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Our oceans and seas need protection!

New background paper by Federal Environment Agency on perspectives in European Marine Strategy

Our oceans and seas cover about 70 percent of the earth's surface and, just as do rainforests, play an important role for mankind and the environment. The oceans and seas are a source of food, they regulate Earth's climate, they harbour phenomenal energy resources, and they are the origin of all life. Protection of oceans and seas is therefore particularly crucial, and according to the Federal Environment Agency (UBA), strategies for their protection must be co-ordinated and consolidated across national borders. A focus on a few individual sectors such as fisheries, transport, or tourism will not suffice. "We need an integrative approach in order to efficiently solve the variety of problems facing the oceans and seas. It's the only way to achieve their sustainable protection", said UBA President Prof. Dr. Andreas Troge. A survey of current European marine policy and recommendations for its further improvement are provided in a new UBA background paper.

Our seas and oceans serve a great number of purposes: they are a source of food for man and animal; they regulate the earth's climate, temperature, carbon dioxide and oxygen levels; they store energy resources such as oil, gas, or waves and currents; they are a source of raw materials such as manganese nodules, ore sludge, sand or gravel; and finally, they supply natural medicines and ingredients for drugs and cosmetics. The oceans and seas are the roads used by the shipping industry and serve as rest and recreation areas vital to the tourism industry.

Heavy use of the oceans poses a great risk to marine ecosystems—overfishing, pollution, overfertilisation, introduction of non-native species, as well as loss of certain (native) species and habitats. Furthermore, the oceans are suffering the consequences of climate change, witnessed in rising water temperatures and water levels as well as acidification by input of the greenhouse gas CO₂.

Protecting the oceans and seas from these dangers and ensuring its sustainable use requires an innovative protection strategy. The EU Commission made recommendations in its Green Book in 2006, and in the Blue Book in 2007, for future European Maritime Strategy across sectors. In so doing, maritime policy has to top priority on the Commission's agenda for the first time. The UBA welcomes these efforts but believes a healthy balance between use and

protection of Europe's oceans and seas is still lacking, for the proposals for future EU marine policy still focus primarily on aspects of use. Moreover, UBA believes that the Marine Strategy Directive soon to be adopted by the EU, and which is intended to serve as the environmental pillar of EU marine policy, falls short in certain critical aspects of the requirements of high-level protection of oceans and seas.

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) which the Helsinki Commission resolved in November 2007 is the first regional action programme to protect Europe's oceans and seas that takes account of the future Marine Strategy Directive. It focuses on the needs of the Baltic Sea's marine ecosystem and formulates specific measures to protect it.

The background paper titled *Perspektiven der europäischen Meerespolitik* [*Perspectives in European Marine Policy*] is available for download on the Internet at www.umweltbundesamt.de.

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