



Key Asks to Environment Ministers at the 5th North Sea Conference

briefing

The North Sea

Stimulated by increasing concern over pollution and the status of wildlife populations, Environment Ministers have focused their attention on the North Sea for over two decades. Some progress has been made with elimination of inputs of pollutants such as industrial waste, sewage sludge and incineration at sea, and the reduction of inputs of certain pollutants from land-based sources in the catchment area. However, the 2000 Quality Status Report (QSR) for the Greater North Sea, recognises that certain activities still give cause for concern because of their widespread impact or increasing trend.

Human impacts are considered to be greatest in the North Sea's coastal zones, with sensitive habitats with large ecological significance being disturbed or vanishing. It is anticipated that further significant impacts will be experienced due to demographic developments and climate change.

Offshore, the impact of fisheries is extremely serious - in the wider area of the North East Atlantic, two-thirds of commercial fish stocks are considered to be over-exploited. There are grave concerns about habitat destruction by fishing gear as well as the amount of unintentional bycatch of non-target species.

Inputs of nutrients from land and inputs of oil and chemicals associated with produced water from offshore industry and/or discharges from ships are also highlighted as continuing threats.

The QSR summarises by recognising that the intensive use and sometimes conflicting uses of the North Sea are responsible for a number of problems relating to healthy ecosystems and sustainable use. The top priorities for attention are fisheries, hazardous chemicals and nutrient pollution.

In the light of these continuing concerns, WWF calls on Environment Ministers and the Member of the European Commission to adopt the following actions within the Bergen Declaration:

Establishment of an Ecosystem Approach

To implement an ecosystem approach, Ministers commit to the completion of a strategic environmental and socio-economic assessment of the North Sea by 2004.

Conservation, Restoration and Protection of Species and Habitats

Ministers agree to complete, by 2005, the identification of relevant areas of the North Sea to be designated as marine protected areas (MPAs) belonging to a network of well-managed sites throughout the North Sea, including for offshore areas, and, by 2010, the legal designation and development of management plans for the network of sites.



Fisheries

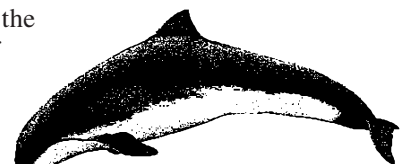
Ministers note that the current process of reforming the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) presents a major opportunity to integrate environmental issues into the principles, objectives and operational procedures of fisheries management.



Ministers urge the competent authorities to make progress to this end and offer their full co-operation to facilitate this.

Ministers urge the competent authorities to minimise bycatch of non-target species by implementing concrete measures, such as improvement of gear selectivity and area restrictions. As one concrete measure, Ministers agree to adopt and implement as soon as possible and in cooperation with all competent authorities a recovery plan for harbour porpoise in the North Sea, with a reduction of the bycatch levels to less than 1 % of the best available population estimate as an intermediate precautionary objective in line with ASCOBANS resolutions. (ASCOBANS =

Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas)



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Reducing the Environmental Impact of Ships

Ministers agree the need for immediate steps to reduce the spreading of non-indigenous organisms to and within the North Sea, and decide upon national and/or regional measures by 2004 at the latest.



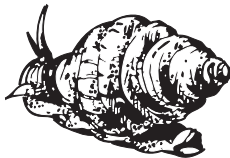
Ministers agree to take concerted action within IMO to promote and establish a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) for the Wadden Sea, along with appropriate protective measures and using risk assessment consider the need for any similar designations in other areas of the North Sea.



Hazardous Substances

Ministers commit to increased efforts to meet the target of the cessation of emissions, discharges and losses of hazardous substances to the marine environment by 2020. In this context, Ministers call on OSPAR to produce programmes and measures which directly relate to the mechanisms of achieving cessation with alacrity and to draw up effective procedures to monitor and assess progress on chemicals selected for priority action.

Ministers further urge OSPAR and the EC to adhere to the precautionary approach by prioritising all substances of concern for the "one generation target" and consistently apply this approach to fresh, transitional, coastal and marine waters.



Cooperation on Spatial Planning in the Protection of the North Sea

Ministers recognise the importance of spatial planning in the delivery of an ecosystem approach and agree to the introduction of spatial planning in the North Sea in a coordinated manner by 2004.



Priority classes of human pressures

(Only classes A & B are shown out of four classes. Class A = highest impact, B = upper intermediate impact, C = lower intermediate impact, D = lowest impact.)

Class A

Fisheries:

- removal of target species by fisheries
- seabed disturbances by fisheries
- effects of discards and mortality of non-target species by fisheries

Trace organic contaminants:

- inputs of trace organic contaminants (other than oil and PAHs) from land
- input of TBT and other antifouling substances by shipping

Nutrients:

- inputs of nutrients from land

Class B

Oil & PAHs:

- input of oil and PAHs by offshore oil and gas industry
- input of oil and PAHs by shipping
- inputs of oil and PAHs from land

Hazardous Substances:

- input of other hazardous substances (other than oil and PAHs) by offshore oil and gas industry
- inputs of other hazardous substances (other than oil, PAHs and antifouling) by shipping

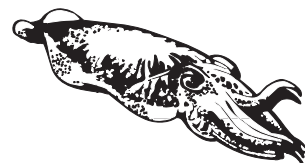
Heavy Metals:

- inputs of heavy metals from land

Biological Impacts:

- introduction of non-indigenous species by shipping
- introduction of cultured specimen, non-indigenous species and diseases by mariculture
- inputs of microbiological pollution and organic material from land

Reference: OSPAR Commission (2000): Quality Status Report 2000, Region II. Greater North Sea. OSPAR Commission, London. <http://www.ospar.org>



WWF briefings launched at the 5th NSC 2002

- A Vision for the North Sea - Making the Ecosystem Approach Operational
- The Crisis in North-Sea Fisheries. Last Exit: Bergen 2002 - Fisheries and Bycatch in the North Sea
- Making Space for North Sea Wildlife - The Need for Marine Protected Areas in the Context of North Sea Wide Spatial Planning
- North Sea Pollution - A Never-ending Story? Shipping & Hazardous Substances

Also available as downloads from <http://www.wwfneap.org>

Human Uses versus Conservation Needs

WWF maps of the North Sea launched at the 5th NSC 2002

- Offshore Areas Proposed for Protection
- Examples of Ecologically Important Areas
 - Sediments and Sediment Disturbance
 - Sediment Disturbance by Bottom Trawls
 - Offshore Sources of Pollution and Noise

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