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ORGANISATIONS

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Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador
Offshore Petroleum Board
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Subject: Comments on Draft Eastern Newfoundland Strategic Environmental Assessment Report

To whom it may concern:

The European Union (EU) would like to express its strong concerns about oil and gas exploratory activities in the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA) in the framework of the consultation on the Draft Eastern Newfoundland Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report. The SEA draft report appears to be incomplete as fundamental data pertinent to NAFO conservation efforts have not been taken into consideration for the SEA draft report.

Firstly, we would like to underline the potential impact from oil and gas exploitation on efforts undertaken by NAFO and its Contracting Parties towards conservation and a sound management of fisheries resources. The proposed licensing areas significantly overlap with Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) protection areas. The most vulnerable ecosystems are easily damaged and have a very slow recovery or may never recover even from occasional disturbances. Based on the Precautionary Approach and on the Ecosystem Approach, NAFO decided to close these areas for fisheries. We would like to underline that the protection of VMEs is a goal in itself as referred to in numerous United Nations General Assembly Resolutions (UNGA Resolution 61/105 of 2006, Resolution 64/72 of 2009, and Resolution 66/68 of 2011).

Secondly, another concern is the overlap of proposed licensing areas with important fishing grounds. Fishing activity does not span uniformly along the NRA and some areas are particularly important for certain stocks. We foresee that if oil and gas exploitation takes place in these areas, exclusion zones will force a number of fishermen out of the fishery.

Thirdly, the impact of seismic activities on NAFO research activities needs to be underlined. Last year a seismic vessel - Sanco Spirit - undertaking geoscientific surveys in the context of the SEA disturbed heavily the work of an EU research vessel carrying out a biological survey. During its research activities around the Flemish Cap the EU vessel was forced to modify haul plans as the seismic vessel is a huge source of noise. Survey vessels are specially conceived to reduce noise and interference with the marine ecosystem. Further, the material produced by Co-Chairs of the Joint Fisheries Commission-Scientific Council Working Group on Ecosystem Approach Framework to

Fisheries Management (WG-EAFFM) of NAFO shows that NAFO surveys could overlap with the proposed license areas. The surveys are very costly and of utmost importance for the work of NAFO in particular for its stock assessments. Surveys need to be consistent along the time and any perturbation during a particular year may considerably bias the results and undermine scientific advice and fisheries management.

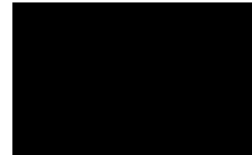
Moreover, seismic vessels have a short and limited capacity of manoeuvring. This raises questions regarding the safety and the protection of fishing vessels.

Therefore, it is important that the adequate arrangements are found in order to ensure a mutual exchange of information between NAFO and the organisations behind the seismic surveys taking place in the NRA.

As the objective of the SEA is to inform for future licencing decisions by the C-NLOPB for this region, the EU believes that the impacts of possible future oil and gas exploitation in the proposed new licensing areas need to be reflected in the SEA report. They are threefold: on VMEs, on the fishing activity and on the fisheries research survey.

Furthermore, it would be important to start reflecting on mitigation measures. Would exploitation start, an appropriate set of mechanisms meant to avoid all possible losses and damages and also sufficient tools to accommodate for financial compensation should be put in place.

Yours sincerely,



Head of Unit;
Head of the EU delegation
to NAFO