CPMR Response

to the European Commission Communication on a Sustainable Blue Economy

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Summary

The Commission’s communication setting out an agenda for the blue economy is a positive and comprehensive proposal that brings together all the elements necessary to achieve a sustainable blue economy. The document includes many approaches and actions that chime with CPMR values and messaging. For example, the Communication refers to a role for local and regional authorities, for a holistic, ecosystem approach, and to the importance of working within sea basins where there are common needs, and it promises the involvement of public authorities in the co-design and co-implementation of solutions. It recognises the role for cohesion policy and smart specialisation strategies in achieving a sustainable blue economy, and cites key sectors to coastal regions, such as tourism. The Communication also highlights the challenge to ensure women are not left out of the new opportunities created by the development of blue economy sectors and the rapid pace of change. It advances the potential of local drivers of sustainability and pledges to support coastal regions in the recovery with, for example, a Blueprint for Local Green Deals.

The Communication recognises the need to involve cross-cutting policy areas and to find the synergies between existing policies and strategies, including the Adaptation Strategy, Farm to Fork, the Data Strategy, State aid rules, the Industrial Strategy, and the Renewable Energy Directive, all of which are relevant to CPMR member regions and to which the CPMR has contributed input.

There are some potentially interesting future opportunities cited in the Communication, such as the creation of a Blue Forum where stakeholders will come together to support the decarbonisation of maritime sectors.

Although the Communication is positive and reflects well the interests of CPMR members, it lacks detail on how the ambition will be implemented. It requires clarity on how local and regional authorities will be involved and some indication of guarantees. Below are some CPMR messages to be reinforced in response to the Communication.
• Regions are a key governance level and are significant actors. Involving regional and local authorities will be essential to a sustainable blue economy, as regions keep policy relevant to the territory. Regions can mobilise existing funds, for which many have a management and coordination role, such as the ESIF, to better integrate the funds for the blue economy. Many local and regional authorities have competences in areas linked to sustainable blue economy, such as skills, education, innovation, SME support, even ports policy, and thus can act directly.

• There is little detail on how regions will be involved in some of the initiatives proposed by the Commission in the Communication, thus we stress that regions should be a pivotal stakeholder of the Blue Forum, as regions are essential for gathering key users of the sea and coastal areas and in organising space in coastal areas.

• Equally, and for those same reasons, regions must not be sidelined in discussions around maritime spatial planning, which is a key element of developing a sustainable blue economy. The design and implementation of maritime spatial plans should nurture all the policy developments on sustainable blue economy and should be carried out within the framework of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance. Activities on the coast impact the sea, and activities at sea can impact profoundly coastal communities.

• EU leaders must ensure there is a clear territorial dimension to address specific territorial needs. This can only be provided with the essential and permanent participation of local and regional authorities.

• Thus, it is of paramount importance to a sustainable blue economy that EU funds are fit-for-purpose. Funds must give enough leeway for regions to spend money as they see fit to address the sectors where there is most need to affect change. This will require a better integration of funds.

• The blue economy cuts across many sectors. This is also evident in the EU Industrial Strategy, which does not include maritime industries as a stand-alone industrial ecosystem, but rather features maritime industries in a number of ecosystems, such as Food (fisheries and aquaculture), Mobility (Shipbuilding), Renewable Energy (off-shore/MRE). The CPMR can complete the picture of funding blue economy investments through the priorities, competences, and capacities of regional governments, particularly as regards the use of ESIF.

• Furthermore, the CPMR supports the Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems (CCRE-S3) thematic area of the Industrial Modernisation Platform, led by three CPMR member regions, and feels it is a model that could be applied in support of a sustainable blue economy. CCRE-S3 aims to stimulate new insights and opportunities related to cultural and creative experiences for local communities and residents, through public-private investments. It focuses on four Cultural and Creative Industry-related groups of professions and could also be applied to blue economy-related professionals, such as marine biologists, maritime historians and archaeologists, MSP planners, fishermen, and traditional shipbuilders.
• Regions are contributing to the interconnection of value chains to answer the challenges of specific sectors. For example, between shipyard companies and marine energy producers, or between shipbuilding and fisheries. Regional and interregional clusters possess precious know-how and should be supported with adequate financing. The RIS3 framework must facilitate synergies between investments co-financed by the regions and EU centrally-managed programmes.

• Maritime regions are vital actors in terms of the delivery of EU funds supporting investment, such as the ESI funds, which play a vital role in fostering the blue economy. Therefore, regions must be involved in the preparation and implementation of Next Generation EU. The CPMR is concerned by the lack of territorial governance in the RRF and REACTEU, which could hamper the contribution of the Blue Economy to a sustainable recovery.

• The stronger the role given to the European Semester as the framework through which investment priorities under the ‘Next Generation EU’ recovery instrument, and EU programmes and policies (cohesion, climate, European Pillar of Social Rights, etc.), the stronger the CPMR demand that the European Semester dialogue be based on partnership and multilevel governance. This is crucial to ensure that the investments supported by the EU recovery instruments are close to the actual needs on the ground, and we strongly believe that regions are in the best place to make that link.

• It is encouraging to see the importance given to sea-basin strategies in the Communication and recognition that common challenges require common solutions. However, it is important to not make too much of a separation between sea basin strategies and macro regional strategies with a strong maritime focus, such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, which have strong maritime pillars. As this Communication testifies, the blue is a vital element in achieving the green, and thus attention must be given to the concept of a maritime macro-region.

• It is disappointing that only Outermost Regions are recognised in the Communication for their vulnerability to climate change. All peripheral and maritime regions are particularly vulnerable to climate change and are dealing with its effects on a daily basis. The role that regions play in delivering the European Green Deal objectives in terms of sustainability and climate action targets must be recognised.

• The key role that islands and outermost regions have as innovation laboratories must not be overlooked. A sea basin approach will be fundamental to foster the uptake of offshore renewables in all the sea basins and to promote territorial cohesion more broadly to achieve a sustainable blue economy.

• As might be expected, the fisheries sector features highly in the strategy towards a sustainable blue economy. However, we insist on the fact that while some measures may seem positive in principle, they are complicated on the ground and are difficult to implement, such as the Landing Obligation, thus full implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy should not be seen as a workable end goal or the solution to the challenges of the sector. Furthermore, the
Roadmap on the Action Plan to Preserve the Fisheries Resources as proposed in the Communication focusses entirely on the impact of fisheries activities on the marine environment, completely neglecting the environmental impact of other activities, such as oil spills or marine litter. This would also be an addition to existing regulations that already provide a strong framework to ensure sustainable fisheries practices.

- The CPMR supports the concept of ports as hubs of the blue economy, providing the basis for an ecosystem of blue innovative businesses. This approach is all about empowering local competencies with global links, which is key for peripheral and maritime regions. The deployment of a blue accelerator for the sustainable blue economy in peripheral and maritime regions, in partnership with an investor community, could lead to real benefits for the blue economies of regions. This will support SMEs and start-ups to develop the innovation necessary to keep up with and to drive forward the transition.

- We stress the need for the Strategy to support both economically and in terms of expertise and know-how the areas with untapped blue economy potential. At the same time, the implementation of the Strategy should ensure that front runners can develop their leading role to the benefit of Europe as a whole.

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) represents more than 150 regional authorities from 24 countries across Europe and beyond. Organised in Geographical Commissions, the CPMR works to ensure that a balanced territorial development is at the heart of the European Union and its policies.

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