In November 2020 the North Sea Commission adopted the North Sea Region 2030 strategy, defining the agenda for its activities in the coming decade. The strategy identifies four priority areas: A productive and sustainable North Sea, A climate-neutral North Sea Region, A connected North Sea Region and A smart North Sea Region.

Travel was still restricted because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and all meetings of thematic groups and the Executive Committee have been held online.

A webinar format called ‘North Sea Talks’ was introduced in the spring of 2021 in order to reach out to the thematic groups and beyond with information on topics from the strategy.
1. North Sea Region 2030 Strategy priorities

The North Sea Region 2030 strategy is implemented through an action plan that will be revised by the Annual Business Meeting every two years. The strategy consists of four strategic priorities, where one thematic group is responsible for each priority. The activities and latest policy developments are presented below.

1.1. A productive and sustainable North Sea

This section is a report on the priority “A productive and sustainable North Sea” and the Marine Resources Group.

Key topics

1. Healthy marine environment
   
   Goal 2030: Lower emissions and reduce disposal of waste into the North Sea

2. Maritime spatial planning
   
   Goal 2030: Better coordinated MSP across national borders and administrative levels

3. Sustainable aquaculture and fisheries
   
   Goal 2030: Sustainable supply-chain in fisheries and aquaculture; Development of new products.

4. Sustainable blue economy
   
   Goal 2030: Higher levels of skills and more career opportunities in sustainable blue economy sectors; The North Sea Region is a global front-runner in sustainable blue economy innovation.

The Marine Resources Group

Erik Kursetgjerde, Møre og Romsdal (NO), was the Chair of the Marine Resources Group until August 2021. A new Chair, David Aitchison from Aberdeenshire (UK), was elected in October 2021. Henk Staghouwer from North Netherlands/Groningen (NL) and Otto Kjær Larsen from Nordjylland (DK) are Vice Chairs. Yolanda Schmal, Noord-Holland (NL), was the group’s advisor until March 2021 when she was replaced by Hannelore Maelfait from West-Vlaanderen (BE).

Group meetings and activities

- 17 March 2021 – Marine Resources Group meeting, online
  
  On the agenda, there was an update and reflection on the two resolutions which were approved during the Annual Business Meeting 2020. First the resolution on circular economy was discussed. The NSC resolution on “reuse of resources from sewage” was a joint approach, initiated by the MRG and in close cooperation with the Energy and Climate Change Group and the Smart Regions Group. The second resolution on safe cargo shipping was presented and there was a discussion on the best way forward. The most important point of the agenda was the reflection of State Secretary Jens Frølich Holte, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway on Norwegian maritime policy and conclusions from the High Level Panel for A Sustainable Ocean Economy.
• **24th of June 2021** – North Sea Talks – Waste Free Rivers
A digital conference was organised in cooperation with KIMO, the Province of Noord-Holland and the city of Zaanstad on how local, regional and national levels can initiate change and create an integrated multi-level governance approach to the marine litter issue. A large part of the litter at sea enters the sea from rivers, so cleaning rivers is an important contribution in the fight against marine litter. A video recording of the event is available here and the presentations here.

• **29 October 2021** – Marine Resources Group meeting, online
A representative from the DG Mare presented the European Commission’s new communication on the blue economy. The BONUS secretariat reported on the strategic research and innovation agenda for the Baltic and North Sea Region.

Update on the development in the EU, CPMR and North Sea Region related to the priority area

• **New Interreg NSR programme**
A priority concerning better maritime governance in the North Sea was introduced in the draft programme. The priority is about strengthening cross-sectoral networks that facilitate multi-level marine governance. The priority also encourage to increase the capacity in marine stakeholders to engage in transnational governance processes.

• **Communication on Blue Economy**
On 17 May 2021, the European Commission adopted the Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU “A Green Recovery for the Blue Economy – Transforming the EU’s Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future”. This strategy sets out a detailed agenda for the sector to transition from “Blue Growth” to a sustainable blue economy, which drives the green transition, replacing unchecked expansion with clean, climate-proof and sustainable activities.

