Final Declaration

Adopted by the CPMR North Sea Commission Annual Business Meeting

23 May 2022

The regions of the CPMR North Sea Commission (NSC) met on the 23 May 2022 for the 31st NSC Annual Business Meeting. On behalf of its members, the North Sea Commission wishes to convey the following messages:

The North Sea Region has been affected by the covid-19 pandemic during the last two years. Our region is still suffering from the impact of the pandemic, both in terms of health and economically. And although the pandemic is not yet over, a new crisis has hit our European continent. The war in Ukraine is an unprovoked invasion of the Russian Federation of Ukraine. The NSC strongly condemns the Russian invasion, in line with the statement of the CPMR Political Bureau of March 25.1

The war in Ukraine has shown that we cannot take peace for granted on the European continent, and that we all must work hard to preserve and restore peace. In this regard, transnational cooperation and good international relations are of utmost importance. Here, the NSC will continue its work in building strong relations between regions, so that we together are prepared to overcome all challenges. The Russian war against Ukraine also highlights the urgency for Europe to become less dependent on Russian oil and gas. Therefore, the NSC would like to stress the importance of speeding up the development and production of renewable energy. The North Sea region has the opportunity to be a frontrunner in the energy transition. The NSC member regions will play an important role in the production of renewable 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. 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 marine litter and other pollution of the North Sea and to take measures for preserving biodiversity. The new OSPAR strategy for the marine environment in the Northeast Atlantic is a good basis for action and the NSC member regions will contribute to reaching the objectives of the strategy.

2. **Welcomes** the initial steps from national governments to collaborate on maritime spatial planning in the North Sea and the inclusion of the NSC in collaboration structures. The North Sea is key for Europe’s supply of renewable energy, fishing, transport, leisure and other activities that use the maritime space.

3. **Calls** on the EU and the governments of UK and Norway to establish best possible practices for the joint management of fish stocks and to tackle negative impacts and challenges of the fishing and fish processing industry in NSC member regions arising from the UK withdrawal from the EU.

4. **Welcomes** the shift towards a sustainable and resilient blue economy in the EU. 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.

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 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. **Urges** the European Commission to put forward a framework for accelerated renewables deployment, including more efficient permitting procedures and state aid exemptions for projects in EU strategic sectors, for example 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. The lack of capacity to engage and involve citizens is a major barrier to making progress on climate adaptation at the regional and local level.

8. **Encourages** both the North Sea Region and national governments to recognize the importance of climate adaptation as an equally important political priority for domestic action as mitigation.
9. **Welcomes** Ex’Tax projects and looks forward to engaging more, both across the North Sea Region and the broader CPMR membership in a common effort to understand taxation as a lever for a transition towards the circular economy.

To ensure a connected North Sea region, the NSC:

10. **Welcomes** the proposal for a Regulation on guidelines for the development of the Trans-European transport network (TEN-T).

11. **Believes** that the proposal contains many positive elements in line with our input to the consultation process.

12. **Stresses** that the advancement of deadlines for implementing the new concept of the extended TEN-T core network from 2050 to 2040 and the alignment of infrastructure standards and requirements between the comprehensive and core networks must be followed by sufficient funding from the EU and member states.

13. **Calls** for a more ambitious approach and stronger obligations for cooperation with third neighbouring countries and **believes** that the TEN-T regulation should state an ambition to promote interoperability with the transport networks of all neighbouring third countries – including Norway and the UK.

14. **Regrets** that our proposals for amendments to the TEN-T maps which were submitted in the consultation process have not been included in the EC proposal for a revised regulation.

15. **Requests** the member states involved and the European Parliament to take into account the amendments called for in item 13 of the NSC position on the TEN-T revision² in the upcoming legislative process.

To ensure a smart North Sea region, the NSC:

16. **Welcomes** the strong focus on smart specialisation strategies in European programmes. These strategies enable for regions to find peers with similar specialisation and jointly develop their strengths. Almost all NSC member regions are innovation leaders or strong innovators according to the regional innovation scoreboard and have the potential to lead the necessary transition in Europe.

17. **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.

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 North Sea region to act as a frontrunner in terms of developing sustainable electric batteries and applying innovative recycling and reuse technologies. The NSC can play a

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² [https://cpmr-northsea.org/download/position-paper-on-the-proposal-for-revised-ten-t-guidelines/]
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:
- work for an improvement in the design of EBs in order to make them more sustainable, as well as easier and less costly to repair, reuse and recycle.
- Develop a digital tracking and identification system for electric batteries, also to avoid illegal dismantling, fly-tipping and transport of batteries to third countries
- Strengthen European regulations on the second life of EB (e.g. purchase, handling over to third party, issue of liability)

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**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.