

House of Lords Wants North Sea Coordination

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The UK House of Lords has released a European Union Committee report highlighting the “often conflicting” activities underway in the North Sea. Releasing the report, the House of Lords EU Committee called for strong leadership on the management of resources among the countries along the shoreline of the North Sea.

The report states that the North Sea is one of the most industrialized seas in the world, with a wide range of pressures being placed on it. Attempts at managing those pressures through planning are embryonic and unpredictable around the North Sea. The Committee has found that no existing body or mechanism has a broad enough remit to facilitate the political co-operation required to make the necessary step-change in the management of the North Sea basin.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market, Chairman of the Sub-Committee that conducted this inquiry, said: “We already have ships queuing to pass through sections of the sea basin and it is predicted that the space allocated to wind farms could increase fifty-fold in the next few years. That level of use places significant pressure on eco-systems in the North Sea.

“If the North Sea is left uncoordinated, the conflict between environmental sustainability and economic growth will intensify. To avoid that, and to strike the right balance, we will need a coordinated and strategic approach. Despite some excellent ad hoc initiatives, we do not feel that such an approach is in place at the moment.

“We want the UK Government to take the lead in convening a Ministerial Conference of North Sea states to deliver the urgently needed strategic and political vision for the North Sea. We also think the Government should think harder about developing our own long term plan for the North Sea along the lines of the Dutch 2050 agenda.

“There is also a role for local authorities to play in stewardship of the North Sea and ensuring opportunities for economic growth in their region are not missed. We were surprised to learn that only one English local authority takes part in the North Sea Commission compared to seven in Scotland. There are clearly financial implications attached to membership, and we understand that times are hard for local authorities so we think the Government and the Local Government Association should look at how local authorities can be supported to play an active role in the North Sea Commission.”

Report Recommendations

The Committee urges the UK Government to convene a ministerial conference that seeks to deliver the urgently required political and strategic vision that will sustain the North Sea for generations to come.

The Committee recommends that the UK Government work with other North Sea Member States on the development of a pilot marine planning project in the North Sea

The report also calls for English local authorities be more engaged in North Sea co-operation, and to work with the UK Government to identify and address barrier to their co-operation, which is currently minimal compared to Scottish local authorities and those from other North Sea countries.

The Committee further recommends commitment to a single database, which could then become a one stop shop, covering the costs not only of data collation, but also of quality-assurance.

The Committee urges the Government to continue its work to overcome technical obstacles to greater cross-border

energy co-operation, such as trading options and cost allocation, through the UK's involvement in the North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative (NSCOGI).

The Committee also urges the Government to show political leadership by intensifying efforts to agree a joint recommendation for fisheries management in the Dogger Bank area, where a failure to align economic interests with environmental protection, has led to paralysis over the last four years.

The European Commission should carry out a specific analysis of work undertaken by Member States to assess the cumulative impact of human activity in the North Sea.

Guidance is required from the European Commission on the implementation of EU legislation affecting the marine environment.

The European Commission should assess the coherence of its various pieces of legislation that affect the marine environment, such as rules on fisheries and habitats.

National Governments around the North Sea should commit to a single cross-border data collection initiative and allocate resources accordingly.

The Committee welcomes the 20 year vision under the first English marine plans, but discerns no long term strategic planning for the seas around the UK as a whole, or even around England.

A North Sea Maritime Forum composed of interested stakeholders should be established.

The report is available [here](#).

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