Press release | 12.10.2010

Offshore exploration

Proposals on much-needed reform of EU rules on offshore drilling underline moratorium necessity

The European Commission today outlined its proposals for strengthening EU rules on offshore oil and gas exploration (1). The Greens, who launched the EU debate on offshore drilling in June, welcomed the proposals, but regretted that the Commission backtracked on plans to clearly call for a moratorium (2). Commenting on the Commission proposals, Belgian Green MEP **Bart Staes** (Groen) said:

"The Commission's proposals are a welcome first step to addressing the glaring holes in EU rules when it comes to offshore exploration. The communication makes clear that Europe is simply not prepared to deal with the growing risks of offshore drilling or the consequences of an accident, which is an all-too-real threat. In these circumstances, the only responsible course of action is to freeze dangerous deep sea drilling activities and we regret that the Commission has backtracked on proposals in earlier drafts clearly calling on member states to suspend licensing until EU rules are revised."

Dutch Green MEP **Bas Eickhout** added:

"The Commission has acknowledged that EU rules on liability are simply not up to the task and we hope it will now move quickly to revise the EU Environmental Liability Directive. Given the devastating consequences of a spill, watertight liability legislation is necessary to ensure the public is not left to pick up the bill for the oil industry.

"The Commission has also underlined that, while some member states have better safety regulations than others, European safety rules on offshore exploration are fragmented and often fall far short. Given the consequences of any spill would clearly extend beyond national borders, we urgently need to ensure that European-wide safety rules are a strong as possible.

"In short, whether it comes to rules on safety or liability in the event of an accident, EU legislation is piecemeal and simply not up to scratch. We should not make the mistake of waiting for an accident, like the Deepwater Horizon disaster, before acting. Until this is addressed, EU member states should suspend deepwater exploration."

(1) Communication on facing the challenge of the safety of offshore oil and gas activities.

(2) In an earlier leaked draft of the communication, the Commission called on member states to suspend licensing for risky exploration. According the news reports, the final communication simply calls on member states to apply the precautionary principle when considering new licensing. http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE69B4PZ20101012

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Bart Staes

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