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Europe

New cluster network vows to challenge EC with 'holistic view'

Maritime cluster organisations from 10 countries come together to form lobby group, writes **Andrew Spurrier**

MARITIME cluster organisations from 10 European countries have agreed to set up a joint organisation to be known as the European Network of Maritime Clusters.

The decision to set up the network was taken at a round table meeting of European maritime cluster organisations, held in Paris on November 4 at the invitation of the Institut Français de la Mer.

Cluster organisations from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom took part in the meeting, which was also attended by observers from Spain and Portugal.

In a statement released afterwards, participants said that the European Commission was moving increasingly towards policy-making at

cluster rather than purely sectoral level and that it was therefore important that the maritime industry offered a "counterpart with a comparable holistic view".

"The European network will refrain from lobbying activities but will strive to improve the understanding of cluster at the European level as well as policy measures that strengthen the unique

European maritime cluster," they said.

Participants were concerned, however, about the differing criteria being used to define clusters in different European countries, which they said presented problems for the compilation of statistics and for cluster discussion at European level.

They agreed to carry out a study of cluster and sector

definitions with a view to proposing a European standard for use in future economic impact studies.

The new network will have its first official outing at The New European Maritime Policy conference, which is due to take place in Brussels on November 17.

The conference has been organised by Mare Forum and the Dutch Maritime

Network, in collaboration with the seven-commissioner Maritime Policy Task Force set up by the European Commission.

Dutch Maritime Network chairman Niko Wijnolst is to be the first co-ordinator and chairman of the network, while Francis Vallat, chairman of the Institut Français de la Mer, is to be vice-chairman.