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News

Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU

The European Commission has adopted a Communication setting out its vision for an Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU, together with a detailed action plan setting out an ambitious work programme for the years ahead.

The proposals are grounded in an extensive public consultation which ended last June, and represents the work of a Steering Group of 10 Commissioners. The Communication and Action Plan are accompanied by a report on the results of the consultation which revealed strong stakeholder support for the Commission's initiative.

Until now, the different activities and policies relating to the seas have been managed on largely sectoral lines. It is intended that an integrated maritime policy will change the way policy is formulated and decisions taken in the maritime sectors, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. This should enable the relevant authorities to analyse interactions between the various sectors and policy areas concerned and to take them into account at every level so as to develop common tools to exploit synergies and avoid conflicts.

The new policy will build on Europe's strengths in marine research, technology and innovation. It will be anchored in the Lisbon agenda for more and better jobs and growth, and in the EU's overarching commitment to ensuring that economic development does not come at the price of environmental sustainability.

The Communication and accompanying Action Plan list a range of concrete actions to be launched during the mandate of this Commission. These actions cover a wide spectrum of issues ranging from maritime transport to the competitiveness of maritime businesses, employment, scientific research, fisheries and the protection of the marine environment.

Source: EUROPA

NOAA funds three-year project on Gulf dead zone

NOAA has awarded first-year funding of $284,000 to researchers at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute (UTMSI) at Austin as part of a three-year $781,000 project to develop a better understanding of how nutrient pollution from the Mississippi River affects the large area of low oxygen water called the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico. The project will also look at how the dead zone affects commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish.

Funds were awarded through NOAA's Northern Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia and Ecosystems Research Program.

This project will provide data to verify water quality models and help resource managers determine the quantitative relationships between nutrient pollution and development, magnitude, longevity, and distribution of the dead zone. Findings will also support the development of more accurate predictive models of hypoxia development on the Louisiana continental shelf.

The dead zone is an area in the Gulf of Mexico where seasonal oxygen levels drop too low to support most life in bottom and near-bottom waters. It is caused by a seasonal change where algal growth, stimulated by input of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers, settles and decays in the bottom waters. The decaying algae consume oxygen faster than it can be replenished from the surface, leading to decreased levels of dissolved oxygen.

Last summer, an area of deep water covering 7900 square miles off the coast of Louisiana and Texas was declared hypoxic. It is the third largest Gulf of Mexico dead zone on record since measurements began in 1985, and represents an area approximately the size of the state of New Jersey. Also, it is more than one and a half times the average annual dead zone area measured since 1990, 4800 square miles. The largest dead zone ever recorded covered 8494 square miles in 2002.

Source: NOAA

Creosote ban in Anacortes to protect marine life

Creosote, found to be leaching from old pilings used to support an old railroad trestle, has stirred the debate about banning the wood preservative in Puget Sound. The petroleum-based creosote, which has been linked to problems with fish, is all but outlawed in Puget Sound marine waters. However, other treated wood products, which contain metals and other compounds found to be harmful to fish eggs and larvae, are still used in the Sound. Scientists and environmental groups are urging cities such as Anacortes to ban their use, as well.

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The treatments prevent organisms in the water from attacking the wood, allowing it to be used longer. Wood is less expensive than steel and concrete, which are more environmentally friendly. But the cost may be relative, scientists say, especially when considering that the Department of Natural Resources has spent $2 million, including $60,000 in Skagit County, in recent years to remove treated wood from Puget Sound beaches. Also, the Samish Indian Nation recently received a $160,000 grant to study the feasibility of replacing the creosote pilings and concrete causeway on the Thompson trail with a more environmentally friendly structure and materials.

In Anacortes, the City Council backed down from an initial proposal to ban all treated wood products. The council has spent much of the past year revising its Shoreline Master Program, which determines what development will occur on the city's 12-mile-long shoreline. The programme will determine the materials that can be used for new structures or to repair old ones as part of that process. The most recent draft of the shoreline programme will allow treated wood products only in cases where nontoxic materials are deemed impractical and the treated wood meets industry standards.

Source: Associated Press

Californians support sport fishing

86% of all adults and 93% of anglers believe pollution poses a greater threat to marine life than recreational fishermen according to a major survey carried out in California by the Field Research Corporation. This belief led to the general public opinion that the health of California's ocean environment can and should be protected without unnecessary ocean closures. When asked whether they believed recreational fishermen are good stewards of the environment and follow practices to help preserve marine life and fish populations, 58% of adults agreed. Sewage dumped into the ocean and land-based pollutants that drain into the ocean are seen as the most serious potential threats to marine life, with greater than seven in 10 considering them very serious.

When Californians were asked whether a number of ocean activities should be banned, limited or not restricted at all if coastal marine habitat is in danger, residents prefer limiting the activities rather than a total ban.

The survey also revealed that only one in three California residents knows what the Marine Life Protection Act is. This act, designated in 1999, mandated that California design and manages an improved network of marine protected areas. These areas, among other things, must protect marine life and habitats, marine ecosystems and marine natural heritage. Marine protected areas include marine reserves, marine parks and marine conservation areas.

A majority of Californians (62%) rate current fishing management practices as at least partially successful in conserving coastal marine life. Large majorities of adults (83%) and anglers (74%) support the idea of establishing parks in designated areas along the California coast, similar to national parks on land, where the ocean is protected, but some recreational fishing would be allowed.

The survey, that was sponsored by The American Sportsfishing Association polled Californians and California anglers.

Source: SanDiego.com

Wetland invader's hidden weapon

Scientists at the University of Delaware have uncovered a hidden weapon that one of the most invasive wetland plants in the United States uses to silently and efficiently kill off its neighbours.

The invasive strain of *Phragmites australis*, or common reed, believed to have originated in Eurasia, exudes from its roots an acid so toxic that the substance literally disintegrates the structural protein in the roots of neighbouring plants, thus toppling the competition.

In Delaware alone, the reed has overtaken tens of thousands of acres of wetlands, decreasing biodiversity, reducing the food and habitat available to wildlife, and altering wetland hydrology, transforming marshes once dissected by tidal creeks and open pools into much drier systems with dense monocultures of the plant.

The scientists identified the toxin produced by *Phragmites* as 3,4,5-trihydroxybenzoic acid, also known as gallic acid.

The toxin works by targeting tubulin, the structural protein that helps plant roots to maintain their cellular integrity and grow straight in the soil. Within 10 minutes of exposure to the toxin in the lab, the tubulin of a marsh plant under siege starts to disintegrate. Within 20 minutes, the structural material is completely gone.

The work was carried out by Harsh Bais of the University of Delaware's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and collaborators Thimmaraju Rudrappa and Justin Bonstall, and marine botanists John Gallagher and Denise Seliskar, who co-direct the Halophyte Biotechnology Center in the University's College of Marine and Earth Studies. The results of the research are reported in the latest issue of the *Journal of Chemical Ecology*.

Source: University of Delaware

Canadian and US wildlife officers break-up major endangered species smuggling ring

Canadian and US Wildlife Officers have dismantled a major smuggling organization of queen conch meat, an internationally protected endangered species. The smuggling operation is believed to have been responsible for illegally importing and/or exporting 120 tonnes of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) meat from several Caribbean and South American countries to Canada and the United States.

According to documents filed in Canadian and American courts in September 2007, it is alleged that between 2004 and 2006, 119,978 kg of protected queen conch meat from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Honduras and Colombia was shipped to Canada using false descriptions to