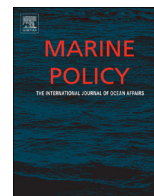




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Short Communication

The European Integrated Maritime Policy: The next five years[☆]Jan-Stefan Fritz^{a,*}, John Hanus^b^a Institute for Intercultural and International Studies, University of Bremen, Germany^b Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans, Brussels, Belgium

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ABSTRACT

At the time of writing, the EU has just finished appointing a new cohort of senior representatives for the period 2014–2019. This includes appointing a Commissioner with a newly defined remit for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and the members of the various Committees of the European Parliament with competences related to maritime affairs. These individuals will invariably spend at least part of their first months in office identifying their respective priorities for the coming years. This commentary seeks to contribute to these deliberations by making concrete suggestions for priorities that might be considered as regards the future of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP). Seven years since its launch, the IMP remains very much a work in progress. Drawing on recent academic studies of the EU's various ocean related policies this commentary argues that two of the greatest weaknesses of the IMP are the sectoral nature of priority-setting and strategy-making as well as the lack of a funding tool to implement its aims. Two concrete proposals are made, specifically aimed at the incoming EU leadership, which seek to address these weaknesses and to realize the aims articulated in the IMP.

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1. Introduction

At the time of writing, the European Union has just appointed a new cohort of senior representatives for the period 2014–2019. This includes appointing a Commissioner with a newly defined remit for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and the members of the various Committees of the European Parliament with competences related to maritime affairs. These individuals will invariably spend the first months in their new functions acquainting themselves with past policies and, more importantly, identifying their respective priorities for the coming years. This commentary seeks to contribute to these deliberations by making some concrete suggestions for priorities that might be considered as regards the future of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP).

This piece is written against the background of increasingly ambitious calls for a more knowledge-based and holistic approach to the governance of the Earth's seas and oceans. Only recently the Global Ocean Commission has argued that “the ocean is under threat, and humanity's approach to it is uncontrolled ... No single body shoulders responsibility for ocean health, and an absence of accountability is characterised by blind exploitation of resources and a wilful lack of care” [1]. Though starkly phrased, this is not a

new recognition. Already in 2007 Manuel Barroso, then President of the European Commission, argued “too often,... sectors which impact on the maritime environment operate independently—each has its own structures, embodies its own culture and vision, and is run according to its own rules”. His message was that Europe needed an Integrated Maritime Policy in order to provide a coherent policy framework to “maximiz[e] the sustainable use of the oceans and seas, build ... a knowledge and innovation base for maritime policy, deliver ... the highest quality of life in coastal regions, promot[e] Europe's leadership in international maritime affairs, and rais[e] the visibility of Maritime Europe” [2].

Seven years onwards, the IMP remains very much a work in progress. Drawing on recent academic studies of the EU's various ocean related policies – many published in this journal – this commentary argues that two of the greatest weaknesses of the IMP are the sectoral nature of priority-setting and strategy-making as well as the lack of a funding tool to implement its aims. Two concrete proposals are made, specifically aimed at the incoming EU leadership, which seek to address these weaknesses and to realize the aims articulated in the IMP.

2. The challenge of integration

In 2010, the European Commission changed the name of its Directorate General for Fisheries (DG FISH) to Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE). Alongside the already traditional goal of reforming the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), this change reflected then Commissioner Joe Borg's earlier declaration that he had a

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jfritz@uni-bremen.de (J.-S. Fritz), hanus@jpi-oceans.eu (J. Hanus).

second priority, namely to implement an Integrated Maritime Policy for Europe which would “increase the coherence and co-ordination between our sea-related policies and activities. It will allow us to extend and optimise the range of benefits that we derive from our maritime activities without threatening the integrity of the resource base: the sea itself” [3]. With this announcement, the European Commission set a clear standard in terms of how it would address the oceans. Under the most recent Commissioner for Marine Affairs, Maria Damanaki, the European Commission has continued to push a combination of CFP reform and the launching of actions under the IMP.

The freshly approved Juncker Commission continued this trend of integration by merging the previously separate portfolios of environment and maritime affairs & fisheries under a single Commissioner. This merger will mean that for the first time one Commissioner, Karmenu Vella, will be responsible for the EU’s three major ocean-related policies—the CFP, the IMP and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. If implemented as now proposed, this structural change responds to the calls of many academic studies that there needs to be a better link between the previously separately managed Fisheries Policy and the environmental standards of the Framework Directive and that all maritime activities should be brought under the IMP as means of treating the oceans in a holistic and integrated manner [4].

