



Submission to EU Green Paper on Future Maritime Policy from the European Small Islands Network (ESIN)

PREAMBLE

Small islands in today's maritime Europe

ESIN has brought together the national associations of small coastal islands in Europe since 2001. Denmark, Scotland, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Ireland and Sweden all participate, making some 1,700 small islands with about 440,000 inhabitants.

In 2003, the Commission conducted a study to characterise European island communities. The study distinguished two territorial levels, i.e., 21 island regions (NUTS II/NUTS III) and 286 islands. The latter figure was obtained by counting islands with over 1 km² of surface area and which are located more than 1 km from the mainland.

If we take the basic definition of an island, i.e., that it is surrounded by water and disadvantaged by a permanent separation from land (no bridge or tunnel), as long as it is inhabited, whatever its size, it can be estimated that over 13.5 million people live on the islands scattered along Europe's coasts. And approximately 500,000 of these 13.5 million islanders live on small islands.

The wide range of situations found between northern and southern, eastern and western Europe in terms of their population size and density, relations with the mainland (large city or rural area), remoteness, position in an archipelago, etc., should not hide the fundamental reality of island communities who live there all year round, surrounded by the sea.

A Eurostat¹ study on islands determined that under the threshold of around 5,000 inhabitants, territorial stakes become especially intense and the vulnerability much greater.

Amongst these stakes are:

- **inevitably limited natural and human resources,**
- **the market is difficult to access and its operations on islands are disrupted**
- **limited production capacities**
- **obviously limited possibilities for redeployment and mobility**
- **limited property holdings and real estate which are under considerable pressure**
- **the demographic balance of communities is extremely vulnerable to crises and population changes can be very sharp**
- **identity and economy are intrinsically linked (as in the example of traditional fisheries), rendering the island identity fragile with respect to changes in the economic situation**
- **access to public services, like housing and jobs, is essential**
- **environmental management, is very important, but complicated and costly**
- **islands are exposed to natural disasters and marine pollution**
- **islands are particularly concerned by changes due to global warming, in view of their geographic locations (drought or lack of rainfall, warming of the water and changes in marine fauna and resources, rising sea level and increasingly frequent storms, etc.)**

¹ Planistat study conducted by DG Regio in 2003

In addition, because they are relatively small and isolated, islands and island communities suffer from a lack of representation on various institutional and territorial levels. By joining together on local, regional, national and European levels, they are seeking recognition and consideration of their specificities, to make their contribution to economic, social and ecological development.

General remarks on the Green Paper

A few references are made to small islands in the Green Paper, particularly in Chapter 3 on « Maximising the quality of life » and more especially in the sub-chapters on the « increasing attraction as a place to live and work » and on « developing coastal tourism », where small islands are clearly defined as being prime tourist destinations and attractive places to live.

However, small island issues can in no way be summed up in terms of quality of life. Although they are too often perceived as being recreational areas, small islands are the home of permanent communities that keep them alive or sometimes just barely so. They play a vital role and their vulnerability absolutely requires an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, as illustrated by that of the Green Paper.

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II RETAINING EUROPE'S LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE MARITIME DEVELOPMENT

2.1 A COMPETITIVE MARITIME INDUSTRY

How can the European maritime sector stay competitive while taking the special needs of SMEs into account?

What mechanisms should be in place to ensure that new maritime development is sustainable?

Alongside the gigantic scale of shipping activities, shipyards and harbours, small islands have an asset in terms of competitiveness, based on the quality, structuring and innovative nature of the activities being developed on a smaller scale.

Indeed, being an island engenders specificities that are sometimes opportunities (market niches based on high quality products or activities) and sometimes limits on competitiveness because of their non-market position (with small, remote local markets that distort competition and make island economies less competitive, with high costs due to transport, lack of a workforce on site, limited and highly fluctuating demand, etc.)

