

Build a stronger North Sea cooperation in the Brexit era

Elected councils around the North Sea call for the UK government and the European Union to ensure that Brexit will cause as little harm as possible to the North Sea Region, to North Sea cooperation and to the North Sea itself. We call for continued UK participation in EU territorial cooperation programmes, Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and their successor programmes. We call for even stronger multi-level cooperation between the EU, national, regional and local authorities to strengthen the North Sea Region.

The North Sea is one of the busiest sea basins in the world, and an important resource for wealth in Europe. Its shipping lanes are a crucial part of Europe's logistics chains, and its ports handle 57 per cent of EU's external trade. Its maritime economy employs more than 850,000 people. It has some of Europe's best fishing waters. It delivers 80 per cent of EU's marine renewable energy, and has great capacity for more. North Sea oil and gas still play a significant role in European and global energy production. The coast is an important recreation area. The shallow waters and the coastlines are vulnerable to oil spills, plastic waste and other pollution. Strong transnational, multi-level and cross-sectoral cooperation is needed as a guarantee for prosperous and sustainable development.

The past years have seen an increase in cross-border efforts to protect and strengthen the North Sea Region – European territorial cooperation projects, advisory council on fisheries, the North Seas energy cooperation, initiatives in maritime spatial planning.

From March 2019, the external border of EU/EEA will cut right through this tightly connected region. A "hard" Brexit will cause several barriers for trade, in particular if no deal is reached on a future free trade agreement. The economic consequences will impact on all of us. Citizens of all territories across the North Sea benefit from the exchange of people and ideas, facilitated by Interreg North Sea and other European cooperation programmes. The UK is one of the most active partners in EU's research programme. The strong links across the North Sea will be weakened if the UK leaves the programmes.

On the regional level, we are committed to continued exchange and cooperation. We hope to see the same commitment from the national and European levels. North Sea integration is more important than ever, and in the Brexit era we need to maintain old links and develop new arenas for cooperation.

The CPMR North Sea Commission represents regions/provinces/Länder/counties in the North Sea countries. We have a total of 33 members in the UK, in the EU27 and in Norway. We work since 1989 to create partnerships between our members and to promote the interests of the North Sea Region in Europe, especially in the fields of marine resources, accessibility and clean transport, energy/climate change and prosperous and sustainable communities.