

20 May: European Maritime Day set up by European institutions

The European Union has decided to celebrate the achievements and potential of Europe's ocean and seas by declaring 20 May as a dedicated "European Maritime Day". The official launch ceremony will be held in Strasbourg, where Commission President José Manuel Barroso, European Council President Janez Janša and the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering will sign a Joint Tripartite Declaration. European Maritime Day will provide an occasion to **highlight the crucial role that oceans and seas play in the everyday life not only of coastal communities, but of all EU citizens, and for Europe's sustainable growth and jobs at large**. Based on a proposal from the Commission, this dedicated Maritime Day will also encourage better stewardship of coastal zones, seas and oceans by all citizens and actors concerned.

"The sea, the maritime sectors and marine resources are essential for Europe's prosperity and well-being. **By setting up a European Maritime Day, we, as Europeans, want to celebrate this reality and to raise awareness about maritime opportunities and our new Integrated Maritime Policy**", said the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso.

"Setting aside a special day each year to mark the importance of the oceans and seas is a way to promote the well-being and welfare of all Europeans in this era of globalisation", declared Joe Borg, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. He added: "It is an idea that received broad support throughout the consultation process on the new Integrated Maritime Policy".

The Commission hopes that citizens and stakeholders living and working in Europe's maritime regions will seize this occasion to showcase their contribution to the EU as a whole, and to stimulate broad debate around the challenges they face.

The first ever European Maritime Day on 20th May 2008 will see the European Parliament vote on a report on the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy. The report highlights, inter alia, the exceptional maritime dimension conferred on the EU by its extensive coastline, islands and outermost regions. It also underlines the unique opportunities offered by the maritime sector as regards innovation, research, environment and biodiversity, calling for these to be fully taken into account in the emerging Integrated Maritime Policy. Furthermore, the report stresses how the involvement of regional and local partners is essential to making a success of the maritime policy and advocates closer cooperation between Europe's coastal regions.

In parallel, the European Commission will hold a Stakeholder Conference in Brussels on 19 and 20 May, open to the press. The programme includes keynote interventions by European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Joe Borg, Member of the European Parliament and Integrated Maritime Policy Rapporteur Willi Piecyk, and 1st Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions and Mayor and MP of Dunkirk Michel Delebarre. There will be a Ministerial Panel headed by the Slovenian Presidency in which members of the Governments of France, Germany, Portugal and Norway will participate. Discussions will focus on how to promote continued stakeholder dialogue in support of the development of an Integrated

Maritime Policy and ensure that the new policy is fully adapted to the regional dimension of maritime affairs.

Since the proposal of an Integrated Maritime Policy by the European Commission on October 2007 and its subsequent endorsement by Heads of State and Government at the European Council of 14 December 2007, real progress has been made towards building a coherent framework to promote synergies and resolves potential conflicts between different sea-related policy areas. In line with the detailed Action Plan published in October, the Commission itself has already come forward with **proposals to combat illegal fishing, boost development of EU ports and port cities, re-assess the social framework regulating seafaring jobs, and promote a better fit between energy policy and maritime policy. It has also carried out a stock-taking exercise looking at maritime surveillance systems, and the offshore activities and competences of the Member States.**