



Environment Ministers fail to adopt a strong Marine Strategy Directive

Comment on the Council agreement on the Marine Strategy Directive (Environment Council 18th December 2006)

The EEB, joined with BirdLife International, the Fisheries Secretariat, Greenpeace, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Oceana, Seas At Risk, the European Coastal Union, in criticising today's Council agreement on the Marine Strategy Directive as lacking commitment to achieve a good environmental status of the marine environment.

The Directive is to achieve a "good environmental status" in all European seas by 2021 at the latest, through an ecosystem-based management within Europe's Marine Regions, a tighter control of human activities in the marine environment and an improved knowledge of marine ecosystems.

Member States have chosen to undermine the substance of the Directive by pledging to merely "aim to achieve" rather than actually "achieve" Good Environmental Status. They limited their commitment to taking measure to protect the marine environment only where "reasonable and practicable" and where they do not incur a "disproportionate cost".

Read in its entirety, however, the overall sense of a weak rather than strong commitment to protect our seas overshadows any improvements the Environment Ministers have adopted on the Commission proposal. Even important existing environmental objectives arising from regional and international conventions and accepted principles of good governance, such as the precautionary principle, have been deleted or ignored by the Council, despite the fact that the Member States and European Union have endorsed these commitments.

In addition, Environment Ministers have appeared all too willing to relinquish their duties to protect all marine wildlife, including Europe's fish, solely to their Fisheries Minister colleagues, apparently due to concerns over competencies. The Marine Strategy Directive, as suggest by Council, will do little to halt the loss of marine biodiversity and is an inadequate environmental 'pillar' for a possible future EU Maritime Policy.

See also the coalition position paper "*Defining Good Environmental Status in the context of the European Marine Strategy Directive*" at the EEB website.

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