



**Submission to the Inquiry to the Oil or gas production in the Great  
Australian Bight**

**Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) and the Seed Youth  
Indigenous Climate Network (Seed)**

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### **Executive summary of AYCC and Seed's submission:**

1. About the AYCC and Seed
2. Climate impacts on plans to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight
3. Opposition to the project from Traditional Owners
4. Impacts the project will have on the community
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## **1. About the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and the Seed Youth Indigenous Climate Network**

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) is an entirely youth-run organisation with the mission of building a movement of young Australians who are empowered to take action on climate change.

We believe that climate change is the single greatest threat facing humanity, and puts young people and future generations at risk. We also believe that addressing the climate crisis is our biggest opportunity to create a world that is more sustainable, just and fair.

Since our Founding Summit in 2006, we have grown from a handful of students to one of Australia's largest youth-run organisations, and now have a membership of 110,000 young people and 100 active grassroots groups around the country. We work with these young people to run effective, strategic campaigns that have a real impact on Australia's domestic carbon emissions, our renewable energy, and our international contribution to climate change.

Seed is Australia's first Indigenous youth-led climate network. We are building a movement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for climate justice. We do this by running campaigns to protect country from climate change and fossil fuel extraction, while also building the capacity of Indigenous young people to be a part of creating positive change by providing skills based training and platforms to take action.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity and core to this crisis is the loss of country, cultures and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples in Australia and across the world. By



building solutions that work towards justice for all people, the climate crisis presents an opportunity to create strong, resilient communities for a fair and sustainable future. Seed and AYCC work together for this future.

Seed is a national network led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, with a small team of staff, volunteer state coordinators and over 100 volunteers from every state and territory.

## **2. Climate impacts of drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight**

At a time when the world is moving to stop the impact of fossil fuels on our climate and moving towards renewable energy technology, the decision to allow international oil companies to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight is dangerous.

Drilling for oil in the Bight would open up a brand new oil-field, which, at full capacity could produce 9 billion barrels of oil with additional unknown reserves of unconventional gas<sup>1</sup>. When burned it would produce 3 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, just 1 gigatonne less than Adani's disastrous Carmichael coal projects. That's the equivalent of eight times Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions for 2013, eating up one third of Australia's entire remaining CO<sub>2</sub> budget to 2050.

This is the biggest proposed new fossil fuel extraction project in the country.

The proposed oil projects in the Great Australian Bight poses too great a risk to our climate and is inconsistent with Australia's commitment to the Paris agreement made at the United Nations climate talks - limiting warming to 2 degrees and aiming to stay below 1.5 degrees.

Climate science is telling a clearer story than ever: global warming is already taking a terrible toll on Australia and the world, and unless we avoid a further increase to the global temperature, the consequences will be catastrophic. To do this, we must stop mining and burning fossil fuels.

The most recent IPCC Report<sup>2</sup> shows with extreme certainty that climate change is real, caused by human activity, and requires urgent action. If we don't take decisive action, someone born in Australia today could witness devastating impacts in their lifetime, including: up to 10,000 more heat related deaths annually; up to a 90% decline in irrigated

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.geoexpro.com/articles/2015/02/the-great-australian-bight-an-emerging-global-hotspot>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>



agriculture; widespread species loss; destruction of the Great Barrier Reef; \$226 billion of damages to buildings and transport infrastructure due to sea level rise; and more frequent and severe extreme weather events like heatwaves, bushfires, and floods.<sup>3</sup>

Drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight would be inconsistent with the Paris Climate Agreement that Australia agreed to adopt at the United Nations climate conference in December 2015.<sup>4</sup>

A new study released by Oil Change International<sup>5</sup> found that the reserves currently operating in oil and gas fields alone, even without coal would take the world beyond 1.5 degrees of warming.

Further, a report from Climate Analytics<sup>6</sup> found that oil from projects to drill in the Great Australian Bight could produce the equivalent of nearly eight times Australia's 2013 carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from fossil fuels, and blow the country's remaining CO<sub>2</sub> emissions budget to 2050.

We live in one atmosphere. We must take responsibility for the fossil fuels we dig up, regardless of where in the world they are burnt. At a time when Australia should be investing in renewable energy, drilling for oil in the Bight would be disastrous for our global climate system.

**Recommendation 1: The committee must make a recommendation to the Federal Government that to keep to below 1.5 degrees of warming all oil from the Great Australian Bight must stay in the ground.**

### 3. Traditional Owners

Aboriginal people are the first peoples of this land and it is important that all Australians continue to acknowledge that the history of this country began long before colonisation. The leadership of all Australian Governments is vital as we move together as a nation towards reconciliation and redress the injustices of previous Governments and policies.

