

Maritime sector needs integrated coastal management

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Opinion

We must avoid making the same mistakes at sea that we have made on land and regulate access to resources, warns Isabelle Thomas.



As parliament's fisheries committee opinion rapporteur on establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management (MSP and ICZM), as well as on the commission's latest communication on the blue economy, I have been able to focus on the role of fishing within the realm of maritime activities.

In Europe, there are 87,445 people employed as fishermen, but including the 116,094 jobs generated by fishing, the 115,651 jobs linked to fish transformation, and adding logistics and sales, the full number is close to 400,000. More importantly, fishing is a pillar for the economy of many coastal regions.

The 21st century is set to be one of maritime adventure, for both good and bad reasons. The good reasons are that technological and scientific advances allow us to carry out maritime explorations like never before.

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The bad reasons are linked to our irresponsibility, as we have used and wasted resources available on land, due to our careless consumption habits.

Experts estimate that maritime activity could generate 1.6 million jobs by 2020. However, we must be vigilant and regulate the sector, as well as access to marine resources, just as is the case with fishing and the common fisheries policy. This is essential so that we do not replicate the environmental mistakes we made on land, and sometimes at sea.

There is one major difference between land and sea - at sea, activities are mostly mobile. As a result, space is more difficult to demarcate and this can lead to conflicts of interest when several activities seek the use of the same space, whether they are well established or fairly recent.

The MSP and ICZM directive was intended to implement an integrated maritime policy, by giving member states the tools to organise maritime territory.

A large majority wanted to map maritime activities and set up a governance mechanism for them, while strategically programming their implementation and consulting relevant stakeholders, as well as taking into account any interactions between land and sea.

Unfortunately, I was unable to get the council to budge, as it saw the directive as an affront to its sovereignty. For this reason, the directive's ICZM chapter was cut.

Yet ICZM is essential. In Brittany, it enabled the resolution of situations that had previously been considered inextricable.

In the Saint-Brieuc bay, a project to build wind turbines clashed with the wishes of scallop fishermen. Integrated management tools were introduced in order to organise a consultation with local authorities, fishermen, scientists and wind turbine developers.

By mapping out the area and carefully studying its activities, as well as discussions between all actors, another more appropriate space was found on which to install the wind turbines.

Other obstacles may turn blue growth into a mere slogan. A lack of budgetary ambition, insufficient scientific information - and the failure to share findings - as well as a lack of training are some of the issues featured in my report on the blue economy.

About the author

Isabelle Thomas (S&D, FR) is parliament's rapporteur on establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management

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