- **The conditions for accessing a market have a significant impact on how competitive firms can be. To ensure the sustainability of island activities, the special non-market position of island economies must be taken into account. SMEs and VSEs should receive appropriate aid, such as higher rates of subsidies granted to projects on islands. This could enable cost overruns related to insularity to be integrated without distorting the market, seeing the limited amount of investments made on islands (ceilings are rarely reached by small scale projects, in spite of their importance in terms of territorial balance).**
- **Various European maritime sectors are not all equal in terms of competitiveness. It is hard to measure the value of traditional island fisheries activities because they go beyond simple economic**

consequences. These activities provide a structuring effect and contribute to balanced socio-economic situations on islands. To ensure their sustainability, the CFP must acknowledge how vitally important they are to islands and take account of their geographical specificities.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF OUR MARINE RESOURCES

How can maritime policy contribute to maintaining our ocean resources and environment?

How can a maritime policy further the aims of the Marine Thematic Strategy?

Activities related to the sea, like fishing and shipping (including seafaring, surveillance and piloting near Europe's coasts and major harbours) have long been the entire mainstay of island economies. Today, tourist activities, also related to the sea, are beginning to dominate the scene.

This means that island communities are closely dependent on the quality of the marine areas surrounding them. Availability of marine resources is an essential key to maintain their continuity and development. The small scope and limited natural and human resources objectively restrict the possibilities of changing or diversifying activities, particularly in highly coveted coastal areas. History has shown that when a resource disappears, whether naturally or accidentally, it leads to technical changes or regulatory provisions which can have a direct and immediate effect on the survival of these small communities.

This situation can be seen on islands today, whether in the field of tourism, where accidental (oil spills, etc.) or economic (less spending power, etc.) causes are at play, or more structurally speaking, in fisheries, where stock depletion affects the activity and through it, all the territory's dynamics.

- ***ESIN highlights the need to protect marine environments. The identity of small islands is steeped in the maritime dimension. On these territories, identity and the economy (traditional fisheries, merchant navy, etc.) are closely linked. This makes communities fragile with respect to economic and structural changes. Maintaining permanent inhabitants and activities that respect marine resources on islands is a means to preserve biodiversity and ecosystems on a European scale under good conditions.***
- ***To fit into the integrated management approach highlighted by the European Commission, protecting the marine environment must involve the islands and islanders, acting as sentries in the framework of local management.***

2.3 REMAINING AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY

How can a European Marine Related Research Strategy be developed to further deepen our knowledge and promote new technologies?

What mechanisms can best turn knowledge into income and jobs?

In what ways should stakeholders be involved?

Small islands have to innovate to meet the various challenges that arise from their insularity (being hard to access in terms of transport, but also with respect to services, jobs, training, energy, water supply, etc.).

Their geographical features lend themselves beautifully to pilot projects. Being somewhat remote and having a small population, small size and clear physical boundaries are all factors that enable the true potential of new technologies to be assessed. This has been demonstrated by initiatives set up on some islands, dealing with telecommunications, energy,

aquaculture and so on. They deserve the active support that some countries, such as Ireland, are already providing.

At the heart of the oceans, small islands are also the perfect place to set up outposts for Research and Development institutes or the European Centre of Excellence for knowledge of the sea and oceans suggested by the EuDA. They could take advantage of the finely honed knowledge islanders have of the marine environment surrounding them.

In addition, creating relevant databases could fill some statistical gaps that prevent small islands from clearly anticipating how their territories and the marine environment around them will change and develop.

- **ESIN highlights the fact that islands can play a role as outposts for new technologies for energy and biotechnologies, adding to knowledge about the marine environment while opportunely creating skilled jobs there.**
- **Islands have interesting potential for innovation in fields like aquaculture, marine GIS, etc.) But to be utilized and developed, this potential requires significant long-term investments in both facilities and research.**

2.4 INNOVATION UNDER CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

What further steps should the EU take to mitigate and adapt to climate change in the marine environment?

How can innovative offshore renewable energy technologies be promoted and implemented?

What is needed to realise the potential benefits of blue biotechnology?

Islands are particularly vulnerable to changes due to global warming. Periods of drought and water shortages, warming of marine waters and changes in marine resources and fauna, frequency of storm events, the rise in sea level and coastal erosion all have consequences on islands and their economies.

These direct relationships between islands and global warming present an obvious scientific interest for Europe.

