Final Declaration
Adopted by the CPMR North Sea Commission Annual Business Meeting
23 May 2023

The regions of the CPMR North Sea Commission (NSC) met on 23 May 2023 for the 32\textsuperscript{nd} NSC Annual Business Meeting. On behalf of its members, the North Sea Commission wishes to convey the following messages:

Last year, the world started to get out of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine was in the beginning stage. The European Union is in a crucial phase with several crises on our continent; the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the climate crisis and rising prices of raw materials, food and energy.

The North Sea Region 2030 Strategy, adopted by the NSC, focuses on vital priority areas to ensure that our region continues to be a frontrunner and leader of innovation, in the green transition, to reach our commitments under the Paris Agreement, the goals of the EU Green Deal, to manage global competition and enable for a sustainable maritime development.

In order to reach our North Sea Region 2030 Strategy goals, regional cooperation and transnational projects are of utmost importance. This cooperation strengthens all of us and helps us to tackle the challenges we all face. The North Sea Commission would like to stress the importance of including all regions, so the entire North Sea Region benefits.

The NSC will continue its work in building strong relations between regions, so that we together are prepared to overcome all challenges. The North Sea Region Strategy 2030 will continue to guide the work of the NSC to create a prosperous region, which brings its citizens closer together.
To ensure a productive and sustainable North Sea, the NSC:

1. **Urges** all levels of government and relevant industry sectors to accelerate actions to reduce pollution of the North Sea, especially regarding the entire group of PFAS compounds. Together with KIMO the North Sea Commission urge National Governments of all North Sea countries to act in unison to impose a Europe-wide ban on the entire group of PFAS compounds. Research should be conducted into the wider impacts and behaviour of PFAS in the marine environment.

2. **Welcomes** the initiative from national governments to collaborate on integrated maritime spatial planning in the North Sea and the recognition of the role of the regions by the inclusion of the North Sea Commission in the collaboration structures. Taking into consideration that the North Sea is key for Europe’s fishing industries, coastal communities, renewable energy, transport, leisure and other activities that use the maritime space.

3. **Supports** the North Sea Fishing sector in their continuing achievements with greater sustainable fishing practises. The demands from many factors such as spatial squeeze, fuel costs, skilled labour shortages and alternative industries competing within the seas are all challenging. There are many developing opportunities to help address all of these challenges to continue providing a vital food source of blue protein from our seas.

4. **Welcomes** the shift towards a sustainable and resilient blue economy around the North Sea. A sustainable blue economy is essential to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal. The regions around the North Sea play a role in implementing policy and developing projects linked with research and innovation, that can help to push the sustainable blue economy forward. Both for the transition of the North Sea fishery and for the emerging maritime activities in the North Sea, the right training facilities, techniques, and skills must be present.

To ensure a climate-neutral North Sea Region, the NSC:

5. **Reiterates** its support for the Fit for 55 packages as a key enabler of a climate-neutral North Sea Region and welcomes the RePowerEU initiative as an initiative to decrease dependency on fossil fuels from Russia. Calls on the Council and European Parliament, as well as the governments of the UK and Norway, to recognise the important role of regions in implementing policy on the ground and democratically anchoring ambitious climate action among citizens by ensuring close collaboration between the NSC and other relevant Green Deal working groups.

6. **Welcomes** the European Commission’s framework for accelerated renewables deployment, including more efficient permitting procedures and state aid exemptions for projects in EU strategic sectors, in order for Europe to be competitive towards global powers like the US and China. This is for example concerning the production and use of green hydrogen, in line with the Hydrogen Accelerator and not only limited to large-scale projects (IPCEI).

7. **Calls** on the EU to allocate more resources to projects focusing on citizen engagement and involvement in the Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and Mission Restore our Oceans and Waters. The lack of capacity to engage and involve citizens is a major
8. **Encourages** both the North Sea Regions and national governments to recognize the importance of climate adaptation as an equally important political priority for domestic action as mitigation.

9. **Reiterates** the need to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable circular economy and the important role of financial incentives to stimulate circular businesses instead of linear businesses. Therefore, adopting the North Sea Commission Resolution “Towards a Circular Economy”.

