

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Use

**SCOTS SYMPATHY FOR “PRESTIGE” DISASTER
VICTIMS**

The SNP in the European Parliament today joined forces with their Galician nationalist colleague (Camilo Nogueira) in blaming European governments for failing to take steps to prevent the recent ecological disaster off the Iberian coast. In advance of an urgent debate on the sinking of the Prestige, which will take place in Strasbourg tomorrow, SNP member Ian Hudghton criticised Member States for delaying action to outlaw single hull vessels, and recalled with sadness similar events off Shetland almost ten years ago.

Speaking from his office in Strasbourg, Mr Hudghton said:

"The tragedy of the Prestige disaster is that it could have been prevented. I mean, it's not as if we haven't been down this road before – just ask any Shetlander and they'll describe the hell of watching your environment blighted and your livelihood wrecked before your very eyes. But it seems that, ten years after the Braer disaster off our own shores, EU heads of states have learned nothing and another chunk of Europe's coastline has been ruined.

"Shetland is still counting the cost of the damage inflicted way back in January 1993. The Galicians have my heart-felt sympathy for the long haul back to recovery and I fully back Camilo's calls for compensation to be made available to all those affected.

"The Commission has been urging Governments to press on with phasing-out single hull vessels, but it seems our leaders are more disposed to the arguments of shipping owners rather than in heeding the harsh lessons of past disasters. Ministers must give their backing to the European Parliament's decision to set up an additional European Compensation Fund for oil pollution damage. Those whose businesses have been damaged must be compensated and we must provide funding to those charged with cleaning up the coastline.

"In tomorrow's debate we will urge the Commission to carry out an investigation into the circumstances that led to the sinking of the Prestige including an examination of the type and condition of the vessel, the causes of the accident, the vessel's destination, owner and all other pertinent factors.

"This week's events have shown that the EU has so far failed to learn from disasters like the Braer and Erika. We must now make sure that this time maritime safety regulations are toughened up to prevent future catastrophes."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Regulation No 417/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 February 2002 on the accelerated phasing-in of double hull or equivalent design requirements for single hull oil tankers.

For the above regulation, the European Commission proposed (art 4) that "Member States shall not allow single hull oil tankers to enter into their ports or internal waters after the earliest of the dates specified hereafter, unless such tankers comply not later than the earliest of those dates with the double hull or equivalent design requirements of Regulation 13F of Annex I of MARPOL 73/78: 1. for crude oil tankers of 20 000 tons deadweight and above and product carriers of 30,000 tons deadweight and above not meeting the requirements for a new oil tanker in Regulations 13, 13B, 13E and 18(4) of Annex I of MARPOL 73/78: when they reach the age of 23 years or 1 June 2005 (Category 1)

But European heads of states through the Council of ministers watered down the above text and adopted that:

1.No oil tanker shall be allowed to operate under the flag of a Member State, nor shall any oil tanker, irrespective of its flag, be allowed to enter into ports or offshore terminals under the jurisdiction of a Member State after the anniversary of the date of delivery of the ship in the year specified hereafter, unless such tanker is a double hull oil tanker:

(a) for category (1)oil tankers:

-2003 for ships delivered in 1973 or earlier,

- 2004 for ships delivered in 1974 and 1975,
- 2005 for ships delivered in 1976 and 1977,
- 2006 for ships delivered in 1978,1979 and 1980,
- 2007 for ships delivered in 1981 or later;