

# North Sea Pollution - A Never-Ending Story?

The North Sea Conference (NSC) process has become a trend-setter world wide by introducing the principle of precautionary action. There is a long track record of achievement, including the ban on dumping and incineration of industrial waste at sea, the cessation of sewage sludge dumping, the land-based disposal of disused offshore installations and the reduction of inputs of certain pollutants from land-based sources. Those key commitments adopted by North Sea Environment Ministers have subsequently been inscribed into Regional Seas legislation, such as the OSPAR Convention. In adopting the target of the cessation of discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances within one generation, the 4th North Sea Conference (Esbjerg, 1995) delivered a visionary milestone in terms of marine, water and chemicals policy, which however has been watered down at the level of European legislation.

The prevention of pollution from ships has been on the agenda since the 1st NSC in Bremen, 1984. North Sea states successfully initiated regional measures at the level of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), including the designation of the North Sea as a Special Area for garbage from ships, and of North West European waters as a Special Area for oil from ships. North Sea states played a major role in promoting the adoption of a global regulation on air pollution from ships and the global agreement on the phase-out of harmful antifouling paints on ships (e.g. TBT). The 5th NSC will have to address emerging threats that aggravate the environmental impact of shipping in the North Sea:

The North Sea has one of the highest shipping activities in the world. Furthermore, the natural ecosystems are out of balance.

These two factors contribute to make the North Sea especially vulnerable to ballast water introductions. About 120 alien species have been registered since 1900, which makes 1.7 new species per year. Some of these species have caused serious problems, i.e. the toxic algae *Chattonella* which has killed more than 1000 tonnes of farmed salmon in Norway.



Despite the high risk and the values at stake, there are currently no regulations on ballast water discharges in the North Sea. An international ballast water convention is under preparation at IMO level. However, given previous experiences with IMO Conventions, we may easily reach the year 2010 before the Convention has entered into force.

Unregulated discharge of ballast water is comparable to playing 'Russian roulette' with the marine ecosystem and industries.

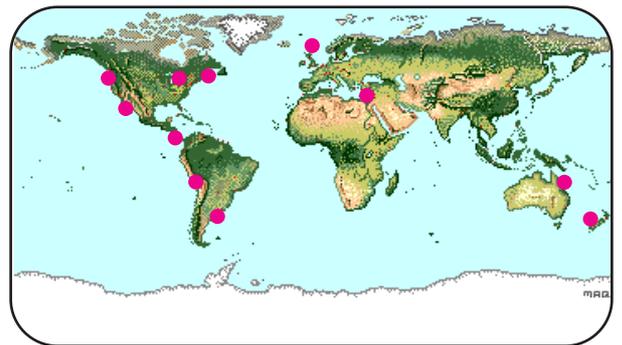
## WWF calls on Ministers to

- **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.

## 5th North Sea Conference: Shipping Issues & Hazardous Substances

### The Introduction of Alien Species via Ballast Water

The introduction of alien species is one of the four biggest threats to the marine environment globally. Ships ballast water is the principal vector for such organisms. Around the world, there are far too many examples of ecological, economic and social disasters caused by ballast water organisms.



### Examples of countries and/or port authorities applying local or regional ballast water regulations

<http://www.intertanko.com/tankerfacts/environmental/ballast/ballastreq.htm>

[http://www.eagle.org/regulatory/regupdate/mep41/Ballast\\_Water\\_Managemnet.htm](http://www.eagle.org/regulatory/regupdate/mep41/Ballast_Water_Managemnet.htm)

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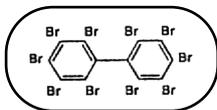
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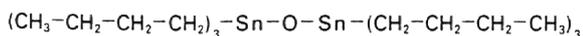
## Elimination of Hazardous Substances

While North Sea states have made progress in terms of quantitative reduction targets (50/70%) for some of the 37 chemicals selected in 1990 and/or 1995, and in particular for heavy metals, the follow-up to §17 of the Esbjerg Declaration („one generation target“) is still at stake.