• **A strategy for the marine environment in the North East-Atlantic**
This new 10-year strategy was adopted by the ministerial meeting of OSPAR in October 2021. OSPAR is also preparing a new regional action plan for marine litter (RAP-ML) for the period from 2022 to 2030.

• **North Seas collaboration group on maritime spatial planning**
All North Sea states have or will soon have one or several maritime spatial plans for their respective territories. In order to increase the collaboration between the countries, a group is being set up by the national governments who will be represented from ministries or authorities. This initiative emanates from the NorthSEE project, where the NSC was involved through the Province of Noord-Holland. The NSC is invited as an observer to the group.

• **Dutch initiative for a sea-basin strategy**
At the European Maritime Day in May, the Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management organised a seminar titled ‘Is it time for an EU North Sea basin strategy?’ The North Sea is the only European sea basin without a strategy. Would the development in blue economy, offshore energy, biodiversity ambitions and Brexit reality be reasons to rethink and call for a holistic EU agreed strategy? NSC Executive Secretary Magnus Engelbrektsson had the chance to comment at the seminar. He recalled that a sea-basin or macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region has been an important question for the North Sea Commission for years and still is.
1.2. A climate-neutral North Sea Region

This section is a report on the key activities from the NSC action plan 2020-2022 priority “A climate-neutral North Sea Region” and the Energy and Climate Change Group.

Key topics

1. Renewable energy/alternative fuels
   Goal 2030: More renewable energy is produced and used in the North Sea Region

2. Energy efficiency
   Goal 2030: Energy efficiency improvements are researched, tested and adopted by industry, business, government and citizens

3. Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage and natural carbon sinks
   Goal 2030: CCUS solutions are utilised in the North Sea and across the regions; Increased afforestation and restoration of degraded ecosystems.

4. Climate adaptation
   Goal 2030: The North Sea region is climate ready, adaptable and resilient to climate change

The Energy and Climate Change Group

Jimmy Gray, Highland Council (UK), was the Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Group. Jon-Olav Strand from Agder (NO) and Tjisse Stelpstra from Northern Netherlands (NL) were Vice Chairs. At the ExCom meeting in October 2021 Tjisse Stelpstra was elected Chair of the group and Elisabet Babic from Halland (SE) was elected Vice Chair. Claudia Cowie, Aberdeenshire (UK), has been the group’s advisor, replaced during a maternity leave under parts of 2020-2021 by her colleague Tara Murray. At the ExCom meeting in October 2021, Poppy Kalesi from Rogaland (NO) was appointed new advisor from January 2022.

Group meetings and activities

- **29th of September 2020** – Energy and Climate Change Group meeting, online

- **8th of December 2020** – Energy and Climate Change Group meeting, online
  Focus of the meeting: ECCG priorities, actions, meetings and webinars. Attending regions: Aberdeenshire, Agder, Midtjylland, Niedersachsen, Noor Nederland, Syddanmark, Västra Götaland, Vestfold & Telemark, Vestland, Zuid Holland.
• 16th of February 2021 – Energy and Climate Change Group meeting, online

• 17th of March 2021 – North Sea Talk on ’Electric Region Agder’, webinar, online
Agder is working with a plan for electrification of the region. The vision is to create the first all-electric region based on 100% clean energy by 2030. The webinar presented the project and different initiatives focusing on both content and methodology. In addition, it was discussed how to bring different partners together to create a joint effort towards the outcomes encouraging more input from businesses and local communities. There were presentations on Electric Region Agder, Langemyr Technology and Transport HUB, Electrification of Port of Kristiansand, and Making the first climate budget of Agder County. So far there are around 30 projects running, and 50 companies/institutions that are taking part. More information can be found here: https://electricregionagder.com/media/zpkcb2cw/era-1-slides-engelsk.pdf

