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Photograph of Gannet by Henk Strietman

Press Release: For immediate release

Ministers called to act on marine litter at North-East Atlantic Environment Summit

Bergen, Norway 17th September 2010. Ministers attending next week's high level meeting of the OSPAR Commission in Norway will be asked by Seas At Risk, KIMO International and other environmental NGOs to support a manifesto calling for urgent action to deal with marine "garbage patches" and the build up of marine litter in the North-East Atlantic.

Current levels of litter are unacceptable with on average 712 items per 100m of beach. Not only is this an eyesore it has severe ecological and economic impacts. 94% of North Sea Fulmars, a sea bird that feeds exclusively at sea, have on average 0.3g of plastic in their stomachs, equivalent to 30g or a plate full for a human. And last year municipalities in the Netherlands and UK spent approximately €28 million just cleaning beaches.

With 'garbage patches' forming across the world, most notably in the Pacific Ocean and an area in the western part of the North Atlantic Ocean, urgent action is needed to stop the accumulation of marine litter.

The manifesto calls on Ministers to end the problem of marine litter within a generation, to make marine litter a priority for the OSPAR Commission and to set an intermediate 40% reduction target for 2020. Ministers are being asked to support a range of measures and initiatives that would regulate and help prevent litter reaching the sea from ships and land-based sources and stop the growth in marine litter.

The manifesto (see attached) will be presented by Seas At Risk and KIMO to Ministers on 24th September at a KIMO side event "A Plastic Breakfast" highlighting the impact of marine litter by dissecting and removing the litter from a beach washed Fulmar's stomach. More details will follow soon.

The 'Marine Litter Manifesto for the North-East Atlantic' is also supported by a host of influential national and international groups, including the North Sea Foundation, WWF, Birdlife International, the Marine Conservation Society, the Surfrider Foundation and Waddenvereniging.

John Mouat of KIMO International said: *"Ministers now need to recognise that marine litter is not just a visual or social issue but is a serious pollution issue of the level of radioactivity or hazardous substances and should be treated as such. The 2010 OSPAR Environment Summit provides the perfect opportunity to send such a strong statement by setting a target to reduce marine litter by 40% by 2020"*

Chris Carroll of Seas At Risk said: *"Along with combined global efforts, regional action is vital in order to stop the growth of marine litter. Ministers of the OSPAR Commission have a golden opportunity to set an example and agree to a range of measures that would discourage ship waste dumping and help prevent litter reaching the seas from land based sources."*

For more information, call John Mouat of KIMO International on +447881788830 or Chris Carroll of Seas At Risk on +32486963384

Notes to editor:

1. The ministerial meeting will involve 15 contracting parties to the OSPAR Commission as part of the 2010 'North-East Atlantic Environment Summit' in Bergen, Norway, focusing on a range of environmental concerns. More for information:
<http://www.squizmix.com/ospar2010/default.aspx>
2. Seas At Risk is a European association of non-governmental environmental organisations working to protect and restore to health the marine environment of the European seas and the wider North East Atlantic.
3. KIMO International is an association of Municipalities from 15 Countries in northern Europe who work together to reduce marine pollution and protect the marine environment for future generations.
4. The UNEP Regional Seas Programme defines Marine litter as 'any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment. Marine litter consists of items that have been made or used by people and deliberately discarded into the sea or rivers or on beaches; brought indirectly to the sea with rivers, sewage, storm water or winds; or accidentally lost, including material lost at sea in bad weather'.
5. It is estimated that more than one million birds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die each year throughout the world after either becoming entangled in or eating plastic materials dumped in the sea (UNEP, 2006)
6. For more information on marine litter in the North-East Atlantic, see the 2009 OSPAR report:
http://www.ospar.org/v_publications/download.asp?v1=p00386
7. Currently, there are official reviews in progress of the EU Directive 2000/59/EC (on port reception facilities) and Annex V (garbage) of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78).