The OSPAR Commission merits acknowledgement for the identification of about 400 chemicals of possible concern, the establishment of a selection and prioritisation mechanism for these substances, and the ongoing development of background documents for more than 40 chemicals for priority action, which are expected to form the basis for programmes and measures. However, none of the chemicals identified for urgent measures by the 5th NSC in 1995 and/or the OSPAR Commission since 1998 has been phased out to date.



WWF fears that the incomplete transformation of the target at EU level will hamper the elimination of harmful compounds, including pesticides and endocrine disrupting chemicals from the North Sea environment. In the EU Water Framework Directive, there are two elements of weakening the „one generation target“: (i) priority setting must generally be based on risk assessment, hence identification of hazardous substances for priority action only in exceptional cases can be based on simplified risk ranking as in the case of the first priority list adopted in 2001; and (ii) the cessation target for the first few hazardous substances is to be met at 2023 to 2025 by the latest, depending on the speed the Parliament and Council adopt the Commissions proposals. For all other hazardous substances to be identified by 2005 or later the cessation target is to be met again 20 year after adoption of control measures.



## WWF calls on Ministers to

- **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.
- **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.



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## The Metamorphosis of the „One Generation Target“

### § 17 Esbjerg Declaration, 1995

„The Ministers agree that the objective is to ensure a sustainable, sound and healthy North Sea ecosystem. The guiding principle for achieving this objective is the precautionary principle.

*This implies the prevention of the pollution of the North Sea by continuously reducing discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances thereby moving towards the target of their cessation within one generation (25 years) with the ultimate aim of concentrations in the environment near background values for naturally occurring substances and close to zero concentrations for man-made synthetic substances.“*

### Sintra Statement, 1998

„We agree to prevent pollution of the maritime area by continuously reducing discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances (that is, substances which are toxic, persistent and liable to bioaccumulate or which give rise to an equivalent level of concern), with the ultimate aim of achieving concentrations in the environment near background values for naturally occurring substances and close to zero for man-made synthetic substances. We shall make every endeavour to move towards the target of cessation of discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances by the year 2020.“

### EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) , 2000

„The Commission shall submit a proposal setting out a list of priority substances selected amongst those which present a significant risk to or via the aquatic environment. Substances shall be prioritised for action on the basis of risks to or via the aquatic environment, identified by: (a) risk assessment ... (b) targeted risk assessment ... When necessary ... substances shall be prioritised for action on the basis of risk .... identified by a simplified risk assessment procedure. ... For the priority substances the Commission shall submit proposals of control for: - the progressive reduction of discharges, losses of the substances concerned and in particular - the cessation or phasing-out of discharges, emissions and losses of the substances as identified ....., including an appropriate timetable for doing so. The timetable shall not exceed 20 years after the adoption of these proposals by the European Parliament and the Council .....

### Further Reading:

EEB, FoE, SAR & WWF (2000): The Environmental NGOs' Approach. Workshop Report: How to Reach the Esbjerg Goal. Guiding principles and steering instruments to reduce discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances. Stockholm, 7-8 September 2000. Swedish Ministry of Environment. Stockholm.

NFD (2001): Actual and potential effects of introduced marine organisms in Norwegian Waters, including Svalbard. Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. Trondheim.

WWF & SAR (2000): Hazardous Substances Identified by OSPAR for Cessation of Discharges, Emissions and Losses by 2020. WWF NE Atlantic Programme & Seas At Risk Federation. Bremen/Utrecht.

WWF (2001): European Importers and Producers of Chemical Substances Suspected to Have POP-like Properties. ÖKOPOL – Institute for Environmental Strategies. A report commissioned by WWF NE Atlantic Programme. Bremen

WWF (2001): WWF's views on the amended proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Decision for establishing the list of priority substances in the field of water policy (COM(2001) 17 final). WWF European Policy Office.