

Speech Joe Borg

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A holistic maritime policy: How knowledge can lead to economic and environmental benefits

We are here today to celebrate knowledge. The start of a new academic year is an exciting occasion. It marks the start of a new episode in the great voyage of learning and discovery. As Sir Francis Bacon said some four centuries ago: "knowledge is power". We all know the saying, but let us reflect upon its meaning, for a moment. Knowledge empowers not only individuals, but entire societies. It is what has allowed man, in many ways, to make the huge strides, in technology, science, economic performance and social behaviour, that have been witnessed over the centuries. In a more formal context, by engaging with people who have knowledge, decision-makers gain valuable insight, enabling them to shape the right policies. The University of Wageningen understands the value of bringing politicians, practitioners and academics together. This is why we are here today.

Shaping a new maritime policy for Europe is no different. When in June this year, the European Commission published a Green Paper with a view to launching a discussion on a new vision for the oceans and seas, it too, sought to bring together the diverse knowledge of stakeholders. Indeed a debate is already emerging but we are still at the beginning of a long process. A Green Paper is a consultation paper. It is a document that does not present decisions, but raises questions - questions on how to ensure a sustainable future for our oceans and seas. We want to answer these questions, together with all those concerned with maritime affairs. Why do we need to look at, and possibly change, the way in which we handle our maritime affairs? In fact, why change at all?

To start with, this is because our relationship with the seas is changing. We are multiplying the uses we make of the seas through the exploitation of new resources and the provision of new services. Europeans have long been drawn to the sea. Traditionally, this has meant activities such as fishing and shipping. Now, it also means aquaculture, dredging, offshore oil and gas production and booming tourism. Tomorrow, it will also mean capturing energy from waves and tides, carbon storage, methane hydrates and blue biotechnology.

Our seas are also changing. The sheer scale of the seas historically led people to perceive them as an inexhaustible source of wealth and resources, but over the past decades a growing body of research has taught us that we were wrong. We have learnt that there are limits to the capacity of marine ecosystems. Growth cannot continue indefinitely at the expense of the available resources. This continuing economic exploitation of the seas and the environmental degradation of the resource base, are therefore compelling reasons to change. But what should we aim for precisely?

Firstly, **clean** oceans and seas. The increasingly intense use of the sea and its resources leaves its mark. Tons of oil, chemicals, nutrients and litter end up in the sea. Ships with their ballast waters bring alien species to our waters almost every day. Without restrictions on fishing, our seas would soon become "deserts". For various reasons, not least among them the protection of biodiversity and the recreational uses of the sea, clean seas are an imperative.

Secondly, **safe** oceans and seas. The world fleet has tripled in the last 100 years - a fact which has greatly increased the risk of accidents. This is simply a numerical fact and, while most shippers take good care of their ships, some seem to put short-term gain over long-term benefit at the expense of safety. We all know that the cost of accidents can be high, not only for the shipper and his crew, but also for the sea and for society at large. It is our duty to ensure that the ships that sail in our waters are safe.

This is both because our seas cannot be subjected to careless, albeit inadvertent, ecological disasters, and also, as fishermen, sailors and other mariners cannot be left to the mercy of the seas. The seas also cannot become a haven for smugglers, pirates, traffickers or terrorists. With the effects of climate change, rising sea levels and the frequency of storms, the call for action is becoming even more urgent.

Thirdly, we should aim for **profitable** oceans and seas. Despite the effects of the economic exploitation of the sea which are all too evident, the seas continue to offer enormous bounty. In order to clarify what I said earlier, I am not in any way, advocating the reining in of maritime entrepreneurs. Quite the contrary.

We have many unemployed in Europe. Our economic growth lags behind that of our main competitors. Europe needs stronger growth and more jobs. Renewable energy, sea monitoring technologies, blue biotechnology, aquaculture and marine tourism are all sectors with the potential for growth. However, this potential may prove unfounded if not

accompanied by proper policies, legal parameters and marine research policies that enjoy public support. I am sure you will agree that public authorities have a role to play. You may, however, still wonder: why change the way in which we manage our seas?