• 10th of June 2021 – Wind energy in Lower Saxony, webinar, online
The aim of the webinar was to shed light on the wind energy sector in Lower Saxony. Specifically, the focus was on the regional policy framework, the current state of implementation of the German Renewable Energy Sources Act and selected lighthouse projects and initiatives developed so far in the region. The webinar presented some of the newest insights of the EU research policy in the field of wind energy. Based on that, new opportunities but also challenges were addressed related to the question on how the ambitious targets of carbon neutrality could be met. There was then an opportunity for other representatives of the NSC regions to share their experience in the wind energy sector in order to foster a closer cooperation in this field.

• 16th of September 2021 – Hydrogen Energy, webinar, online
This webinar was organized by members in Aberdeen and Northern Netherlands. There were presentations on Aberdeen’s journey from hydrogen pilots to developing Scotland’s first commercially scalable, investable, hydrogen production and distribution facility, making use of the region’s renewable resources to provide green hydrogen. The presentation from Northern Netherlands was on their Hydrogen Investment Plan and critical success elements of hydrogen production plant and the industrial application of green hydrogen as a feedstock in Groningen Seaports. Speakers from different projects in the 2 regions also presented on: the Dolphyn Project (hydrogen production on a floating wind platform with the hydrogen transported to shore via pipeline); Gasunie Project (Strategic analysis on transport of hydrogen sharing experience with scaling up projects of hydrogen production in northern Netherlands and integrated energy hubs); hydrogen applications in Northern Netherlands in the residential area of Hoogeveen; and lastly Holthausen presented on 2 projects they are involved in - the production of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and how to build a hydrogen fueling network.

Update on the development in the EU, CPMR and North Sea Region related to the priority area

• The European Green Deal and various associated energy and climate change policies are related to the ECCG priority areas, including the proposals stated in the EU Fit for 55-package. As part of the European Green Deal, with the European Climate Law, the EU has set itself a binding target of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. As an intermediate step the EU has set an emissions reduction target of at least 55% by 2030. The EU is now working on the revision
of its climate, energy and transport-related legislation under the 'Fit for 55 package' in order to align current laws with the 2030 and 2050 targets. Several new proposals are also included in the package.

Considering the European Green Deal, Fit for 55-package and other European energy and climate change policies, the following points relate to the ECCG key action areas:

- EU adaptation strategy
- A revision of the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS), establishing a separate emission trading system for road transport and buildings
- A revision of the regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF)
- A revision of the renewable energy directive, including National renewable energy action plans 2020, and EU strategy on offshore renewable energy
- A recast of the energy efficiency directive, including EU energy efficiency targets 2020 and 2030
- A revision of the directive on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure
- A revision of the energy tax directive
- A social climate fund
- An EU forest strategy

Energy and Climate Change in the Interreg North Sea Region Programme 2021 – 2027

- The new Interreg-programme consist of policies that are related to the ECCG priority areas, including:
  - A green transition in the North Sea Region – Promoting energy efficiency measures
  - A climate resilient North Sea Region
    - Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention & disaster resilience
    - Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution

1.3. A connected North Sea Region

This section is a report on the priority “A connected North Sea Region” and the Transport Group.

Key topics

1. Transnational Accessibility
   
   Goal 2030: The accessibility to markets, jobs and services is satisfactory for people and businesses; Good connections to the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks and improved conditions for maritime transport

2. Clean shipping, climate-neutral and inclusive transport
   
   Goal 2030: Significant reduction of the carbon footprint of transport, including shipping and aviation; Well-functioning transport services are available in all kind of territories and affordable for all groups in society

3. Intelligent transport solutions
Goal 2030: A coherent regulatory framework related to intelligent transport solutions at the EU level has been adopted; Regional and local authorities have the capacity to handle and benefit from new transport solutions

The Transport Group

Preben Friis-Hauge, Syddanmark (DK), chairs the Transport Group, with John Reynolds, Aberdeen City (UK), and Kåre Pettersen, Vestfold (NO) as Vice Chairs. Jon Halvard Eide, Vest-Agder (NO), is the advisor of the group.

