

Brussels/Gland 7 July 2010

Dear Ms Wallis,

European Parliament urged to call for a moratorium on new drilling for petroleum in the Arctic

We are writing to you with regard to the upcoming meeting of the 8th Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians that will be meeting at the European Parliament on 13th-15th September this year. We are deeply concerned about the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It clearly illustrates that the petroleum industry is not in a position to manage the huge risks involved in drilling and exploration of oil and gas, and moreover that the regulatory framework for such activities are at best insufficient.

With the increasingly intensified quest for locating new petroleum sources, combined with the ice melting due to global warming in the Arctic, industry and governments are preparing for exploring oil and gas resources in new undiscovered areas.

Vast but vulnerable natural resources

The Arctic contains some of the richest, most diverse areas in the world in terms of renewable natural resources. The most important commercial fish species of the North Atlantic depend on these waters – such as cod, haddock and herring. The Arctic endemic species are particularly vulnerable and many of them already in danger of extinction. The low growth rates and fragile reproduction of most endemic species make the Arctic ecosystems extremely sensitive to any pollution.

The difficulties of dealing with oil spills in the Arctic

Petroleum activities will always involve risk of accidents and serious emissions. The number of small and large accidental spills in Europe is rising, as illustrated by the recent evacuation of the Gullfaks C platform in the North Sea. Accidents similar to the one of Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico could well happen elsewhere. Oil spills in the Arctic are likely to be dramatically more difficult to deal with than in many other seas, due to sea ice, strong currents, cold weather, rough seas and dark winters.



Photo: WWF

Call for sustainable economic development in the Arctic

Creating new jobs for the Arctic region is one of the main arguments for exploration of its petroleum resources. But as Europe is on a steady course to decarbonising its economy and promoting vast investments in renewable energy sources, it would be a grave mistake to start developing an industry that will face declining demand from Europe in the decades to come. We must by all means avoid development of a dual policy, whereby the Arctic relies on development of a fossil fuel extraction economy while the rest of Europe shifts towards a clean economy.

Instead, the EU must ensure that this region becomes a key contributor to the EU's goal of building a truly sustainable economy based on renewable energy sources. For instance, the potential for both onshore and offshore wind energy in the region is tremendous. With the development of an increasingly integrated European electricity grid, these resources will in the future be able to deliver clean energy to the continent. However, the development of a petroleum industry in the Arctic would become an obstacle for this nascent industry to compete for expertise, skills and investment in the region.

Call for a moratorium

On this basis, the undersigned organisations call upon the European Parliament to take the lead in calling for a moratorium on all new petroleum exploration activities in the Arctic. We would be glad to participate in policy debates and elicit support from the rest of civil society across Europe to support this goal.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,



Frederic Hauge
President
The Bellona Foundation



John Hontelez
Secretary-General
European Environmental Bureau



Gary Miller
Arctic Initiative Leader (*ad interim*)
WWF