

Oil Platforms

European Commission is moving in the right direction, but member states must keep track

European Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger today addressed the European Parliament for the second time on offshore oil and gas exploitation and the European response to the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe. Green MEP's **Bas Eickhout** (Netherlands) and **Bart Staes** (Belgium) welcomed Mr. Oettinger's change of tune and desire to take serious action.

Commenting after the address, **Bas Eickhout** said:

"In contrast to what Mr. Oettinger said the first time in plenary and what he said a few weeks ago in the environmental committee, the European Commission shows a real sense of urgency today. It is very promising that Mr. Oettinger mentions the option for a moratorium on deep sea drilling. Member states have announced more and more plans for deep sea drilling: Ireland for example wants to allow drilling up to 2000-3000 metres! We are happy that the whistle we blew a month ago has been taken seriously by the Commission. We look forward to concrete steps to protect our seas."

"Another crucial point is that the Environmental Liability Directive - currently under review - will also cover offshore oil and gas exploitation. As for safety inspections of offshore installations and cleaning up of oil spills, the mandate of the European Maritime Agency (EMSA) should be expanded. We know Transport Commissioner Kallas, who is currently reviewing the EMSA regulation, is in favour of this."

Bart Staes added:

"When it comes to oil platforms, the member states and their regulators show a tendency to say they have everything under control. But they should fully understand this is one of the most truly pan European issues one can imagine. If there would be an offshore oil spill in Scottish or Norwegian waters, the coasts and biodiversity of all member states around the North Sea would be affected. Therefore the Belgian presidency and other member states should play an active and constructive role by cooperating closely with the Parliament and Commission. In order to prevent a catastrophe, and to respond effectively in case of a major accident, the three EU institutions should try and agree on concrete regulatory measures before the end of the year."

"The member states have a golden opportunity next September: In a ministerial meeting in Norway the parties to the OSPAR Convention (1) will conclude a review of the Convention so that OSPAR will play a major role in the European Maritime Strategy. I call on the member states to make sure that the so called 'Bergen Statement 2010', foreseen to be adopted by the ministerial meeting in Norway, deals in a sufficient way with the current and increasing safety risks connected to offshore oil and gas exploration in the North Sea and beyond. I especially call on the Belgian presidency to make this

happen!"

1) Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment

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