Group meetings and activities

- **20th of January 2021**
  The political chairmanship, the Advisor and members of the task holder teams met on 20 January to report on ongoing work and to plan future activities and events.

- **11th of March 2021** – North Sea Talks webinar on Clean Shipping & ports, Intelligent Transport Solutions and Transeuropean Transport Network (TEN-T), online
  Apart from the topics mentioned in the headline, the event also heard presentations of the new EU strategy for smart and sustainable mobility, and of the thematic cluster on transport in Horizon Europe. Some 40 people from NSC member regions, the CPMR secretariat, Interreg projects, universities and interest organisations attended the webinar. The presentations from the webinar is available on the NSC homepage.

- **12th of March 2021** – Ordinary Business Meeting, online
  The meeting addressed the key topics in the transport chapter of the NSR 2030 action plan. The first version of the report on intelligent and innovative transport solutions was presented and the meeting discussed how to follow-up the report. The meeting also discussed the draft response to the EU consultation on the impact assessment for the revision of the TEN-T regulation and mandated the TEN-T team to finalise and submit a response according to the guidelines provided by the group.

- **30th of June 2021** – Ordinary Business Meeting, online
  The participants exchanged information on recent transport developments (plans, strategies, infrastructure projects and investments, regulatory schemes etc.), in the member regions. The reports delivered under this item demonstrate that many initiatives on zero/low emission and intelligent transport solutions are going on among NSC members.

  The meeting also discussed how to use the report on innovative and intelligent transport solutions which was published in March 2021. Relevant areas for use are to link examples in the report up to the EU strategy for smart mobility and use the examples as a basis for upcoming calls in EU programmes.

  Furthermore, the meeting heard an update on the status for the planning of a joint Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) – NSC event on the TEN-T revision to be held in Brussels in February 2022. The purpose of this event is to present common interests and positions on the TEN-T revision to Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the EU Council (member states).
• **5th of October 2021** - Smart Regions Group and Transport Group joint webinar on smart specialisation and renewable energy in the transport sector, online (see below under Smart North Sea Region)

• **28-29th of October 2021** – Ordinary Business Meeting, Herøya, Vestfold og Telemark (NO)
  This was the first physical meeting in 20 months and attracted members from 10 regions. One day was devoted to study visits in the Grenland area, one of Norway’s main industrial hubs with the ambition to become the world’s first climate-positive industrial region by 2040. The site is dominated by fertilizer production and other chemical process industry. The climate ambitions will be achieved through a number of measures including carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS), electrolyser for hydrogen production and circular economy initiatives.

  There was a presentation of Yara Birkeland, the world’s first autonomous and electric containership, which will be in operation in 2022, carrying goods from Herøya to the nearby ports in Brevik and Larvik, and thereby moving large amounts of freight from road to sea. The group also visited the NorCem cement factory in Brevik, where a full-scale carbon capture facility will be in operation from 2024. The facility is part of the Norwegian government’s Langskip project, where CO2 will be transported by ship to West Norway and pumped into a storage below the seafloor.

  The meeting also included an ordinary group meeting with reports on ongoing work. Three more member regions attended this part of the meeting online.

• **TEN-T Team**
  The team has met regularly in the reporting period to develop and finalise the action plan for the promotion of NSC priorities in the context of the TEN-T revision. The team has developed a response to the EU consultation on the TEN-T revision, adopted by the Executive Committee in April, and will arrange a joint event with the CPMR BSC on the same issue in Brussels early next year.

• **Team for clean and intelligent transport and shipping**
  The team has been working to finalise the first version of the report on the mapping of innovative and intelligent transport solutions which was presented at the group meeting on 11–12 March 2021. The report proposes that regions could and should play a role in policy development around innovative mobility solutions, in order to ensure that the innovation and new technologies are in line with the societal goals of economic, social and environmental sustainability, not at least ensuring a transition to a zero-emission, safe and efficient transport sector.

