



Think Tank North Sea 2050 – Internal Regulations

Context

In 2016, while the marine spatial plan for the Belgian section of the North Sea (2020-2026) was under review, a future development path was marked out for a long-term vision for Belgian sea policy (Horizon 2050). Representatives from the fields of science, policy, industry, civil society and society as a whole formed three working groups (Naturalness, Multiple Use of Space and Blue Economy and Innovation) to examine the main challenges, opportunities and threats facing the Belgian section of the North Sea. Each of these working groups enjoyed the support of experts in intersecting subjects (sustainability, research and development, governance & management structures, security, land-sea interaction and transboundary thinking). The process was coordinated by the North Sea Council (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS), the Flemish Institute for the Sea (VLIZ) and the cabinet Secretary of State for the North Sea).

The process offered considerable added value on the strength of its broad representation and the opportunities it afforded for harmonisation between stakeholders from a variety of fields. Given the rapid developments currently underway in the North Sea, the state secretary for the North Sea thought the time was right to export the unique dynamic created in the process to a Think Tank North Sea (2050) (cf. Postface North Sea Vision for 2050). The activities of the think tank are outlined below.

Principles

Think Tank North Sea 2050 is a neutral and unaffiliated body which bases its work on current science. The think tank aims for transparency in all activities and addresses the big challenges facing society today. Chief among these is the equality of its members.

Ethics and commitment

The members of the Think Tank North Sea 2050 undertake to:

- Further the general interest at all times¹;
- Help assure the continuity of the activities;
- Refrain from any action which might undermine the equality of its members;
- Disseminate information among members of the think tank in a simple and transparent manner;
- Refrain from communicating the think tank's current discussions and preliminary results to external parties²;
- Respect the confidential nature of the information when so requested by the information provider.

Objective

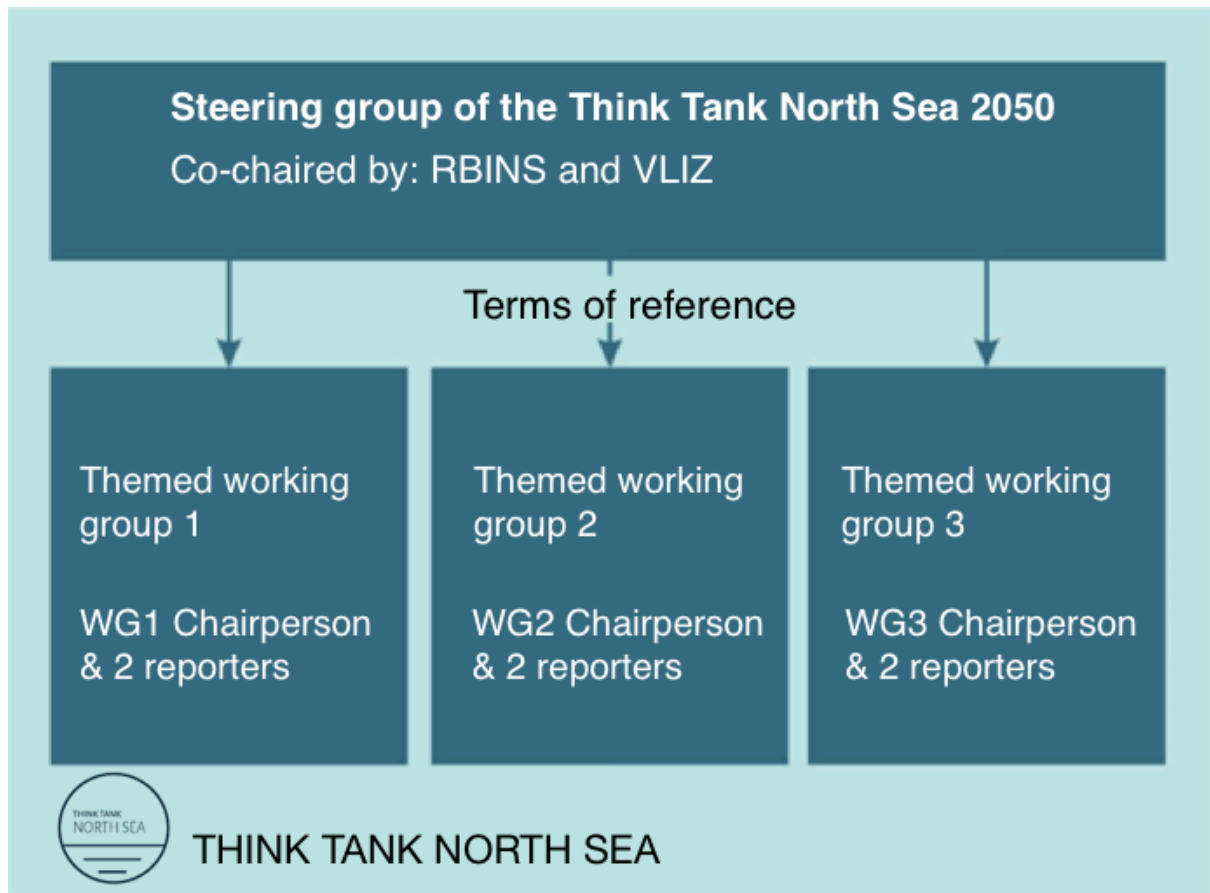
Think Tank North Sea 2050 has a threefold objective:

