**Finance Minister Mr Yiannis Stouraras**

**Tourism Minister Mrs Olga Kefalogianni**

27.05.2014

Dear Ministers Stournaras and Kefalogianni,

Alarmed by the prospect of unprecedented loss of valuable coastal ecosystems, due to the draft law on the "Protection of the shoreline and coast", WWF Spain addresses you with this urgent call to rethink Greece's policies on coastal conservation and tourism and to lead Greece's way towards a living economy through a healthy and sustainably managed natural capital.

As I am sure you know, Spain is the Mediterranean country suffering from the most dramatic alteration and destruction of its coastline. Intensive development during the last decades, without environmental consideration, has had disastrous consequences, which Spain will have to address in the coming years.

Currently, 75% of the Spanish coast is urbanized or is under development (at a rate of 8 ha/day during the last 20 years) and the first kilometre of coastline has been completely developed in one third of Spain's Mediterranean coast. In the same time, about half a million dwellings are empty.

This disproportionate growth of real-estate industry has had a huge environmental cost and has fostered corruption. The increase in population living along the coast and uncontrolled development have caused a profound degradation of the coastal environment, accompanied by unsustainable use of water, land and energy.

Furthermore, important key ecosystems have disappeared or are under severe threat: most of the coastal wetlands have disappeared, 60% of the dunes have been lost, 80% of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows have been degraded, beaches have regressed and many river channels and streams have been altered.

This environmental degradation of the coast has had not only environmental, but also economic effects. With over 70% of the coastline is occupied, there has been a loss of competitiveness, attractiveness, and environmental quality with negative effects on the quality and stability of tourism. In fact, tourism in Spain has declined during the last years, only benefiting from social and political instability in other Mediterranean countries.

In your own country, Greece, we are already aware of cases where unsustainable coastal development is threatening extraordinary landscapes and sites of unique biodiversity. Such examples include Laganas in the National Marine Park of Zakynthos

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and the sand dunes and sea turtle habitat in Kyparissia, the two most important nesting sites for *Caretta caretta* in the Mediterranean. Due to the threats to this globally endangered species your country has been referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union. In other areas, for example in Rhodes and Crete, intensive development is undermining the future of tourism itself, since the natural capital that is an integral part of the tourist product is also being degraded, whereas coastal destruction in Crete has been reported by scientists as a major threat to soil quality, flood protection and beach stability. Environmental protection of the coastline is a key factor for competitiveness, human welfare, job creation and the preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural centers of interest. In fact, the European Commission has warned that if coastal development is not controlled, it can jeopardize biodiversity, natural resources and cultural heritage.

So taking into account the Spanish experience of recent years, I wholeheartedly urge you to ensure that any legislation affecting the coastline will guarantee the protection of coastal ecosystems and the ecological services which they offer, so that Greece can be internationally recognized as a major tourism destination that respects its key tourist product: nature.

Sincerely,

Juan Carlos del Olmo

WWF Spain CEO