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Europe's Marine Strategy not yet fit to sail

Brussels, Belgium (24 October 2005) - The environmental groups BirdLife International, Greenpeace, IFAW, Oceana, Seas At Risk, WWF, the Fisheries Secretariat and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) have criticised the European Commission's proposal for a Marine Framework Directive as desperately inadequate. The groups regret that it contains no binding commitment to protect Europe's seas.

With chronic overfishing rampant in EU waters (38 of 43 stocks – such as cod, anchovy, spurdog and sandeel – assessed overfished), as well as hundreds of thousands of tonnes of oil discharged every year into European waters, the protection of marine habitats and biodiversity is essential for the future of the marine ecosystems and the fisheries sector.

Today's proposal was expected to fill a gap in the EU environmental policy, which remains land-focused. It was intended to promote the protection and recovery of marine ecosystems, the alleviation of pollution impacts, and the sustainable use of marine resources. But the Commission's text falls short. It is now the responsibility of the European Parliament and Council to set legally binding objectives within this Directive, including a clear definition of what constitutes a healthy sea.

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Notes to editors:

- The European Marine Strategy, is one of seven thematic strategies resulting from the Community's Sixth Environmental Action Programme. It is composed of three

documents: a communication representing the European Marine Strategy, a legislative proposal for a Marine Framework Directive, and a Commission (regulatory) impact assessment.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/newprg/index.htm>

- A number of relevant commitments have already been made by the Community, including the commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 (EU's Sustainable Development Strategy), provisions to protect marine habitats and species under the EC Habitats and Birds Directives, and targets to achieve good ecological status, not least in coastal waters, under the EC Water Framework Directive.