- Provide a seedbed for future visions of the North Sea;
- Prepare (science-based) recommendations on subjects related to the North Sea;
- Extend support³ and harmonise subjects relating to the North Sea.

¹ Sector-specific visions may be put forward, while the think tank is in progress, to fuel the debate.

² This does not affect the transparency of the think tank or hinder internal feedback on the think tank's activities.

³ In this context the term 'support extension' does not relate to a specific policy framework but it does involve an intensification of the dialogue between the interested parties.



Schematic diagram of Think Thank North Sea 2050.

Activities

The think tank is chaired by the VLIZ and RBINS jointly. The two bodies have also agreed to man the think tank secretariat in the opening stage as a contribution in kind. It is thought that a dedicated secretariat will be needed at a later stage.

The think tank's activities are organized by a steering group, which continues in the vein of the former North Sea Council and is made up of policy and science experts dedicated to the general interest (see annex 1. composition of the steering group). More experts can be brought into the steering group if needed, depending on the subject under consideration.

Members of the think tank and external parties may at any time propose subjects (+ brief reasons for this) for consideration by the think tank (open forum). An annual call for subjects will be organised through the website and a mailing campaign.

Subject proposals will be screened by the steering group in accordance with the following criteria:

- General interest;
- Multisectoral;

- Multidisciplinary;
- Likely impact;
- Demonstrable added value if the subject touches on current processes.

The steering group may also group subjects together and accentuate subject proposals. Subjects meeting the criteria will be opened on the website, whereupon a decision, based on a statement of commitment from think tank members, will be reached as to which working groups to initiate.

The themed working groups are to be led by a chairman and two reporters. Reference terms are to be defined at the beginning of each working group, in which the deliverables, period, language⁴, etc., are specified in more detail. The aim is to have at least one current working group in each year.

Composition

The Think Tank North Sea 2050 aims for a broad representation of all parties with an interest in the North Sea (science, policy, civil society, industry, society as a whole). As a rule, a public or private organization's membership will be confined to a maximum of 1 representative (and one proxy) per working group to assure the balanced composition of the group. Active contributions from individual citizens are to be encouraged. It costs nothing to participate in the activities of the think tank, and, as a result, there will be no entitlement to reimbursements of any kind.

Potential members may apply to the chairman/secretary of the think tank, whereupon their membership will be proposed to the steering group. The steering group may remove from the think tank any members whose actions are inconsistent with the internal regulations or the terms of reference of the working group.

Budget

The cabinet Secretary of State for the North Sea has arranged a start-up budget (EUR 50,000 in 2018) for the think tank. The RBINS and VLIZ will also make a contribution in kind, by providing personnel. Ideally, in the future, the secretariat can be made permanent through the appointment of one 0.5 FTE. The steering group will investigate the potential for recurrent funding.

⁴ One of the three national languages or English.

Annex 1. Composition of the Steering Group of the Think Tank North Sea

Co-chairpersons:

Representative from Directorate Natural Environment – RBINS

Representative from the Flemish Institute for the Sea

Members:

Representative from the Maritime Institute, Ghent University

Representative from DG Waterways, FPS Mobility

Representative from Marine Environment Service, FPS Environment

Representative from EWI Department

Representative from BELSPO

Representative from Directorate Natural Environment – KBIN

Representative from ILVO

Representative from Coastal Territory Operations, Province of West Flanders

Representative from POM West Flanders

Representative from Coastal Services secretariat

Representative from FRDO

Representative from DG Fisheries – European Commission

Representative from VLIZ