



A Vision for the North Sea

briefing

At the 4th North Sea Conference in 1995, Environment Ministers recognised "that the marine ecosystem of the North Sea is an interdependent whole the protection of which, nevertheless, has to be addressed within the framework of the various national, European Union and wider international legal systems." They agreed two levels of co-ordinated action, the first within territorial waters and the second "action within the rest of the North Sea", recognising that "this may require new forms of co-operation between North Sea States". The North Sea is, in effect, the pilot for the delivery of integrated ecosystem management in Europe or the North East Atlantic requiring



new forms of co-operation between North Sea States. The next priority for North Sea Environment Ministers and for the Ministerial Conferences must be to develop a way forward for the delivery of integrated ecosystem management in the North Sea.

In 1998, the OSPAR Convention entered into force and a new Annex was adopted on the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems (Entry into force: 30 August 2000). With strategies to address biodiversity protection, marine pollution reduction and offshore developments, the 15 Contracting Parties are now required to "take all possible steps to prevent and eliminate pollution and take the necessary measures to protect the maritime area against the adverse effects of human activities, so as to safeguard health and to conserve marine ecosystems and, when practicable, restore marine areas which have been adversely affected". OSPAR recognises the Greater North Sea as

A Vision for the North Sea - Making the Ecosystem Approach Operational

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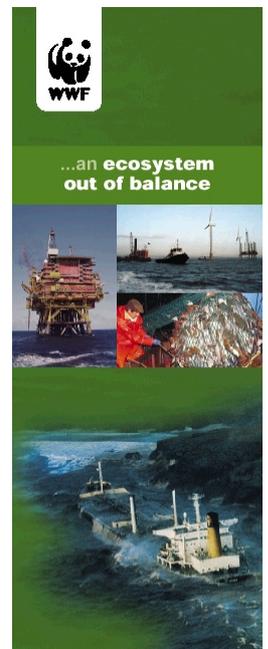
a separate assessment region (OSPAR Region II) that is a geographically defined ecological unit.

At the 5th North Sea Conference in 2002, WWF calls on Environment Ministers to implement an ecosystem approach and in this context, commit to the completion of a strategic environmental and socio-economic assessment of the North Sea by 2004. Social and economic factors have been particularly neglected in the development of an integrated ecosystem approach and this needs to be addressed.

Background

In the early 1980s, Environment Ministers met to consider future management and environmental protection for one of the most productive but intensively used seas of the world - the North Sea. It was here, in the early 1980s, that the precautionary principle was first developed and adopted. Following a series of groundbreaking Ministerial meetings in the 1980s and 1990s, Environment and Fisheries Ministers formally recognised the need for an ecosystem approach to the management and protection of the North Sea at the Intermediate Ministerial Meeting (IMM) in Bergen, 1997. This approach was further developed at a workshop in Oslo in 1998. A series of additional workshops fostered the development of Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) which are considered one out of a whole range of delivery tools for an ecosystem approach. Central to the ecosystem approach is the holistic assessment of the impacts of human activities on the North Sea ecosystem and the development of the respective integrated management measures.

Marine management is also being addressed by frameworks that are broader than the North Sea, including the OSPAR Convention, European Union Policy and Directives (e.g. the Common Fisheries Policy and the EU Habitats Directive), national legislation and policy for non-EU countries and the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. None of these frameworks, however, have an overview of all the sectors involved with exploiting the North Sea. It is notable that the OSPAR Convention does not address fishing or shipping activities, and the EU Policy and Directives are notoriously poorly integrated at both an EU level and with regional seas frameworks such as the OSPAR Convention. EU Habitats Directive implementation is being undertaken in



bio-geographic regions, but these are largely administrative and are not representative of marine ecological regions such as the North Sea. The recognition for a regional or zonal framework for fisheries management within an overarching Policy is increasing in momentum. There are already two initiatives that can effectively be seen as the first stages of regional or zonal fisheries management, the Irish Sea Cod Recovery Programme and the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership. However, regional or zonal management of fisheries as a sector is not integrated ecosystem management of all activities.

The North Sea Conference process is the only framework that has considered at a Ministerial level, the full integration of all activities within a region, which can be described as a discrete ecological region.

Making ecosystem management operational

In order to make integrated ecosystem management successful it is essential to have integrated policy and also integrated management action. Recognising that it is human activities that we aim to manage not ecosystems, there are only a limited amount of tools available for marine management. These can be broadly divided into two groups: assessment tools and delivery tools. Strategic environmental assessment (SEA), incorporating both socio-economic and ecological assessment and risk assessment, alongside environmental impact assessment (EIA) can be used to facilitate decision-making processes. While the delivery tools can be largely grouped under three headings (i) spatial controls; (ii) controls on levels; and (iii) best practice including appropriate technological advances etc. The combination of tools used will depend on the biology of discrete ecological regions and social and economic factors. Putting these measures in place also requires a decision-making process and ways and means of monitoring and evaluating the success of the measures.