10. **Welcomes** the summit of leaders from nine European countries and the European Commission with the aim of scaling up the wind energy production in the North Sea. **Supports** the summit’s collective goal to boost offshore wind power generation to 120 gigawatts by 2030 (from just 30 GW today) and at least 300 GW by 2050. However, **underlines** the importance of adequate funding mechanisms and sufficient recruitment in the sector in order to achieve these goals. The same goes for the need to resolve supply chain bottlenecks for cables, substations and foundations, and in the availability of offshore wind vessels.

11. **Takes the opportunity** to remind that the coastal regions of the NSC host advanced industry clusters and ports that make them well positioned to be involved in major offshore wind developments.

**To ensure a connected North Sea region, the NSC:**

12. **Calls on** the European Parliament and the Council to take into consideration the position of the NSC on the revised TEN-T regulation now being negotiated in the co-decision procedure. [https://cpmr-northsea.org/download/position-paper-on-the-proposal-for-revised-ten-t-guidelines/](https://cpmr-northsea.org/download/position-paper-on-the-proposal-for-revised-ten-t-guidelines/)

13. **Requests** transport ministries and rail operators to improve the transnational rail service in the NSR – including overnight services, in order to reduce emissions and accidents from transport in line with adopted EU targets. **Believes** that it in this regard will be particularly important to speed up the removal of various bottlenecks of technical and administrative nature, and to facilitate for cross-border travel planning and ticketing across borders.

14. **Welcomes** the political agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation to boost the number of publicly accessible electric recharging and hydrogen refuelling stations in particular across the European Union’s main transport corridors and hubs.

15. **Recognizes** the potential of regional airports to act as a frontrunner in the transition towards a more sustainable aviation sector as they can operate smaller aircrafts over shorter distances which will be the first ones to which zero-carbon technologies can be applied. **Calls on** the EU and North Sea countries to step up the support for research and testing of relevant technologies within this field.
To ensure a smart North Sea region, the NSC:

16. **Recalls** that the European Education Area and the Erasmus+ programme are important instruments to provide young people with the necessary skills to enable their participation in democratic life and society, and to obtain good jobs. Confirms that the North Sea Commission is ready to act as a platform to facilitate mobility for learners and educators and promote cooperation between educational institutions among its member regions.

17. **Highlights** the importance of skills in the green transition and hydrogen economy. To achieve a climate neutral Europe in 2050, the right skills are needed to make the transition to a green economy. Moreover, the North Sea Commission underlines the importance of efficient permitting procedures for projects contributing to the green transition.

18. **Believes** that the aspect of recycling and re-use options for electric batteries (EB) should be considered in greater depth due to their relatively short first life cycle of about eight years.

19. **Encourages** the authorities in the North Sea region to act as a frontrunner in further supporting research and the industry's efforts in developing sustainable electric batteries and applying innovative recycling and reuse technologies. The NSC can play a significant role in this regard by influencing policy and regulation at the EU, national and regional levels. Sustainable and smart transformation of the transport sector towards a more regional, possibly self-sustaining, supply chain is an opportunity for European and especially the North Sea Region’s manufacturing industry to lead globally. Access for all North Sea region countries to the EU battery market is vital.

20. **Requests** decision-makers at relevant levels to:

   • **support research aiming at the** improvement in the design of electric batteries in order to make them more sustainable, as well as easier and less costly to repair, reuse and recycle.
   • **support initiatives aiming at ensuring** a digital tracking and identification system for electric batteries, also to avoid illegal dismantling, fly-tipping and transport of batteries to third countries.

21. **Highlights** that the shift towards sustainable, climate neutral and circular industries will require a stronger diversification, and the development of new, competitive and sustainable products, especially based on blue and green resources, and more circular business models.

22. **Underlines** the need for more sustainability and circularity in the coastal and maritime tourism industry, as stated in the EU sustainable blue economy strategy, and a need for diversification and less seasonality; recalls the large yet largely unexploited potential for sustainable tourism development in the North Sea Region.
The CPMR North Sea Commission

The CPMR North Sea Commission represents 27 regional authorities in Belgium, Denmark, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden. We have been working since 1989 to create partnerships between our members and to promote the interests of the North Sea Region in Europe, specifically in the fields of marine resources, transport, energy/climate change and smart regions.

We are part of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, a leading regional interest organisation and think tank with 160 member regions across Europe.