



POSITION PAPER

2015

WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative

POSITION ON OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

WWF does not support any new oil and gas development anywhere in the Mediterranean Sea region. New hydrocarbon development is not an environmentally or economically sustainable policy. Therefore, WWF opposes any exploration and exploitation of new hydrocarbon development on both the continental shelf and the deep-sea floor in the Mediterranean¹.

According to several scientific studies and the International Energy Agency (IEA) more than two-thirds of the earth's known fossil fuel reserves should be left underground to have a 50% chance of constraining the increase in global average temperature to less than 2°C compared to pre-industrial times and to avoid the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

We need to start implementing a retirement of fossil fuel reserves and a 'no drilling' approach as soon as possible. And where would be a better place to start than in highly vulnerable and fragile marine ecosystems like the Mediterranean Sea?

WWF is open to constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including financial actors, in an effort to avoid new marine oil and gas developments in the region and ensure the maximum level of environmental protection standards in existing oil and gas developments in the region (including their complete phasing out, if they present any risk).

This position takes into account the unique biodiversity and geo-morphology of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a biodiversity hotspot of global relevance, with 28% of endemic animal species and unique ecosystems ranging from coastal seagrass beds to deep-sea vulnerable habitats. Recent studies assessing pressures on Mediterranean marine ecosystems highlight the high incidence of the cumulative impacts of the terrestrial and maritime sectoral activities which take place². The semi-enclosed nature of the sea, exemplified by a water replacement time as high as 80 years, exacerbates its extreme vulnerability. Because of such intense pressure the Mediterranean has been characterized as a sea "under siege"³.

Since the 1990s, the global significance of hydrocarbon resources in the Mediterranean Sea has dramatically increased. Hydrocarbon exploration projects and associated drilling activities have mushroomed around the Mediterranean, and drilling has penetrated to even the most inaccessible regions of the deep-sea floor. Advances in seismic research and drilling technology, a rapid increase in global fossil fuel and energy demand, fluctuating oil and energy prices and the debate on the 'security of energy supply' – all exacerbated by the global economic crisis which has hit the region – have led to an exploration boom and consequent significant findings of oil and especially gas.

The short-term business-as-usual projection is that the oil and gas sector will become the prevalent maritime industry in the region, overshadowing traditional activities (such as fishing, aquaculture and tourism) that – unlike hydrocarbon exploitation – rely on healthy and functional ecosystems. New oil and gas exploitation result in a further escalation of human pressure on the Mediterranean Sea and threaten its unique natural values and its ability to supply crucial ecosystem goods and services.

A serious accident, such as the one in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, would have devastating effects on species and ecosystems with irreversible consequences for food security and traditional economic activities, such as tourism, on which Mediterranean economies rely. In addition to these regional impacts, new oil and gas developments will further increase societal reliance on fossil fuels, with deleterious consequences on the global climate and the entire biosphere.

WWF underlines the fact that the Mediterranean region has abundant renewable energy resources which, however, currently account for only a limited share of the region's primary energy supply. Renewables and enhanced energy efficiency contribute to the energy security goals of the EU in a much more effective and sustainable fashion than fossil fuels and are also in line with the EU's recently formulated climate goals for 2030. Rather than investing in a search for new oilfields, financial resources should be concentrated on developing renewables and energy efficiency that become the overriding priority – overcoming the many institutional, regulatory and market barriers they face in the Mediterranean region. The present situation, with a bias towards new hydrocarbon development, strongly hinders the necessary legislation for and investment in renewables and ambitious energy efficiency and conservation.

February 2015

¹Including halting any on-going exploration activities and works aimed at starting new exploitation activities at the moment this position was adopted.

²Micheli F, Halpern BS, Walbridge S, Ciriaco S, Ferretti F, et al. (2013) *Cumulative Human Impacts on Mediterranean and Black Sea Marine Ecosystems: Assessing Current Pressures and Opportunities*. PLoS ONE 8(12): e79889. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0079889

³<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1466-8238.2011.00697.x/abstract>