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COMMENT

European Parliament votes in favour of greater protection for Europe's seas

Strasbourg, 14 November 2006

Joint comment by Greenpeace, BirdLife International, the European Environment Bureau, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Fisheries Secretariat, Seas At Risk and WWF on the European Parliament Plenary Vote on the Marine Strategy Directive:

The European Parliament today called for a determined Europe-wide effort to combat the impacts of destructive and unsustainable fishing, shipping, oil drilling, marine pollution, coastal and offshore construction and littering, which present an escalating threat to Europe's seas. Environmental groups welcomed the assembly's stance on the Marine Strategy Directive, which demands tougher action than those contained in the vague and empty shell of the European Commission's original proposal.

The vote comes just a week after an eminent study warned of the impending collapse of global fish stocks and marine ecosystems by 2050 (1). Supporting environmental groups' repeated demands, the study's authors emphasised the need for marine environments to be managed according to a holistic, ecosystem approach. This would need to include integrated fisheries management, creation of marine reserves, maintenance of essential habitats and pollution control - to avoid serious threats to global food security, coastal water quality and ecosystem stability.

The Parliament backed a number of significant changes to the Directive: it brings forward to 2017 the deadline for member states to clean up their marine environments; it sets specific and legally binding criteria for the definition of a European "good environmental status" applicable to oceans and seas, and proposes fast-track pilot projects for regions such as the Baltic where member states are keen to press ahead with protection measures. The amended Directive also aims at a better integration of environmental concerns into other Community policies – enabling Member States to require EU-wide action, for example, if fishing activities are proving an obstacle to their efforts to achieve 'good environmental status' in their waters.

For further information:

Saskia Richartz, EU Marine Policy Director, Greenpeace European Unit, tel. +32 495 290028, email: saskia.richartz@diala.greenpeace.org

Carol Phua, Fisheries Policy Advisor, WWF European Policy Office, tel. +32 473323779, email: cphua@wwfepo.org

Gaia Angelini, Political campaigner, IFAW EU Office, tel. +32 475 86 78 32; email: gangelini@ifaw.org

John Maggs, Policy Officer, Seas At Risk, tel. +44 7966 3223 79, email: jmaggs@seas-at-risk.org

Staffan Danielsson, Policy Officer the Fisheries Secretariat, tel. +46 (0)8 704 44 84

Email: staffan.danielsson@fishsec.org

Stefan Scheuer, EU Policy Director, The European Environmental Bureau, tel. +32 22891304, email: stefan.scheuer@eeb.org

(1) Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services. Worm et al., Science, Vol 314 3/11/2006. The study, conducted by an international team of marine biologists projects that if current trends continue all currently fished stocks may have collapsed in less than 50 years. It is the first study to examine a wide range of the existing data on ocean species and ecosystems, and provides a synthesis of historical, experimental, fisheries, and observational datasets to understand the importance of biodiversity at the global scale.