

MEDIA RELEASE

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EU/OIL INDUSTRY MEETING: CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ARCTIC OIL DRILLING
MORATORIUM GROW

- * Critical meeting between energy commissioner, oil companies and regulators
- * European Parliament asked to back moratorium on new drilling in the Arctic
- * British oil firms drilling activities under scrutiny

There should be an immediate moratorium on new offshore drilling in the environmentally-sensitive Arctic, said environmental groups today (Wednesday 14 July).

The call by WWF, the European Environmental Bureau and The Bellona Foundation comes ahead of important talks today (Wednesday 14 July) between the European Union's energy commissioner and major oil companies and industry regulators. Last week, the EU's energy commissioner, Gunther Oettinger, called for a temporary ban on new oil drilling in the North Sea following the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. [1]

In a letter to the European Parliament, the environmental groups called on the Parliament to back an immediate moratorium on new offshore drilling in the region. [2] The U.S., Canada and Norway have all declared moratoria on deepwater drilling whilst the Gulf of Mexico accident spill is investigated.

The call for an immediate moratorium comes less than a week after it was announced that British oil firm, Cairn Energy, had begun drilling exploration wells in the waters off Greenland. [3]

Dr. Patrick Lewis from the WWF Arctic Initiative said:

"The European Union has a growing interest in the Arctic. Hand in hand with this interest comes a responsibility to ensure that new industrial developments do not threaten the environment which defines the region, and upon which local communities depend.

"At the June G8 meeting the Russian Federation called for the establishment of an international regulatory mechanism for the petroleum industry. The adoption of a moratorium by the European Parliament would echo growing concerns across the Arctic that industry needs to prove Arctic oil development will not cause catastrophic damage to the Arctic environment and to the lives and livelihoods of peoples who depend on that environment."

Commenting, WWF Scotland's Director, Dr Richard Dixon, said:

"The sensitive Arctic environment is the last place we should be drilling for oil, the risks just aren't worth it. That a British company is at the forefront of exploration in the Arctic is deeply disturbing. The European Parliament has a good track record on tackling environmental pollution and now is the time to introduce an immediate moratorium on new offshore drilling in the Arctic and time for countries to start ending their addiction to oil."

John Hontelez, Secretary-General European Environmental Bureau said:

"The EU pretends to go for a low carbon economy and is promoting investments in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. It would therefore be strange to allow and support oil explorations in the Arctic that will create serious environmental risks but also compete with the decarbonisation of our economy."

Frederic Hauge, President The Bellona Foundation, said:

"The BP oil spill clearly proves that the oil industry is incapable of handling major disasters in a safe manner. The mere fact that they are considering new activities in the Arctic, such an important region for renewable natural resources, is worrying. But even worse, oil companies are now moving their activities from the Gulf of Mexico to more northerly areas after the ban on deep sea drilling on the US shelf. An example is the Swedish corporation Stena, which recently moved its rig Stena Forth to the Davis Strait near Western Greenland in order to explore new prospects there."

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

[1] Mr Oettinger is due to meet major oil companies in Europe today (Wednesday 14 July). The European Commission has also called a meeting with national regulatory and supervisory authorities on the same day.

Minister's speech:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/368>

EU chief calls for North Sea oil drilling ban

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east_orkney_and_shetland/10558148.stm

[2] The text of the letter to the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Diana Wallis, is as follows:

Dear Ms Wallis,

European Parliament urged to call for a moratorium on new drilling for petroleum in the Arctic

We are writing to you with regard to the upcoming meeting of the 8th Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians that will be meeting at the European Parliament on 13th-15th September this year.

We are deeply concerned about the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It clearly illustrates that the petroleum industry is not in a position to manage the huge risks involved in drilling and exploration of oil and gas, and moreover that the regulatory framework for such activities are at best insufficient.

With the increasingly intensified quest for locating new petroleum sources, combined with the ice melting due to global warming in the Arctic, industry and governments are preparing for exploring oil and gas resources in new undiscovered areas.

Vast but vulnerable natural resources

The Arctic contains some of the richest, most diverse areas in the world in terms of renewable natural resources. The most important commercial fish species of the North Atlantic depend on these waters – such as cod, haddock and herring. The Arctic endemic species are particularly vulnerable and many of them already in danger of extinction. The low growth rates and fragile reproduction of most endemic species make the Arctic ecosystems extremely sensitive to any pollution.

The difficulties of dealing with oil spills in the Arctic

Petroleum activities will always involve risk of accidents and serious emissions. The number of small and large accidental spills in Europe is rising, as illustrated by the recent evacuation of the Gullfaks C platform in the North Sea. Accidents similar to the one of Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico could well happen elsewhere. Oil spills in the Arctic are likely to be dramatically more difficult to deal with than in many other seas, due to sea ice, strong currents, cold weather, rough seas and dark winters.

Call for sustainable economic development in the Arctic

Creating new jobs for the Arctic region is one of the main arguments for exploration of its petroleum resources. But as Europe is on a steady course to decarbonising its economy and promoting vast investments in renewable energy sources, it would be a grave mistake to start developing an industry that will face declining demand from Europe in the decades to come. We must by all means avoid development of a dual policy, whereby the Arctic relies on development of a fossil fuel extraction economy while the rest of Europe shifts towards a clean economy.

Instead, the EU must ensure that this region becomes a key contributor to the EU's goal of building a truly sustainable economy based on renewable energy sources. For instance, the potential for both onshore and offshore wind energy in the region is tremendous. With the development of an increasingly integrated European electricity grid, these resources will in the future be able to deliver clean energy to the continent. However, the development of a petroleum industry in the Arctic would become an obstacle for this nascent industry to compete for expertise, skills and investment in the region.

Call for a moratorium

On this basis, the undersigned organisations call upon the European Parliament to take the lead in calling for a moratorium on all new petroleum exploration activities in the Arctic. We would be glad to participate in policy debates and elicit support from the rest of civil society across Europe to support this goal.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Frederic Hauge, President The Bellona Foundation John Hontelez, Secretary General European Environmental Bureau Gary Miller, Arctic Initiative Leader (ad interim) WWF

[3] Exploration Disko West Offshore Greenland

<http://www.cairnenergy.com/NewsDetail.aspx?id=1203>