Allow me to illustrate this with the case of port expansion. Ports are the gateway for practically all the commodities and goods traded on the world market. 3.5 billion tonnes of cargo and 350 million passengers pass through European seaports each year. What would the impact of the failure of our ports to absorb the growing volume of trade be on our economic growth potential? Clearly the impact would be negative. From an economic perspective, port expansion is therefore needed. But we need, at the same time, to acknowledge that port expansion carries collateral costs: it impacts the environment and denies other users the opportunity of exploiting the same coastline; be they tourists, farmers, birds or fish. It may have negative effects on surrounding aquatic ecosystems. Thus, jobs may be gained in the port, but others may be lost in neighbouring areas.

This example shows that questions of transport, the environment, recreational activities and economic development are inter-linked. They come together in what we term spatial planning – whereby competing uses of the seas are looked at in an integral manner. In policy terms, prevailing decision-making in Europe remains largely sectoral. This fragmentation of decision-making creates disagreement, and sometimes even conflict, about the right balance between various interests. It generates misunderstandings; it causes uncertainty and thus delays in finding solutions. Moreover it can lead to negative, or unintended, outcomes.

This illustrates why we need to look at our oceans and seas in a more holistic way. An all-inclusive approach is the best guarantee we have to maximise the benefits from our seas whilst simultaneously protecting the marine environment that makes it all possible.

We are not the first in this venture. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the conclusion reached was that "sustainable development of the oceans requires effective co-ordination and co-operation of decision-makers at all levels". Others have already heeded this call: Australia, Canada and the US are developing integrated ocean policies, and some EU Member States, including the Netherlands, are also moving towards integration. But how are we, in the European Commission, going about this?

Allow me to read out to you what our aims are, exactly as they are recorded in the Commission's strategic objectives for this mandate. We aim at "developing a thriving maritime economy and the full potential of sea-based activity in an environmentally sustainable manner. Such a policy should be supported by excellence in marine scientific research, technology and innovation." We do not, therefore, rely purely on regulations to make progress. We count on scientific research, technology and innovation. Whereas laws are a necessity in some cases, the real gain, I feel, is to be found in knowledge.

I would like now to focus on the central question of my intervention - how can knowledge lead to environmental and economic benefits?

Knowledge, when coupled with economic considerations, generates innovation. Innovation brings us the breakthrough solutions we need to reach certain targets, like the preservation of our oceans as a source of wealth in a sustainable way. We therefore need to be imaginative in the way in which we use our knowledge in order to reap results. For example, the millions of species that are yet to be discovered in the ocean depths could prove to be important sources of biodiversity and thus raw material for future biotechnologies. It is today unquestionable that further research into the potential of blue biotechnology can greatly improve the quality of our lives, through, say, the creation of new medicines or new foodstuffs.

Economic gain is often seen to be in conflict with environmental considerations and, yet, while this is often true, the two can also be mutually reinforcing. Research into clean-ship technologies for cleaner engines, treatment of ballast water and oil recovery carries the promise of drastically reduced air and ocean pollution while enhancing economic productivity. Clearly, we need to be innovative in the way in which we exploit our sources of knowledge.

To make the most of research, I see three key challenges.

Firstly, we need to make the most of the multiple, and often parallel, research efforts underway. We need to coordinate, to streamline and to eliminate wasteful duplication of identical, or almost identical, research activities. We need ground-breaking research to find the answers to some of our generation's biggest challenges, such as climate change, energy security and food supply. But research is also needed to help us deal with practical questions, like whether or not to authorise certain economic activities at sea at a point in time or in a particular location. Our understanding of the world has advanced a great deal. It has become highly sophisticated and highly complex. No one can grasp the totality of it. To get the full picture, knowledge must be shared. This is also true when it comes to our understanding of the oceans and seas. Sea-related research is scattered over a range of fields, such as biology, biotechnology, geology, oceanography and offshore engineering. Yet often this research is conducted in isolation. Against this backdrop of fragmentation, ensuring the co-ordination and co-operation of this specialised research is the logical next step.