The way forward

The recent OSPAR Quality Status Report (2000) confirms that marine management of the NE Atlantic has not been successful. Several organisations recognise that regional or zonal management is essential, for example, the partnership between WWF-UK and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. WWF believes that regional or zonal management is required for (i) the development of practical marine management measures; (ii) biological monitoring and evaluation at an appropriate level; (iii) to address social and economic realities in different regions; and (iv) to facilitate decision-making frameworks that include representatives of all legitimate interests in a region, for example, to negotiate and form strategies for implementation of management solutions.

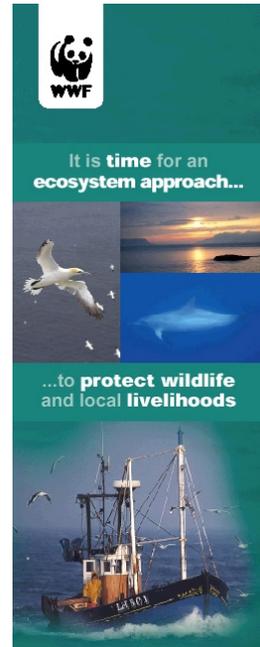
Regional or zonal management and stakeholder management of fisheries in Europe or the North East Atlantic is in its infancy. The next steps for ecosystem management include the need to fully integrate all relevant sectors (not only fisheries) in the development of ecosystem management and for each sector to "find their feet". It is also necessary to further develop and communicate widely the need for (i) monitoring and evaluation techniques; (ii) assessment tools; and (iii) delivery tools for practical measures.

Further Reading:

MacGarvin, M. (2001): A Marine Act for the United Kingdom? A report to the Joint Marine Programme of The Wildlife Trusts and WWF-UK. Oceans Recovery Campaign, WWF UK, Godalming.

Pullen, S. (2002): Major Issues in Marine Environmental Protection: A Global Perspective - Delivering an Ecosystem Approach. Global Conference on Oceans and Coasts at Rio+10 - Toward 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, December 3-7, 2001. UNESCO, Paris.

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WWF's Recommendations

- The delivery of an ecosystem approach can be achieved through five steps, including:
 - the development of a common vision and integrated oceans policy,
 - an assessment of the resource and status of the resource,
 - the establishment of a decision-making mechanism and spatial planning system,
 - identification of relevant delivery tools, and
 - the production of a strategy for delivery.
- A common Vision should provide a framework which incorporates overarching principles, such as:
 - wider management of the marine environment,
 - ecologically sustainable management,
 - setting integrated environmental, social and economic objectives,
 - adoption of the precautionary principle,
 - introduction of the polluter and user pays principles,
 - and a duty of care placed on the users.
- The development of a Vision should allow for full stakeholder involvement leading to greater acceptance of a common vision.
- The Vision should provide an opportunity for a new ethos to be adopted, one which moves away from the current systems of narrow, exclusive, sectoral management.
- The character of an integrated oceans policy should be determined by three important and inter-related aspects:
 - the perspectives and goals of the sectors and stakeholders,
 - the participatory mechanisms used for integrating the policy,
 - the integrated marine policy's boundaries in both the real and policy worlds.
- The delivery of an ecosystem approach requires the use of management tools, which can be broadly divided into two groups:
 - assessment tools, such as strategic environmental assessment (SEA), root cause analysis, and
 - delivery tools, such as spatial controls including representative networks of marine protected areas or consents plus conditions on developments, level controls such as limits on concentrations of a polluting discharge, and best practice.
- SEA should be used to facilitate decision-making processes for spatial planning.
- Recovery tools, such as regeneration areas for fisheries and wetland recreation should be utilised alongside delivery tools, due to existing damage and degradation of the marine environment.
- A spatial planning framework and body should be established to facilitate decision-making once the resource has been assessed, the threats identified, and the risks ascertained. It should be noted that stakeholder involvement and transparency are crucial issues at this stage.
- A Strategy for delivery should be developed, incorporating enforcement mechanisms to ensure that planning decisions are implemented; new research programmes to better inform the decision-making process; and appropriate fiscal measures and financial incentives.
- Monitoring and evaluation programmes should be put in place to ensure that such an approach works and that the controls placed on the management of various activities are indeed sufficient to ensure that the marine resource is being managed sustainably and that the ecosystem is not compromised.