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SNP hail rejection of EU oil exploration ban

An EFA press release by MEPs Ian Hudghton and Alyn Smith (SNP)

SNP Members of the European Parliament **Alyn Smith** and **Ian Hudghton** today (Thursday) hailed a surprise victory in the European Parliament when the Parliament voted to reject a call for a ban on deepwater drilling in EU waters by 323 votes to 285. The motion as a whole went on to be approved by the Parliament by a massive majority, with the SNP maintaining opposition on the grounds that the report calls for considerable expansion of EU competence in energy policy.

The victory may be short-lived however. The European Commission will publish formal proposals in a Communication due on Wednesday 18 October, and the Commissioner confirmed yesterday that we can expect formal legislative proposals, which may revisit the alleged need for a moratorium, in the first semester of 2011. The SNP pledged today to continue to press for continued national control of energy resources.

SNP President **Ian Hudghton** MEP said:

"I'm pleased that MEPs voted quite sensibly to reject calls for a moratorium on deep sea oil drilling. We have all been horrified by the Gulf of Mexico disaster and lessons clearly need to be learnt. But it was ridiculous to suggest that Scotland's oil industry, with its first-rate safety record, should be jeopardised by such a knee-jerk reaction.

"This vote will also be seen as a rebuke for those who want to see the European Commission gain powers over oil and gas resources. It is for Scotland's democratically elected institutions, working with our neighbours, to shape the future of our oil and gas exploration in a responsible way. I look forward to the day when an independent Scotland has full control over its natural resources."

Speaking after the vote, **Alyn Smith** MEP said:

"I take it back, even as recently as last night I was predicting that the Parliament would indeed vote for a ban, on the basis that lots of states have a view on potential pollution from a hypothetical disaster, but had no economic national interest at stake. It turns out my fellow MEPs are more sensible and I'm glad that they were persuaded a ban is a kneejerk reaction and welcome their support.

"A ban would be a disaster for Scotland's economy, and I hope the Commissioner is paying good attention, he does not have support for one in the European Parliament. Today's decision recognises the rigorous standards already in place in Scottish waters. We have over forty years experience of drilling in harsh conditions in the North Sea. In that time, more than 300 wells have been bored in water deeper than 300 feet, without a blowout or other drilling accident.

"However, this will not go away. There are lessons to be learned from the US Deepwater Horizon tragedy, and we will learn them. We have an ongoing job to reassure our European colleagues that our standards are indeed as high as they need to be. The next step is working with the governments of Europe to ensure that the new safety proposals lead to high standards across the continent. I have no doubt that as world leaders in offshore safety, there will be Scottish experts and companies at the forefront of these efforts."

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