- **Insularity can more directly reveal the many stakes, especially in terms of environment and energy, in play on a European or even global scale. ESIN believes that small islands therefore have a scientific and educational interest that can contribute to the drawing up of strategies that go beyond European borders, as suggested by the European Commission.**
- **In addition, ESIN emphasises the fact that any initiative taken must ensure the protection of the interests of communities living there, in the midst of the ocean.**

Energy supply issues are nothing new for islands. Their technical choices must take account of the various elements (specific geographical characteristics related to insularity, costs in capital investments and operation of facilities paid by authorities who must cope with strong seasonal swings, impacts on fragile environments, risks of vagaries, technical breakdowns, being dependent on a single supplier, etc.)

Innovations in the field of stand-alone renewable energy sources can be interesting alternatives for island areas where favourable conditions often prevail (steady winds, sunshine, waves, etc.).

And because people are limiting their energy and fuel consumption, small islands are also nearby destinations that provide a real change of scene.

- **Island areas are a good place to develop renewable energies. Setting up pilot projects there presents a scientific interest and enables the large investment costs that island authorities generally cannot shoulder to be factored in.**

The immediate proximity to marine resources means that small islands are an ideal base location to develop research centres on “blue biotechnologies”. Setting up research centres could contribute to the stability of small islands by providing skilled jobs and new sources of income.

2.5 DEVELOPING EUROPE’S MARITIME SKILLS AND EXPANDING SUSTAINABLE MARITIME EMPLOYMENT

How can the decline in the number of Europeans entering certain maritime professions be reversed and the safety and attractiveness of jobs ensured?

The decrease noted in the number of seafarers in Europe is also seen on the level of small islands. Of course the populations are smaller, but their proportion and social role in island communities reflect the importance of seafarers and the need to protect maritime employment on a larger scale.

In the fisheries sector, jobs have become less attractive due to numerous environmental uncertainties (allocation of fishing rights for small fleets based on islands, inadequate harbour facilities and infrastructures limiting added value to products, etc.) and are now threatened. And yet, these jobs are a structuring factor in balancing small island areas, since they supply permanent jobs and enable resources to be protected by using traditional and small-scale fisheries methods which are environmentally friendly.

The shipping sector also concerns small islands. Transport quality is vital, because it is like "lifelines" linking the islands to the mainland. Transport activities are also a significant source of permanent jobs for island communities. However, the rules of free competition (calls for tenders) imposed on local companies can threaten this link and the related jobs.

- **Guaranteeing the sustainability of maritime jobs requires three levels of action:**
 - **innovation which can lead to diversification of activities like aquaculture, create skilled jobs and offer careers to young islanders. Innovation entails reliable studies on each area's potential and better access to training for local populations.**
 - **adapting the legislation to allow support for investments in SMEs and VSEs and keep jobs safe in these areas subjected to major constraints arising from insularity (limited resources, difficult accessibility, distorted markets, limited mobility and fewer possibilities for re-training and redeployment).**
 - **financial support for local authorities to guarantee the facilities and infrastructures needed to maintain and develop fishing and aquaculture activities on islands.**

2.7 THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

How could the regulatory framework for the maritime economy be improved to avoid unintended and contradictory impacts on maritime goals?

How should the common fisheries policy be further developed to achieve its aim of sustainable fisheries?

Major European sectoral policies have an impact on island communities in terms of fisheries, agriculture, transport, trade and business, the environment... and can provide significant leverage. However, an approach which consists in applying a single, one- size-

fits-all rule can also have undesirable effects on small island territories. The example of restricted fishing rights for small scale fisheries reveals the disastrous and disproportionate effects some policies can have on a local level. Another telling example in the field of transport has been the opening of the market on maritime links to islands.

- **Competition, considered as the « key mechanism for providing rational market incentives» in the Green Paper, must imperatively take account of island specificities.**
- **More generally speaking, in regulatory terms, the measures adopted should be adapted to geographical realities and show flexibility with respect to them.**

In the case of small islands, this particularly means:

- ***territory-based management of fishing rights to protect the interests of small island fisheries***
- ***higher funding levels for capital investments for island SMEs and VSEs***
- ***specific measures to protect islanders' interests in terms of shipping (island-mainland links).***