



Press release

Hope for ban on oil and gas exploration in Spanish waters

Wädenswil, January 13, 2021: While France has already imposed a ban on exploring any new oil and gas sites in its waters and the Danish government has just announced such ban for its waters within the North Sea, the Spanish Government has proposed a similar measure within its draft Climate Change and Energy Transition Bill.

The international marine protection organisation OceanCare considers the proposed text, which is expected to be decided upon within this month, an essential legal text which will prohibit any new hydrocarbon exploration, research and exploitation project throughout the national territory, including the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf.

However, the current draft also includes some legal loopholes which OceanCare urges the Members of the Spanish Parliament to address and remove. Explicitly, all hydrocarbon exploration projects currently undergoing an administrative process need to be prohibited and shelved. Further, it must be clear that the current exploitation concessions will not be extended when their respective licences expire.

Banning all fossil fuel exploration activities and initiating a gradual but urgent phase-out of current exploitation activities will facilitate and accelerate the large-scale deployment of renewable energy, helping the EU to become a leading region in the production of, among others, green hydrogen, which is seen to be a key energy vector in the decarbonisation of the economy", stated Nicolas Entrup, ocean policy expert and Co-Director of International Relations at OceanCare.

This would also be a clear signal for companies in the fossil fuel sector to truly fulfill their pledge to be carbon neutral by 2050, seriously committing to the production of alternative fuels with zero greenhouse gas emissions", added Entrup.

The International Energy Agency and various scientific studies have concluded that if we really want to face the challenge of climate change and comply with the Paris Agreement, we should leave most of the remaining reserves of fossil fuels unused in the ground, so as to avoid a drastic accumulation of CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere.

In the context of climate emergency like the current one, it does not make sense to continue carrying out hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation. "OceanCare encourages European countries to actively work to achieve as soon as possible a full ban on fossil fuel exploration and an urgent phase-out of existing

exploitation concessions throughout the European territory”, said Carlos Bravo, policy consultant to OceanCare in Spain.

Some countries, such as France, have already done so. In December 2017, its National Assembly passed a law to end these activities throughout its national territory. Denmark has recently announced a ban on new oil and gas permits in the North Sea. Portugal and Ireland are considering similar legislation, too. Outside Europe, several countries like New Zealand have banned offshore hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation.

OceanCare points to the fact that with banning oil and gas exploration, so called seismic surveys, one of the loudest man-made noise sources would be silenced. During seismic surveys, airguns are employed which emit impulsive sound reaching up to 260 decibels every 10 to 15 seconds for several weeks. Dozens of those surveys are constantly taking place all around the planet. This noise pollution is of great concern to many marine species (cetaceans but also crustaceans, molluscs, and even coral reefs ...) and the wider marine ecosystem. Removing this noise source would have multiple environmental benefits for the oceans.

In this context, OceanCare calls on the members of the "Coalition for an Exemplary Mediterranean in 2030", which was launched this Monday at the One Planet Summit for Biodiversity, organised by the French Government in cooperation with the United Nations and the World Bank, to include the objective of prohibiting offshore hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation activities in their waters.

This coalition currently comprises six Mediterranean countries, including Spain and France. It is a multisectoral initiative that aims to make the Mediterranean Sea an exemplary sea by 2030 by mobilising the States of the basin through concrete actions around four objectives: advance towards the sustainability of maritime transport, gradually end overfishing, fight against marine pollution and marine litter and develop protected areas for reaching the 30 percent goal by 2030.

For more information

- Nicolas Entrup: Phone:+43 660 211 9963; Mail: nentrup@oceancare.org
- Carlos Bravo: Phone: +34 626 998 241; Mail : cbravovilla@oceancare.org

About OceanCare

OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education. OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is a partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), as well as UNEP/MAP. OceanCare has also been accredited to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governing body of UNEP as part of the Major Group 'Science and Technology' and is a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter.