



Committee of the Regions

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OPINION

Innovation in the Blue Economy: Realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- stresses the need to use a cross-policy integrated approach in the coordination of research policy, economic policy, the common fisheries policy and transport policy.
- calls for a broader focus on the aquaculture sector and marine, coastal and cruise transport;
- calls for the creation of a specific Knowledge and Innovation Community for the Blue Economy as a further measure for the development of skills and the transfer of ideas from marine research to the private sector;
- calls on the European Commission to further extend the use of scientific research in its efforts to achieve regionalisation in the common fisheries policy.
- notes that protection and conservation of marine ecosystems must be a key element in European maritime policy;
- recommends the development of clearly defined performance indicators for growth and innovation in the blue economy;
- notes that Commission's plans to increase SME participation in the blue economy should be backed by adequate financial assistance under both existing and future programmes. The need for funding is particularly visible in the aquaculture sector;
- notes that an enhanced policy framework for the inclusion of private business in the blue economy is necessary. Businesses should have an important voice in identifying research needs as well as in formulating norms, standards and business-friendly solutions;
- stresses that entrepreneurship in the blue economy extends beyond operations in our seas and oceans. It is important to plan appropriate support for onshore businesses related to the blue economy such as local fish processing plants to create a sustainable business environment for local fishermen.
- notes that PPPs should not only be used for the blue economy for the purpose of acquiring large businesses as private partners. Public-private partnerships should take account of the financial potential and risk management capacity appropriate for the small and medium-sized business sector which will also allow smaller authorities to use the resources held by such businesses.

Rapporteur

Mr Adam Banaszak, Member of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Regional Assembly (PL/ECR)

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Innovation in the Blue Economy: Realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth
COM(2014) 254 final/2

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions – Innovation in the Blue Economy:
Realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. believes that using the potential of blue growth represents an opportunity to boost the local economy and creates quality jobs in knowledge- and investment-intensive economic sectors;
2. points out that protecting the environment should continue to be one of the primary objectives of the European blue growth strategy;
3. believes that the assessment of scientific data can significantly contribute to a successful reform of the common fisheries policy and is a major condition for the implementation of the regionalisation component of the policy;
4. reaffirms its belief that developing and supporting European aquaculture represents a key element for the creation of jobs in structurally weak areas and ensures the supply of high-quality seafood for European consumers;
5. endorses the initiatives taken by the European Commission aimed at stimulating the growth of the blue economy;
6. stresses the need to use a cross-policy integrated approach in the coordination of research policy, economic policy, the common fisheries policy and transport policy. To make the EU's action for the blue economy more effective, the above policies should not be treated exclusively as separate areas. Ensuring synergies between them will make the initiatives adopted more effective and provide greater added value;
7. draws attention to the need to use scientific research for implementing the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, protecting marine ecosystems and managing risks in crisis situations; stresses, however, that the use of scientific research and the implementation of innovation should primarily focus on blue growth understood not only in terms of economic growth in the marine economy but also as growth that has a positive impact on other parts of the economy;
8. notes that while the process of unlocking the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and economic growth is both necessary and desirable, it must not lead to the deterioration of the natural environment or the destruction of marine ecosystems;
9. calls for a broader focus on the aquaculture sector and marine, coastal and cruise transport when introducing innovation in order to ensure more economic growth and create new jobs;

10. calls for broader and more effective coordination between the blue growth strategy and other EU strategies and programmes, in particular the Europe 2020 strategy;