This logic, far from being solely an idea, is taking shape here in Wageningen. With the creation of IMARES, Wageningen University has become an exemplary initiative of integrated research. By bringing together different areas of marine research, IMARES can address relevant questions on economic yield, nature conservation or the use of space. And this brings us one step closer to answering how knowledge can lead to economic and environmental benefits. It goes without saying that, inasmuch as it is able to, the Commission will do its best to carry this ambition forward through the European Community's seventh Research Framework Programme, which will be launched next year for the period 2007-2013.

Our second challenge is to secure Europe's leadership in marine research. Europe has a strong position in many scientific research areas, and our position will be stronger still, if our scientists work together, build on each other's knowledge and thus create a European Research Area. Research framework funds are available to European scientists to work on joint projects and to forge stronger ties between them. I would urge you to seize the opportunities offered in the 7th Framework Programme to create a true European Marine Research Area.

Lastly, the ultimate challenge, which I see, is to create increasing added value from our scientific excellence. We need to overcome Europe's research paradox. Although Europe is the world leader in scientific output, R&D investment in Europe is lower than in the US and Japan, especially in the private sector. Our attention needs to go beyond merely conducting research; we need to look also at transforming it into readily usable research. And we also need to look at its financing. We must ensure that the right procedures are in place to deliver research results to industry and governments as fast as possible. This is why we support the establishment of European Technological Platforms - such as the waterborne platform within the transport sector. These technology platforms bring together industry, researchers and policy-makers to develop a shared strategic research agenda.

We have no illusions. These challenges can only be properly addressed with the full involvement of the marine scientific community. This implies, however, that the scientific community needs to organise itself to be able to contribute fully to this integration process. In the Green Paper on a future maritime policy for the Union we ask for feedback on how to support such a process, and what structures could facilitate co-operation and cohesion within the European marine scientific community.

As I said earlier, I also see gains to be had in the better organisation of the way in which we collect geological, biological and economic marine data. Today data collections are scattered, they are stored in heterogeneous formats, different users have different access rights and monitoring is sporadic. We need to overcome this. A European Marine Observation and Data Network could be formed, paving the way to a more comprehensive picture of our oceans and seas.

As much as 84% of the ocean bed is uncharted thus far. This is why the Green Paper has put forward the idea of an EU-atlas, charting the features of Europe's underwater world. A systematic mapping of the seabed of Europe's coastal waters will be of great benefit to all those that are involved in ecosystem analysis, spatial planning, safety at sea and the study of the marine climate.

With the right tools for surveillance, governments will be able to fulfil their obligations; for example, to combat the illegal trafficking of drugs, arms and people, illegal fisheries, piracy and terrorism. Vessel monitoring systems are increasingly sophisticated; yet again, the existing systems monitor just one port or one stretch of coastline, or they focus on one activity, such as fisheries. We should strive for full inter-operability of these systems.

These ideas are just a few of the many possibilities for using knowledge for the benefit of both the health of our oceans and seas and the wealth we draw from them. So, what then are the next steps?

I am convinced that a holistic approach, an overall vision for Europe's oceans and seas, is the way forward. It is the way to preserve our oceans and seas' rich resources for our children and our children's children. Yet, to achieve these results, we need more than a vision, we need action. But, before we can move from words to action, we must have the fullest input from those who know our oceans: people who carry out in-depth studies, people who engage with the oceans and seas in their daily work, who derive their living from them and who have a direct interest in their future.

We think we can learn much by listening to them, to you. Your knowledge is essential in finding the answers to our questions. So I invite you to use your knowledge, your power; to be imaginative, to innovate; and to tell us what you think. Together, I firmly believe, we can build a sustainable future for our oceans and seas

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