

Europe bids to tighten offshore drilling rules

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A polar bear walking past an oil drum on the edge of Hudson Bay outside Churchill, Canada, on November 14, 2007. Europe moved Thursday towards agreement on new rules governing offshore oil and gas drilling in response to a major environmental disaster off the United States, but environmentalists criticised the omission of terms covering Arctic exploration.

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"Before oil and gas firms could get a licence to drill, the (proposed new) directive would require them to submit major hazard reports and emergency response plans and prove their ability to remedy any environmental damage caused," the [European Parliament](#) said after talks with European Union member state governments.

Lawmakers said Europe had "learned its lessons" from the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 "and wants to reduce the risks of offshore [oil and gas drilling](#) to a minimum," according to conservative Belgian MEP Ivo Belet.

Environmental campaigners Oceana, however, said rules for EU companies drilling in developing countries still needed fixed, as well as a deal on how to exploit the Arctic.

The legislation "falls short of ambitions in a number of areas, particularly in failing to increase EU supervision and controls through the European Maritime and Safety Agency, dropping the proposed moratorium in the Arctic, and rejecting calls for improved transparency," they said in a statement.

Oceana called notably for tougher pre-drilling liability guarantees to be put up by prospectors and "the future criminalisation of [oil pollution](#) activities under European law."

According to campaigners, nearly 1,000 offshore installations are operating in EU waters.

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