Aboriginal people have a sacred and irreplaceable connection to this land and since 2009

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<sup>3</sup> The Climate Institute (2013), "Media Brief: Climate Risks Around Australia", [http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/verve/\\_resources/TCI\\_MediaBrief\\_IPCC\\_September2013.pdf](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/verve/_resources/TCI_MediaBrief_IPCC_September2013.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2016/09/OCI\\_the\\_skys\\_limit\\_2016\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2016/09/OCI_the_skys_limit_2016_FINAL_2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://climateanalytics.org/latest/new-oil-exploration-not-compatible-with-australias-climate-commitments>



the Australian Government has recognised this through its support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration affirms the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, security and well-being of Indigenous peoples worldwide and enshrines Indigenous peoples' right to be different.

Through independent consultation, we have determined that the affected Traditional Owner groups have not been consulted by any company wishing to drill or explore within the Great Australian Bight in any form. We feel that the one stop shop approval process for NOPSEMA undermines the rights of Indigenous Peoples in this country by not following the requirements under any Native Title Act or Land Rights Act in this country.

**Recommendation 2: We recommend that the approval of any offshore exploration or drilling in Australian waters be held to the same standard of consultation as any similar onshore project. The Federal Government must step in make allowances for affected Aboriginal Traditional Owners groups to be consulted on the plans and approvals required under the Federal and/or State Land Rights and Native Title Acts which is currently not being upheld or addressed in the NOPSEMA process.**

#### 4. Community

The local fishing and tourism industry along the Great Australian Bight relies on a clean and pristine Bight to keep their industry thriving.

The tourism industry along the coastline has expanded rapidly over the past decade, with many of the region's coastal icons now highly prized and visited tourism destinations. The Bight tourism industry brings in \$1.2 billion each year and employs directly and indirectly 10,000 people.<sup>7</sup>

This industry relies on a pristine environment - from whale and dolphin watching to shark diving. Kangaroo Island, a place that would be heavily impacted by an oil spill, is one of Australia's best known and loved tourist destinations, and is a stop on the southern right whale's journey.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://tourism.sa.gov.au/regional-tourism-profiles.aspx>



Over the last few months key members of the the South Australian Oyster Growers Association and salmon industry have come out against drilling the Bight, stating that the project puts the industry at risk and that the companies drilling in the Bight need tighter restrictions.<sup>8</sup>

Protection of the tourism industry along the coast should be seen as a top priority for the Federal Government.

Oil and gas production is capital intensive and does not employ many people. Australia wide, the oil and gas industry employs 19,000 people out of a workforce of 11.9 million people. This represents less than 2 out of every thousand jobs in Australia, 0.16 percent.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of any future employees would be fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers who would be flown from around Australia to Adelaide and Ceduna and then to production rigs by helicopter. Many of these employees would not be from South Australia and would not reside in South Australia during their employment on the project.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly the tourism industry in South Australia is a more sustainable industry for not only the environment but for long term jobs in the region.

**Recommendation 3: Acknowledge Social, Economic and Cultural Values: That the Committee acknowledge the important social, economic and cultural values associated with the Great Australian Bight.**

**Recommendation 4: The committee needs to recommend that through the NOPSEMA process there needs to be proper consultation processes with the community**

**Recommendation 5: The committee needs to recommend that the oil companies must release full economic costings of oil spills and benefits to the community.**

## **5. Oil spill and faulty equipment**

The area oil companies want to drill in the Great Australian Bight is rougher, deeper and more remote than Deepwater Horizon.

A recently released oil spill impact assessment by BP shows that if a spill was to occur

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/197505/sub019-fisheries-aquaculture.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/197505/sub019-fisheries-aquaculture.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6291.0.55.003Feb%202016?OpenDocument>

<sup>10</sup> <https://gateway.icn.org.au/project/3552/bp-great-australian-bight-exploration?pl=1>



there is a 70% chance of the oil reaching Apollo Bay and Wilson's Promontory, in Victoria, in Winter. There is also a 41% chance of the oil reaching the NSW south coast in winter.<sup>11</sup>

Given the depth of drilling, the rough seas and lack of experience these oil companies have drilling at these depths an oil spill in the Great Australian Bight is highly likely and not if but when.

The rig that BP was using in Mexico was operating in 1,544m of water, with the well reaching another 4,051m below the seafloor.<sup>12</sup> In the Bight, BP were proposing to go more than a kilometer deeper than they did in Mexico.

Following the disaster in Mexico BP's Chief Operating Officer Doug Suttles acknowledged that while the technology theoretically existed to plug a spill they haven't been done in 5,000 feet of water"<sup>13</sup> They also used ten different techniques<sup>14</sup> to stop the oil flow, revealing how little they know about the technologies need to stop an oil spill.

BP's oil spill modeling must be taken into account by the Senate Inquiry and restrictions on the other companies must be put in place to prevent and oil spill in the Bight.

