’s seas will be of great value. We do, however, consider that the current Communication could have been more progressive. For example, the commitments given by North Sea Environment Ministers at the Fifth North Sea Conference (5NSC) in Bergen 2002 and the Commitments given by all EU Member States at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) are not reflected in the Communication. It will be important to ensure in the future that objectives are set which “push the boundaries” in terms of the management and protection of Europe’s seas.

WWF strongly advocates the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the process and welcome the opportunity for stakeholder involvement. WWF is an environmental stakeholder, with representation across EU countries and accession countries, with direct experience that can contribute to the process. WWF advocates the elaboration of all objectives and action with timelines. WWF welcomes the principle of a Consultative Body as outlined at the Stakeholder Conference in Denmark, December 2002.

In taking forward the EU Marine Strategy WWF advocates:

**Delivery of an ecosystem approach:**
- A vision for the seas of Europe and reflecting our "footprint" outside European seas
- An integrated marine policy to assist management on a regional basis
- Inclusion of a mechanism for strategic assessment, some of which could be developed by the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC), and applied to the full range of activities both in protected areas and the wider marine environment on a regional or sub-regional basis
- A framework for spatial planning at a sub-regional level e.g. Southern North Sea or Adriatic Sea to deliver both protection and management of Europe’s seas
Co-operation and Co-ordination

WWF proposes the inclusion of an overarching action to complement the overall objective set out in the Strategy, incorporating the development of an integrated marine policy in coastal and offshore waters.

Further reading