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Senate Inquiry into Oil or Gas Production in the Great Australian Bight

I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications on the proposed BP exploratory oil drilling project in the Great Australian Bight. I am very concerned that the government is even considering approving this highly risky venture due to the threats it presents to the marine, coastal and global environment. In particular:

1. Contribution to Green House Gases (GHG) and Global Warming:

Not only will any oil or gas produced make a contribution to the global carbon dioxide budget when it is combusted, but the flaring of gas typical to such exploration and fugitive methane emissions will also contribute to any GHG allowance that Australia is expected to comply with under the Paris Climate agreement. Development of any new fossil fuel resources is not only short sighted, but is threatening the rights of our descendants to a habitable planet.

2. Great Australian Bight Whale Nursery:

The Great Australian Bight is a very significant calving area for the southern right whale, a species still recovering from historic over-exploitation. The disturbance to this breeding from underwater noise generated by drilling is hard to quantify, but could easily be significant.

3. Marine Ecosystems, Parks and Reserves:

The many marine habitats and diversity of species in the Great Australian Bight are what made it worthy of declaration as a Marine Reserve. Other than the southern right whales, the Bight is an important foraging area for the threatened Australian sea lion and white shark and the migratory sperm whales and short-tailed shearwaters.

4. High-Risk Deepwater Drilling and Oil Spills:

After the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion and fire in the Gulf of Mexico, and the subsequent extensive oil-spill that caused severe damage to coastlines, wetlands and estuarine zones, the Australian government should be very cautious of giving BP an opportunity to repeat this, even if BP aren't. Deep drilling in a potentially hostile open ocean environment is very high risk. The consequences of any failure and oil spill would be a totally unacceptable burden on the ecosystems and community that live on the Great Australian Bight or depend on it for their livelihood.

Brynn Mathews