Research and innovation for blue growth

11. emphasises that the process of conducting scientific research and introducing innovation - while aimed at fostering blue growth - should not only have an impact on the marine economy but also on other areas of the economy;
12. calls for the creation of a specific Knowledge and Innovation Community for the Blue Economy as a further measure for the development of skills and the transfer of ideas from marine research to the private sector;
13. agrees that gaps in knowledge and data about the state of our seas and oceans, seabed resources, marine life and risks to habitats and ecosystems represent one of the key problems hampering the development of the blue economy. Increased knowledge of our seas will promote growth in the blue economy, through both a better knowledge of the resources it contains and a better understanding of how these can be used, in tandem with achieving our environmental objectives;
14. stresses the importance of the availability of data about the state of our seas and oceans for the development of the blue economy. Improving the supply of data and making them more accessible will drive forward innovation and competition, making it possible to manage crisis situations effectively and to reduce uncertainties connected with marine areas;
15. notes that the availability of data about the state of our seas and oceans should not be limited to general information that is relevant only at EU or individual Member State level. It is vital to take account of the needs of individual regions and to make more information available to them in the above area which they can use effectively both in the public and private sectors;
16. notes that while it is important to make available data about the state of our seas and oceans at local, regional and national level, the whole process must be coordinated at EU level. This will increase the effectiveness of the data used and allow for an appropriate exchange of information among the interested parties;
17. calls on the European Commission to further extend the use of scientific research in its efforts to achieve regionalisation in the common fisheries policy. The wider use of scientific research will both reflect the principle of a cross-cutting approach towards the blue economy and improve the rational management of fisheries resources;

18. emphasises that the European Union should continue to support aquaculture as one of the fastest growing areas in the food production sector. Appropriate scientific research which gives businesses access to new, wider information about the state of our seas and oceans can make businesses more competitive and, accordingly, trigger growth in employment, particularly in structurally weak areas;
19. highlights that collecting and sharing marine information should not create any disadvantages or additional administrative burden for local and regional authorities and economic operators;
20. notes that adequate access to information about the state of our seas and oceans is not only important for implementing innovative solutions, protecting our environment and managing fisheries resources and aquaculture but can also be a key enabling factor for risk management and the adoption of appropriate supporting action in crisis situations. Accordingly, the Committee of the Regions calls for steps to be taken towards the elaboration of a mechanism for the use of satellite imaging data delivered by the Copernicus satellite service to assist LRAs in their initial response to natural disasters;
21. emphasises the need to monitor the implementation of innovation and growth in the blue economy on an ongoing basis to ensure that the action taken is as effective as possible. The Committee of the Regions therefore recommends the development of clearly defined performance indicators for growth and innovation in the blue economy. Indicators that are defined in this manner will not only be useful for the Commission but will also help identify appropriate objectives for Member States and regions;

Environmental protection of seas and oceans

22. notes that the key issue for the blue economy is not just about using marine information to boost economic growth but mainly about using it to preserve marine ecosystems and maintain the quality of the marine environment. Protection and conservation of marine ecosystems must be a key element in European maritime policy;
23. stresses that a marine environment should be clean and healthy. Accordingly, the idea of drawing up plans for the removal of military material leftovers and chemical waste dumped at sea, as set out in a previous opinion of the Committee of the Regions¹, should be officially taken into consideration, while information about our seas and oceans should also be used to help cleanse and replenish our marine environment, which will help ensure its biological diversity and fertility;
24. highlights that a clean and healthy marine environment based on Marine Protected Areas is also important for the development of tourism, e.g. sustainable diving, which represents a

¹ [CDR 2203/2012](#), Blue Growth - Opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth; rapporteur: Adam Banaszak (PL/ECR).

strategic tool for acquiring knowledge about the marine environment and for raising public awareness about it;

25. notes that increased competitiveness and employment in the aquaculture sector will help make the development of this sector more dynamic. This must not, however, lead to any deterioration in the quality of marine products in favour of their quantity. Accordingly, all necessary action should be taken to ensure that European consumers are supplied with high-quality products. In particular, this means a lack of authorisation to supply genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to consumers;