Update on the development in the EU, CPMR and North Sea Region related to the priority area

**Transport policy developments at EU level**

• In 2020 the European Commission presented its ‘Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy’ together with an Action Plan of 82 initiatives that will guide the work for the next four years. A main message is that the future transport system must be green, exploit the opportunities offered by digitalisation and become more resilient against climate change and pandemics. It is furthermore crucial that mobility is available and affordable for all, that rural and remote regions are better connected, accessible for persons with reduced mobility and persons with disabilities.

• Several proposals introduced in the European Fit for 55-package are targeting the transport sector, including:
- To phase out free emission allowances for aviation and align with the global Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) and to include shipping emissions for the first time in the EU ETS.
- Introduce a separate new emissions trading system for fuel distribution for road transport and buildings.
- The Effort Sharing Regulation assigns strengthened emissions reduction targets to each Member State for road and domestic maritime transport.
- Stronger CO2 emissions standards for cars and vans requiring average emissions of new cars to come down by 55% from 2030 and 100% from 2035 compared to 2021 levels. As a result, all new cars registered as of 2035 will be zero-emission.
- The revised Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) will require Member States to expand charging capacity in line with zero-emission car sales, and to install charging and fuelling points at regular intervals on major highways.
- This regulation also requires that aircraft and ships have access to clean electricity supply in major ports and airports.
- The ReFuelEU Aviation Initiative will oblige fuel suppliers to blend increasing levels of sustainable aviation fuels in jet fuel taken on-board at EU airports, including synthetic low carbon fuels, known as e-fuels.
- Similarly, the FuelEU Maritime Initiative will stimulate the uptake of sustainable maritime fuels and zero-emission technologies by setting a maximum limit on the greenhouse gas content of energy used by ships calling at European ports.

Public consultation on the impact assessment for the revision of the TEN-T regulation
- In December 2020, the European Commission published an inception impact assessment and a roadmap as a basis/guidance for the revised guidelines and regulation. The impact assessment focuses on facilitating further digitalisation, scaling-up roll-out of charging and refuelling infrastructure, increasing quality requirements (also at the comprehensive network), stronger integration with urban transport planning and strengthening resilience and preparedness in relation to climate change and pandemics etc. The CPMR submitted an input to the roadmap in December, with contributions from its geographical commissions – incl. from the NSC Transport group. In February 2021, the EC opened a public consultation which forms part of the impact assessment that will underpin the legislative proposal for a revised TEN-T Regulation. The objective of this consultation is to ensure that, in addition to the organisations directly involved in the TEN-T policy, other stakeholder groups and the general public are provided with the possibility to express their views on the topic.

Transport in the Interreg North Sea Region Programme 2021 – 2027
- Programme Preparation Group (PPG) has decided not to include the policy objective “A more connected Europe” in the new programme. Transport will be supported under the green priority. The corresponding specific objective reads “promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility, as part of transition to a net zero carbon economy”. Projects funded under this specific objective will:
  - Support sustainable and multimodal initiatives, including mobility of people and the supply chains of the connected hinterland areas in the North Sea Region (NSR).
  - Promote climate neutral transport modes, contribute to carbon-effective mobility and encourage the demonstration and use of available or newly developed green transport solutions.
- Promote sustainable mobility between peripheral, coastal areas and metropolitan areas
- Focus on public awareness raising in order to effect a behaviour change towards sustainable modes of mobility, willingness to use public transport, bike- and carsharing instead of individual car use.

1.4. **A smart North Sea Region**

This section is a report on the priority “A smart North Sea Region” and the Smart Regions Group.

