

**Nessa Childers MEP – Speech ‘Realising EU Priorities at local level’**

**‘Coastal Resource Protection and Management ‘**

**Seminar organized by the Marine Group of the Environmental Pillar**

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In my presentation today I will briefly outline EU Maritime Policy, linking this policy to Government plans, and looking at the challenges of realising these plans in a careful and sensitive manner at local level.

EU Maritime policy involves many strands including -

- climate change and promoting the use of sustainable shipping vessels,
- port management and consolidation,
- industrial fisheries, coastal tourism, small-scale fishing interests and marine research.

EU policy is focused on the economic, and on environmental protection; linking this environmental protection to tourism and sustaining the fishing industry.

At National level the Programme for Government sets out a number of commitments relevant to the foreshore and marine spatial planning including:

- the need for foreshore licensing and leasing for marine energy;
- off-shore drilling and streamlining the planning and regulatory process for bringing ashore these reserves, and
- the development of an integrated marine and coastal planning process to coordinate and develop the coastline for fishing, aquaculture, ocean energy and tourism.

However what this audience here today will be concerned with is how this approach to coastal zone management will be designed, and how coastal zone planning regulation will protect valuable coastal marine ecology.

In my opinion this will only come about if this approach to marine development is also balanced, or tempered, by the ratification of the Aarhus Convention. And I welcome the

Government's commitment to do this, and I understand this is at a late stage and nearing completion.

In Ireland if we are to comply with both the letter and the spirit of the Aarhus Convention, and the aims of EU Marine policy regarding the environment, there needs to be a shift in attitude to marine ecology and landscape - and endorse these concepts with a much greater status in planning law. This needs to be backed up with greater support for local authorities to protect coastal zones.

For an example of the need for awareness of landscape combined with coastal zone management, we need to look no further than the flood mitigation proposals along the Clontarf promenade in north Dublin, as an example of how we should **not** go about coastal zone management and climate change mitigation.

There are three critical issues raised by Dublin City Council's approach to the flood defence plans for Clontarf –

- 1) There was no proper consultation with residents or elected representatives, and the plans appear to be solely an engineering solution to a main drainage project and flood protection.
- 2) That local authorities need to integrate flood defence plans with sustainable coastal zone management, and landscape design. In other words flood mitigation plans must take into account environmental considerations but also amenity and visual considerations, and existing coastlines. The local authorities need to take a long term approach and plan defences that merge into the existing landscape and contribute to that landscape.
- 3) That if we are to protect valuable landscape amenity and coastal ecology - local authorities require the legislation to do so, and strong support from Government.

Good coastal zone planning requires that business, tourism and environmental NGOs, residents, and local authorities come together before any plan is designed, and before there is even one drawing put on paper. Again this is easier said than done; cultural practices and

attitudes towards the land and the coastline will influence people's approach; furthermore successful plans involve the establishment of trust between all involved, and a deep knowledge of all the issues, but most importantly good planning takes time.

My belief is, if there is an absolutely level 'playing pitch' balancing business interests against protecting the environment, both sides - NGOs and business - will have no choice but to sit down together and strike a deal. The results of strong environmental legislation would be to encourage innovation and creative approaches to coastal development and necessary engineering works. We cannot afford to do anything less if our natural and landscape heritage is to be protected for future generations.

The EU and Government are planning how to manage and develop the marine environment **as we speak**. This is necessary to respond to climate and environment concerns relating to sea vessels and cruise liners, but also to manage wind and wave energy projects. The challenge for us here in Ireland, is to say **yes** we want to manage our marine and coastal zone areas and be involved in creating green energy, but also to accept the enormous challenge to do this in a manner that is sensitive to marine coastal ecology.

Finally, on one level there is an awareness of the role of this ecology in supporting vital fish stocks and that we should protect our unique coastal landscapes, but is there a willingness to do the right thing - and the willingness and sense of urgency to do it soon?