However, this combination of portfolios on its own does not guarantee greater coherence in the EU’s ocean policy. As the case of the IMP proves, even within one single policy there has been very little coordination over the last years. Individual initiatives, including a blue growth strategy, an initiative on marine data and knowledge, a directive on maritime spatial planning, an initiative on maritime surveillance, as well as various sea basin strategies have been launched, each with their own specific internal logic and with little overall coordination. For example, the Blue Growth Strategy launched in 2012 aims to promote the development in five maritime sectors, identified via a study and a stakeholder consultation, but excludes the biggest maritime employers, including offshore wind, oil and gas, fisheries and aquaculture as well as shipping and ports because these are governed by separate policies. While most initiatives under the IMP are certainly interesting at an operational level, at a higher political level, none has marked a shift in emphasis of the EU to taking a holistic approach to the seas and oceans, so far.

The latest re-organisation of the Commission provides, nonetheless, a new window of opportunity for a more integrated ocean policy framework. However, as previous experiences with the IMP have shown and given the fact that the Directorates-General for Environment and Maritime Affairs & Fisheries will remain geographically and functionally separate despite their subordination under one Commissioner, active measures need to be taken to seize this opportunity and ensure that the EU’s maritime policy becomes as integrated in reality as it is on paper.

3. Proposals

The following section makes two concrete and easily implementable suggestions which could contribute to overcoming two of the principal shortcomings of the EU’s ocean governance approach to date: (1) the organisation of the priority-setting and strategy-making process along sectoral rather than along integrated lines and (2) the lack of an integrated funding instrument which offers a coherent investment strategy in future-oriented maritime activities.

3.1. Support a transparent, inclusive process for identifying key ocean issues and their relevance for the EU [5]

The consultative nature of the IMP is considered as a particular strength by some academic studies, with stakeholders regularly

being given the opportunity to contribute to the strategy-making process. One potential benefit of involving stakeholders that is cited is to offer an inclusive way of assessing the relative importance of various maritime sectors and thus overcoming some of the difficulties associated with sector specific interests making policies for themselves [6]. While it is true that there is a high degree of consultation in the IMP – since 2012 alone the European Commission has conducted numerous stakeholder consultations related to maritime affairs, including on the Arctic, seabed mining, marine biotechnology, maritime surveillance, seabed mapping & forecasting, tourism and ocean energy – these consultations have not overcome the problems sectoral policy-making. As the above examples illustrate, the manner of seeking stakeholder input to the IMP is in fact highly sectoral, which tends to result in a policy formulation process that is largely based on consulting only those sections of the public interested in the sector at hand. This fragmentation is reinforced by the fact that interest groups themselves are organised almost exclusively along sectoral lines and, in some cases, are even encouraged to do so by the Commission, e.g. through the setting-up of sector or region specific technology platforms, ERA-Net funding schemes, regional seas strategies, etc. Both the process of collecting stakeholder input and the type of input delivered, therefore, serve to avoid any collective and cross-sectoral discussion about the development of the IMP itself. In short, there is no debate about the strategic IMP priorities that encompasses all maritime sectors and thus little reflection on integrated ocean strategies.

The question therefore arises, how to engage stakeholders in a strategy-making process without being subjected to a discussion led by highly sectoral and vested interests? One possibility would be to establish something akin to an ‘European Oceans Think Tank’ which would encourage critical debate about the relative importance of individual maritime sectors and contribute to identifying potential win-win strategies by linking different maritime sectors to create new opportunities. No such body exists at present.

Putting forward an operational plan for such a think tank is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a useful starting point for exploring how it might work conceptually may be offered by the Commission’s own recent deliberations of how to best conduct strategic consultations using a, foresight’ approach. A widely cited definition of foresight has been put forward by the Foresight for Regional Development Network (FOREN).

Foresight is a systematic, participatory, future intelligence gathering and medium- to long-term vision-building process aimed at present-day decisions and mobilising joint actions [...] Foresight involves bringing together key agents of change and sources of knowledge, in order to develop strategic visions and anticipatory intelligence. Of equal importance, Foresight is often explicitly intended to establish networks of knowledgeable agents, who can respond better to policy and other challenges [7].

According to this definition, foresight comprises five key elements. First, foresight, as the name suggests, seeks to anticipate future developments and needs, such as research gaps and priorities as well as technological requirements, by analysing current trends and projecting these onto the medium- to long-term. Second, foresight is an interactive and participative process. Contrary to classic top-down decision-making by experts, foresight aims to draw upon the expertise and knowledge of a large number of participants including scientific experts and policy-makers as well as industry representatives, members of civil society, and in some cases even ordinary citizens. Third, foresight aims to forge new and lasting (cross-sectoral) networks which allow participants to develop a collective understanding of the “challenges and opportunities they are liable to confront, and the strategies and objectives that others might pursue” [8]. Fourth, one of the key objectives of a foresight exercise is to generate a shared strategic vision among the participants about what the future should

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