**Key topics**

1. **Smart specialisation strategies**
   *Goal 2030: Economic diversification ensures viable jobs in all parts of the region; New and innovative industries based on marine resources, sustainable energy, sustainable tourism, circular economy and digitalisation*

2. **Skills/competences and mobility of researchers, students and the work force**
   *Goal 2030: High employment rates thanks to high innovation capacity, a skilled workforce, successful inclusion of migrants and other disadvantaged people*

3. **Circular use of resources**
   *Goal 2030: Circular economy methods and techniques are widely adopted in society; Economic growth based on sustainability and climate change mitigation should be among the highest in Europe.*

**The Smart Regions Group**

Beate Johnsen, Agder (NO), chairs the group. Birgitta Adolfsson, Västra Götaland (SE), and Philip Bell, Aberdeen City (UK) are Vice Chairs. Dawn Syvertsen, Vestfold og Telemark (NO), is the group’s advisor.

**Group meetings and activities**

- **2nd of December 2020** – Smart Regions Group, webinar, online
  
  Webinar on the topic of “Tourism – Ways of adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic”. Lower Saxony was the hosting partner and coordinator. Through the sharing of best practices and experiences, the participants learned how enterprises, local authorities and tourism organisations cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, information was shared on the experience of current challenges, government schemes and innovative solutions developed by the stakeholders so far. There were regional examples from Germany, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and an invited special guest from Hubei Province in China. NECSTouR from Brussels provided a perspective of the network of European Regions for a sustainable and competitive tourism. Please find here a [report](#) from the webinar.
• **25th of March 2021** - North Sea Talks webinar, online  
Webinar focusing on the European Education Area (EEA), the new Erasmus+ program and the potential for cooperation between NSC member regions. The following topics were addressed: How can the EEA provide a common framework for the education sector throughout Europe? How can member regions use Erasmus+ projects as strategic tools for working towards their goals for the sector? A presentation was given by a representative from the EU-commission on the new Erasmus+ program and the potential for NSC member regions. There were also presentations from NSC member regions in Sweden (Västra Götaland), Germany (Weser-Ems) and Norway (Vestfold og Telemark and Trøndelag). The presentations showed several different types of Erasmus+ projects from elementary school, to vocational education and higher education. The NSC Youth group was also represented and expressed their views on the potential of collaborating in education between NSC member regions.

• **29th of April 2021** - Smart Regions Group Ordinary Business Meeting, online  
The focus of the meeting was to update group members on the work of the focus areas and provide information about upcoming meetings and activities, as well as to involve our members more in this work. The aim of the meeting was also to strategically discuss concerns on the SRG action plan activities for 2021 and its alignment with the North Sea Strategy 2030.

• **5th of October 2021** - Smart Regions Group and Transport Group joint webinar on smart specialisation and renewable energy in the transport sector, online  
The webinar addressed the transition towards a zero emission and climate neutral future in the context of Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability (S4) & innovation and sustainable investments. Several speakers held presentations which focused on the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) Concept, EU Taxonomy with criteria for sustainable investments, and showcased best practice examples from North Sea Commission member regions of S3 priorities on renewable energy solutions in the transport sector (hydrogen, electric vehicles & ferries, CCS - Carbon capture and storage).

**Update on the development in the EU, CPMR and North Sea Region related to the priority area**

• A modernised legislation on batteries was introduced in the Circular Economy Action Plan, as a part of the European Green Deal. Batteries should, according to the new legislation, become sustainable, high-performing and safe all along their entire life-cycle. The legislation affect the third key action area, concerning circular use of resources.

• The European Education Area (EEA) seeks to foster cooperation between the EU and member states in terms of further development to enrich the quality and inclusiveness of national education and training systems. When adopted, EEA affect the second key action area, concerning skills/competences and mobility of researchers, students and the work force.
2. Other activities

2.1. Annual Business Meeting

The 2020 Annual Business Meeting was held online in November. President Kerstin Brunnström, Västra Götaland (SE) and Vice President Andreas Lervik, Viken (NO) were both re-elected for a new two-year mandate. Councillor Peter Argyle, Aberdeenshire (UK), continued in his second year as a Vice President.

