

Joint NGO Statement on oil drilling, OSPAR ministerial 23.9.2010

On the issue of deep sea oil drilling, environmental NGOs are deeply disappointed about the lack of concrete measures in the draft recommendation that has been presented to you by your negotiators.

Some months ago, in the Gulf of Mexico, we saw the largest marine oil spill ever recorded. If you adopt the present recommendation, OSPAR will give an extremely weak answer to this unprecedented disaster. Back in 1995, after the Brent Spar incident, OSPAR ministers reacted immediately and agreed a moratorium on the dumping of oil platforms. Today, after around 5 million barrels of oil have devastated the Gulf of Mexico due to deep sea oil drilling, OSPAR only recommends to wait for reviews and postpone any possible decision on that issue to next year. With this recommendation, OSPAR risks its credibility and its influence.

It is clear that a catastrophe like the Deep Water Horizon could occur any day in the OSPAR region. But exploration of new deep sea oil fields is continuing at high speed. A recent example is the deep sea drilling program planned by Chevron and BP West of Shetland this fall, without any revised environmental impact assessment or safety procedures.

You would not continue to drive your car if you are not sure whether it is safe. You need to stop it and to examine all possible risks.

The demand of EU commissioner Oettinger for a moratorium on drilling while such safety checks are made appears to have had no impact here in Bergen. Germany's already weakened proposal to examine the option of a moratorium was blocked by the host country of this conference and other countries with deep water oil producing interests. The word moratorium has disappeared completely from the text that you have now in front of you.

We think OSPAR should be protecting the marine environment from oil pollution, and not protecting the reckless behaviour of a small number of oil producing states.

Ministers, if you adopt the text as it stands, it will be "business as usual" for deep water oil drilling in the OSPAR area. New and dangerous drilling activities in deep sea waters with incalculable risks for the marine environment and the coasts in the OSPAR region will continue. Please do not let this happen.

We urge you, even at this late stage, to redraft the text and adopt a moratorium on deep sea oil drilling activities, at least until a full and serious examination of the risks and safety standards has taken place.

The environmental NGOs call upon you, the OSPAR Ministers and the European Commissioner to agree a stronger and more ambitious Bergen Statement on all issues we mentioned- the future of the North East Atlantic lies in your hands today!

Thank you for your attention.