



PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 24 June 2010

Ref: CRPMC0M100023

NO TO AN OIL SPILL DISASTER IN EUROPE

On 23 June 2010, representatives from oil companies, the European Commission and NGOs debated with the members of the *Seas and Coastal Areas Intergroup* in the European Parliament on the risks of an oil spill disaster in Europe.

Corinne Lepage (ALDE-FR), President of the Intergroup, stated *"I welcome this public hearing, which is a first. The debates demonstrated the need to work towards developing legislation with regard to strengthening the responsibilities of the stakeholders. Law-makers should not be constantly fighting yesterday's battles, but should be more pro-active in this area: it is imperative to increasingly anticipate these problems that could suddenly occur, rather than suffering them a posteriori and taking emergency action."*

The participants underlined many differences between US and EU legislations. For instance, **Jan Panek**, Head of Unit "Coal and Oil" at the European Commission (DG Energy) highlighted the role of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), as well as different EU legislations regulating audits and inspections in the European offshore oil platforms.

"20 years ago, 167 offshore workers were killed in an offshore oil disaster." **Steve Walker**, Head of Offshore divisions in the UK, remembered. *"This shook up the UK legislation and the whole industry. Since then, much progress has been made in the UK and across the whole North Sea area."* Mr Walker also reminded delegates that in Europe, offshore platforms are generally safer than in the US because 50% of them are not in the deep waters¹. However, many of them are 25 years old.

For the industry, **Michael Engell-Jensen**, Executive Director of the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers, stated that the protection of the environment and people is among the top priorities of their agenda. He reassured the participants that regulators and companies work together in respect of legislation and transparency. *"Recently, 43 oil companies accepted to participate in a Statistical Survey in order to encourage the prevention of such risks"* he declared.

For the NGOs, **Anitidia Citores** from Surfrider foundation called for a precise list of platforms in Europe, with their exact locations. Speaking on the Gulf of Mexico disaster, **David Santillo**, Honorary Research Fellow of Greenpeace wondered *"how would the operators have responded to such an accident in Europe? And how would a representative of British Petroleum (BP) have answered in today's meeting?"*

¹ Less than 200 metres below the sea

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CRPM) has also been very attentive since the oil disaster started in the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed, during its North Sea Commission (NSC) General Assembly meeting which was held in Rogaland (NO) on 19 June 2010, the maritime regions signed a statement² on the prevention of oil spills in the North Sea Region.

Gunn Marit Helgesen, Mayor of Telemark County Council (NO), and President of the CPMR North Sea Commission declared to be alarmed by the results of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. *"A similar disaster in the North Sea", she declared, "will have huge consequences for the people and communities along the North Sea coast. This is an example of a disaster that calls for common regulations to avoid and prevent catastrophes like this in the future. When accidents occur we need joint efforts and emergency plans to minimize the impact of such tragedies."*

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² North Sea Commission statement: *"The General Assembly of the North Sea Commission expressed their real concerns in respect of the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It urges all governments to urgently investigate the risks which exist in the North Sea. The North Sea is of fundamental importance to the lives of its inhabitants and the economies of all the countries around the North Sea"*