

Bonn Agreement Accord de Bonn



Press statement

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North Sea states strengthen cooperation against marine pollution

Today all North Sea states and the European Community agreed on the framework of an Action Plan to combat illegal and accidental pollution of the Greater North Sea and its approaches. The Action Plan to be further developed by the end of this year will strengthen joint prevention, preparedness and response to marine pollution from shipping and other maritime activities in one of the world's busiest international shipping areas. This important step towards a clean and healthy North Sea was made at the Annual Meeting of Contracting Parties to the Bonn Agreement, one of the most successful multilateral agreements which is an obligation under the International Maritime Organization.

The meeting took place on 7-9 October 2009 in Bonn, 40 years after the agreement was concluded in the former capital of Germany in 1969. In his message to the meeting, Wolfgang Tiefensee, Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs, Germany, congratulated the Bonn Agreement Contracting Parties on 40 years of successful work. He said that he was convinced that in future the Bonn Agreement will "yet again make a successful contribution" to achieve a good environmental status for the seas by 2020, a goal set by the Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union and its environmental pillar, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Bonn Agreement has made an important contribution to the prevention, preparedness and response to marine pollution both in Europe and globally. In 1967, the tanker Torrey Canyon was wrecked South-West of England. It was carrying 117,000 tonnes of crude oil. As this cargo turned into a black tide, the need for international cooperation to deal with such problems became clear. Coastal states could not wait until the threat was in their waters: they needed to respond collectively as soon as possible. The scientific, technical and operational work accomplished in the last 40 years has been vital in protecting the region's marine environment.

Notwithstanding the efficient Bonn Agreement framework for joint preparedness and response to maritime disasters and joint aerial and satellite surveillance to detect and deter illegal discharges, the danger of accidents and pollution remains – mainly due to bigger ships, growing volumes of cargo and the dangerous nature of many goods being carried. Delegates from all eight North Sea States and the European Community, plus observers from Ireland and Spain, together with guests from other maritime organisations, including the International Maritime Organization, and the Lisbon Agreement unanimously agreed at the meeting that continuing efforts were needed to protect the values of the North Sea and services provided by the marine environment to human society, against risks from maritime activities.

Ms Pia Bucella, Chair of the Bonn Agreement and Director at the European Commission, concluded a tribute to the anniversary proceedings saying ‘I am convinced that the Bonn Agreement Action Plan, addressing some of these challenges, has the potential for becoming a key milestone in the further development of the Agreement’.

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Note for editors

The Bonn Agreement (Agreement for cooperation in dealing with pollution of the North Sea by oil and other harmful substances) is the mechanism by which the North Sea States, and the European Community (the Contracting Parties), work together to help each other in combating pollution in the North Sea Area from maritime disasters and chronic pollution from ships and offshore installations and to carry out surveillance as an aid to detecting and combating pollution at sea.

Based on a German initiative, this important Agreement on the protection of the marine environment was concluded in 1969 in the former federal capital of Bonn. Since then, Germany has been the Depository of the Bonn Agreement. In 1983 and 1989, the Agreement was extended and adapted to take account of the latest developments.

The North Sea States are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Ireland will shortly join the Bonn Agreement and the North Sea Area will be enlarged to include Irish waters.