



Society for Conservation Biology

A global community of conservation professionals

20th January 2014

MONCLOA PALACE

Mrs. María Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría Antón

Vice-President of the Government

Complejo de la Moncloa

Avda. Puerta de Hierro, s/n

28071

cc. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Mr. Miguel Arias Cañete

Minister

C/ José Abascal 41, despacho 114

28003 Madrid

Dear Mrs. Vice-President and Mr. Minister,

On behalf of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB), we write to voice our concern for the environmental consequences likely to result from the development of the REPSOL project near the islands of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. Such development will be expected to have long-lasting detrimental consequences for the natural heritage of the archipelago, and particularly the marine mammal populations in the region. Impacts are likely to include accidental oil spills, but will unquestionably incorporate routine chemical discharges, as well as noise pollution during geological prospecting, oil rig construction and drilling operations. With regard to this, we note that certain marine mammals in the Canary Islands have already been seen to be highly sensitive to noise from naval exercises.

We acknowledge that the Spanish Government approved a Royal Decree authorizing prospecting for oil off Canarian coasts on 16th March 2012. However, the entire territory of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, together with La Palma, La Gomera, and El Hierro islands, and almost half of the island of Gran Canaria, have been declared UNESCO "Biosphere Reserves." This is because of the presence of numerous protected terrestrial, coastal and marine habitats. Furthermore, the approved area for the oil exploration overlaps with one of the ten sites included in the project LIFE+ INDEMARES "Inventory and designation of marine Natura 2000 areas in the Spanish Sea". The main purpose of this project was to contribute to the protection and sustainable use of the biodiversity in the Spanish seas through the identification of valuable areas for the Natura 2000 network. In an evaluation of the Natura 2000 work in 2010, the EU Commission found that the network of marine protected areas was insufficient in the Macaronesian Seas and urged Spain that additional protected areas needed to be designated among the Canary Islands to fulfil its obligations under the Habitats Directive. Furthermore, the EU 7th



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Environmental Action Programme and the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy both stress the efforts needed to conserve biodiversity to achieve agreed targets and sustainable development. With particular regard to marine mammals, the areas designated for prospecting under REPSOL support 30 species of cetaceans (including several listed on IUCN's Red List) and represent one of the most unique and important collection of marine mammal habitats in the world. Many, if not all, of these cetacean species (and their habitats) are protected under European law, as well as by CITES and other international agreements and declarations of the United Nations. The REPSOL project threatens the biodiversity acknowledged by all of these designations and projects. The richness of the biodiversity in these areas is crucial to the sustained appeal of the Canaries as a highly desirable tourist destination. Tourism is thus a substantial enduring industry that is likely to suffer should the relatively short-term REPSOL project be allowed to proceed.

Accordingly, we write to request that both of you exercise your powers to safeguard the natural heritage of the Canary Islands by rejecting the development of the offshore oil industry in these waters in favour of more sustainable policies. Such policies could be based on the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy, which are in plentiful supply in the Canary Islands. We believe that the Canary Islands can help lead the way to a more sustainable 21st Century energy economy in Europe, instead of maintaining the 20th Century reliance upon fossil fuels. Please feel free to contact the Society if we can be of any further assistance with this matter, or any others pertaining to the conservation of living natural resources.

Respectfully,

John A. Cigliano, PhD,
President, Marine Section, Society for Conservation Biology

Carlos Carroll, PhD,
Chair, Global Policy Committee, Society for Conservation Biology