



Press release

Great win for whales: The Gulf of Lion is Now Completely Rid of the Oil Threat

Wädenswil, January 22, 2021: Yesterday saw another major setback for the petroleum industry's interest for oil and gas deposits in the Mediterranean Sea. Four requests for exploration permits have been shelved by the Spanish government. OceanCare welcomes this decision, but again urges the Government that the Climate Change and Energy Transition Bill includes the archiving of all existing hydrocarbon exploration permits that are still being processed.

The international marine conservation organisation OceanCare welcomes the definitive shelving of the hydrocarbon research permits called "Nordeste-4", "Nordeste-5", "Nordeste-6" and "Nordeste-7", requested in the Gulf of León, off the coast of Catalonia (see attached map), by the Dutch oil company «Vitol E&P BV». A respective announcement was published on Thursday 21st, in the Spanish Official Gazette.

With the archiving of these four projects, the Gulf of Lion is finally completely free of the oil threat. In 2018 and 2019, another eight "Nordeste" projects had been shelved, all of which were initially requested by Capricorn Spain Limited, the Spanish subsidiary of Scottish oil company Cairn Energy. In previous years, pressure from civil society and local authorities had already managed to prevent several seismic surveys projects of hydrocarbons search in this area of the Mediterranean.

When searching for hydrocarbon resources in the seabed, air guns every 10 to 15 seconds emit explosions of around 260 dB lasting for several weeks or, even months, with significant impact on marine life.

All those hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation projects overlapped with the Mediterranean Cetacean Migration Corridor, an area of great ecological value, declared in June 2018 as a Marine Protected Area (MPA). In December 2019, this MPA was included in the List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) by the Barcelona Convention, an achievement for which OceanCare had fought for several years.

The French part of the Gulf of Lion had already been protected from the oil threat since December 2017, when the French National Assembly approved the Macron Government's bill that made France the first country in the world to effectively ban the production of hydrocarbons. There is no exploration or exploitation of hydrocarbons in the French waters of the Mediterranean.

The definitive archive of these "Nordeste" projects is one of the measures that OceanCare had repeatedly requested from the Spanish Government. However, the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITERD) still maintains a significant number of hydrocarbon exploration projects in process, several of them in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Tarragona, near the Ebro Delta, where Repsol also operates the oil extraction platform called "Casablanca".

"If we really want to face climate change decisively and effectively, and to comply with our commitment to the Paris Agreement, it makes no sense to continue processing hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation projects," said Carlos Bravo, spokesman for OceanCare in Spain.

For this reason, OceanCare urges the Spanish Government and the parliamentary groups that the Climate Change and Energy Transition Bill (currently in parliamentary processing) expressly states that all projects

and/or requests for exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons currently under administrative processing will be archived. At present, only the prohibition of any new exploration and exploitation project of hydrocarbons is stated in Article 8 of this Bill.

"The cancellation of all hydrocarbon exploration projects currently in progress would resolve the incongruous situation of continuing hydrocarbon extraction activities beyond the year 2050, when it is assumed that Spain should have already reached a decarbonized economy," stated Bravo.

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More information :

- Map of the Gulf of Lion, indicating the four research permits which have been shelved, as well as the overlap with the SPAMI corridor ©OceanCare

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.