The meeting adopted the North Sea Region 2030 Strategy and the 2020-2022 Action plan. Two resolutions were adopted, one on safe cargo shipping and one on circular economy and the reuse of resources from sewage.

2.2. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee (ExCom) met in online in March and October 2021. Members of the Executive Committee in 2020-2021 were, in addition to the President and Vice Presidents, Councillors Elisabet Babic (Halland, SE), Jean de Bethune (West-Vlaanderen, BE), Marianne Chesak (Rogaland, NO), Antje Grotheer (Bremen, DE), Nienke Homan (Noord-Nederland/Groningen, NL), Carole Mulroney (Southend-on-Sea, England), Otto Kjær Larsen (Nordjylland, DK) and John Reynolds (Aberdeen City, Scotland). Chairs of the thematic groups have attended and reported in the meetings.

2.3. President and Vice Presidents

Kerstin Brunnström, Västra Götaland (SE), is the NSC President. Andreas Lervik, Viken (NO) and Peter Argyle, Aberdeenshire (UK) are Vice Presidents.

The President has, in addition to leading ABM and ExCom meetings, represented the NSC in the CPMR Political Bureau and in external contacts. The President and Vice Presidents have also attended meetings of the NSC thematic groups.

2.4. Secretariat

The NSC Secretariat in 2020-2021 was hosted by Västra Götaland (SE) and led by Executive Secretary Magnus Engelbrektsson. The position as Assistant Executive Secretary was held by Anneli Weinholt until June 2021 and later by Robin Stenström.

2.5. Youth involvement

Following the decision to involve young people in the work of the NSC, there have been several meetings of young representatives of member regions, coordinated by youth advisor Esme Leitch, Highland.

On the 14th of November 2020, the NSC organised its first online youth conference, ‘Changing Tides and Making Waves’. The event was organised in partnership with the Northern Alliance, a regional
improvement collaborative in the north of Scotland and had around 60 attendees from 17 regions across the North Sea Region.

There was a range of speakers, panelists and workshop facilitators at the conference including NSC President Kerstin Brunnström, The Minister for Children and Young People in the Scottish Parliament – Maree Todd, The Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland- Bruce Adamson, a Director of the European Youth Parliament – Janis Fifka, Lead Officer at the Northern Alliance – Helen Budge and Moira Pezzetta from Young Feminist Europe as well as members of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

In the NSC session, facilitated by Magnus Engelbrektsson, NSC Executive Secretary, and Esme Leitch, NSC Youth Advisor, the young people attending were given an outline of the new strategy and invited to give their thoughts on how they can be involved with the work of the organisation as part of the ongoing youth participation project. A core group of representatives met virtually a couple of times and developed a proposal. The proposal is in short that NSC will have a Youth Advisory Committee, consisting of up to two representatives per member region, aged 14-24. The Committee will meet every two months virtually, and twice annually in person and they will be represented at ABM, ExCom, thematic group meetings and joint annual North Sea conference to provide a youth perspective on the work. The proposal was adopted by the Executive Committee in March 2020. A new Youth Meeting will take place back to back with the NSC ABM.

2.6. Member base

There was no change in the member base. The North Sea Commission has 27 member regions from Belgium, Denmark, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden (see map on page 2).

2.7. Annual conference

The Province of South Holland and the City of Rotterdam had kindly offered to host the NSC’s and Interreg NSR Programme’s annual conference in 2020. Due to the pandemic it was, however, decided to hold the conference online broadcasted from a studio in Aalborg. The conference, ‘Towards new horizons’, was held on the 10th of November 2020 and gathered almost 300 participants. NSC Executive Secretary Magnus Engelbrektsson presented the new North Sea Region 2030 Strategy and the head of the Interreg secretariat Christian Byrith gave a status report on the preparations of the Interreg programme for 2021-2027.

In 2021, the next joint annual conference will take place on the 24th of November in Bruges, West-Vlaanderen (BE).