Participation of private sector businesses in the blue economy

26. appreciates the importance of the European Commission's initiatives aimed at extending the use of scientific research and innovation in the blue growth strategy. It is important, however, to remember that the main and most desirable outcome of the blue growth strategy should be to develop entrepreneurship based on the untapped potential of our seas and oceans;
27. notes that the communication does not take account of some areas with the biggest share in the blue economy such as shipbuilding, maritime transportation and blue energy. It is clear that the communication is paving the way for future innovation and scientific initiatives; however, the above economic sectors continue to be the drivers of the blue economy;
28. considers that, when assessing the possibilities of introducing innovation into the blue economy, particular consideration should be given to the development of marine transport and tourism, which harbour huge potential in terms of increasing employment;
29. emphasises that businesses from the private sector can play a key role in terms of innovation and using it to boost economic growth and create new and better jobs. Businesses from the SME sector in particular can play an important role in this area;
30. notes that the Commission's plans to increase SME participation in the blue economy should be backed by adequate financial assistance under both existing and future programmes. The need for funding is particularly visible in the aquaculture sector; micro-businesses represent 90% of this sector and are capable of generating the desired level of innovation;
31. an enhanced policy framework for the inclusion of private business in the blue economy is necessary. To ensure optimal synergy between the public sector and the needs of the private sector, businesses should have an important voice in identifying research needs as well as in formulating norms, standards and business-friendly solutions;
32. notes that the wider inclusion of private businesses in the blue economy should take place without any unnecessary burdens on the private sector;

33. calls upon the Commission and the Member States to work towards improving the competitiveness of European maritime economic operators. If we understand private sector needs in relation to participation in the blue economy, it should be easier to adapt measures and policies at EU, national and regional level in line with them;
34. stresses that entrepreneurship in the blue economy extends beyond operations in our seas and oceans. It is important to plan appropriate support for onshore businesses related to the blue economy such as local fish processing plants to create a sustainable business environment for local fishermen;
35. notes that the introduction of innovations in the blue economy for economic growth and new jobs also requires selecting appropriately skilled people. Close coordination between policy making, education and business is needed in order to make offshore jobs more popular and desirable among young people;
36. emphasises that the benefits arising from the blue economy will be felt in both the public and the private sectors. All public funding has its limitations, however. It is therefore important to also raise private capital to finance operations in this area. In view of this, broad cooperation should be encouraged between the public and the private sectors, not least through public-private partnerships, in which the public sector can benefit from the financial capacity of the private sector as well as its expertise, business experience, management skills and intellectual potential in order to develop and implement innovative solutions for the blue economy;
37. emphasises that, owing to the differences that exist between EU Member States in terms of legal arrangements for public-private partnerships, the European Commission has a crucial role to play in promoting best practices and solutions for the use of PPPs in the blue economy. Particular consideration should be given to the possibility of implementing institutionalised public-private partnerships in view of the potential creation of new jobs;
38. notes that it will not be possible to engage private sector representatives - including those of small and medium-sized enterprises - in cooperation with the public sector, unless such cooperation is promoted at local and regional level. There is a need to facilitate and support work by local and regional authorities to get representatives of the private sector involved in projects carried out in the form of public-private partnerships;
39. notes that PPPs should not only be used for the blue economy for the purpose of acquiring large businesses as private partners. If they are to be properly implemented, public-private partnerships should take account of the financial potential and risk management capacity appropriate for the small and medium-sized business sector which will also allow smaller authorities to use the resources held by such businesses;

40. welcomes that the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as laid out in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 3 and 4 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, are upheld in the communication.

Brussels, 3 December 2014.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Michel Lebrun

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Innovation in the Blue Economy: Realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth
References	COM(2014) 254 final/2
Legal basis	Article 307(1) TFEU
Procedural basis	Optional referral
Date of Commission letter	Catherine Day letter of 26 March 2014
Date of Bureau decision	23 May 2014
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Adam Banaszak (PL/ECR)
Analysis	June 2014
Discussed in commission	3 October 2014
Date adopted by commission	3 October 2014
Result of the vote in commission	Unanimity
Date adopted in plenary	3 and 4 December 2014
Previous Committee opinion	CDR 2202/2012 - <i>Marine Knowledge 2020: from seabed mapping to ocean forecasting</i> ; rapporteur: Arnold Hatch (UK/NL) CDR 2203/2012 - <i>Blue Growth - Opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth</i> ; rapporteur: Adam Banaszak (PL/ECR)
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	n/a