**Recommendation 6: that the Senate Committee advises that the risk of drilling in the tumultuous seas of the Great Australian Bight is unacceptable and irresponsible, and recommends an outright ban on oil drilling on the coast.**

## **6. Lack of transparency of the environmental approval process at NOPSEMA**

In December 2014, the current Government under Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt and Resources Minister Ian MacFarlane gave NOPSEMA full environmental assessment and approval powers. Because of this, NOPSEMA became the sole environmental regulator for offshore petroleum activities in Australia and their associated environmental impacts.

We are seriously concerned about the lack of transparency in the NOPSEMA process. Environment Plans submitted to NOPSEMA for assessment and approval are not made

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-16/bp's-oil-spill-modelling-shows-damage-to-great-australian-bight/7851586>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.theoil Drum.com/node/6493>

<sup>13</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1988431,00.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/apr/20/deepwaterhorizon-key-questions-answered>



public, and only summaries are published after the application has been accepted.

In addition to the secrecy of NOPSEMA, it is also heavily weighted towards industry, with the majority of board members coming from the petroleum and oil industries - hardly an independent judge of the risks of the projects they are judging.

The public, industries and states who would be directly impacted by a spill have a right to know about oil companies' operations, their impacts, and their management in case of disasters like oil spills. The information about their environmental plans and their financial records need to be made public so the Australian people can assess the risks associated with this project.

**Recommendation 7: The committee should recommend that environmental approval powers sit with the Environment Department at a state and federal level, and for all information to be made available to the public.**

**Recommendation 8: The committee should recommend that environmental and oil specialists be involved in the NOPSEMA process**

## 7. Leases

Three weeks ago BP public stated that the company was no longer interested in drilling for oil in the Bight. They stated that:

*"We have looked long and hard at our exploration plans for the Great Australian Bight, but in the current external environment, we will only pursue frontier exploration opportunities if they are competitive and aligned to our strategic goals."*<sup>15</sup> - Exploration and Production Managing Director, Claire Fitzpatrick

Clearly public and economic pressure lead to BP's decision and will send a signal to the companies still interested in drilling the Bight that there are clear risks associated with it. These risks are economic, community, reputational risks around oil spills, and climate change impacts.

We have serious concerns about the existing licenses over the Bight held by Chevron, Santos and Karoon. Given the above mentioned impacts that this project would have on our climate and the likelihood of an oil spill the committee should recommend to the

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-11/bp-withdraws-from-great-australian-bight-drilling/7921956>





Federal Government that they cancel all existing licenses over The Bight and protect the climate, Traditional Owners, and communities from the risks.

**Recommendation 9: Acknowledge the social, economic and environmental risk the existing leases have on the Great Australian Bight and surrounding areas and recommend that all leases are cancelled and a ban is put in place to stop future drilling in the GAB.**

## **8. Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:** The committee must make a recommendation to the Federal Government that to keep to below 1.5 degrees of warming all oil from the Great Australian Bight must stay in the ground.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that the approval of any offshore exploration or drilling in Australian waters be held to the same standard of consultation as any similar onshore project. We would like to see the Federal Government step in make allowances for affected Aboriginal Traditional Owners groups to be consulted on the plans and approvals required under the Federal and/or State Land Rights and Native Title Acts which is currently not being upheld or addressed in the NOPSEMA process.

**Recommendation 3: Acknowledge Social, Economic and Cultural Values:** That the Committee acknowledge the important social, economic and cultural values associated with the Great Australian Bight.

**Recommendation 4:** The committee needs to recommend that through the NOPSEMA process there needs to be proper consultation processes with the community

**Recommendation 5:** The committee needs to recommend that the oil companies must release full economic costings of oil spills and benefits to the community.

**Recommendation 6:** that Senate Committee advises that the risk of drilling in the tumultuous seas of the Great Australian Bight is unacceptable and irresponsible, and recommends a ban on oil drilling for good.

**Recommendation 7:** The committee should recommend that environmental approval powers sit with the Environment Department at a state and federal level, and for all information to be made available to the public.



**Recommendation 8:** The committee should recommend that environmental and oil specialists be involved in the NOPSEMA process

**Recommendation 9:** Acknowledge the social, economic and environmental risk the existing leases have on the Great Australian Bight and surrounding areas and recommend that all leases are cancelled and a ban is put in place to stop future drilling in the GAB.

## 9. Conclusion

The Great Australian Bight is a untouched wilderness home to the the Traditional Owners The Mirning people, a thriving fishing industry, Southern Right Whale, Orcas and has a more diverse ecosystem than the Great Barrier Reef.

There are serious concerns from our community of over 110,000 young people about the remaining leases over the Bight including Chevron, Santos and Karoon.

This project will have huge impacts on Australia's ability to fulfill our commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement. This will have huge ramifications on limited our climate to 2 degrees of warming.

The AYCC and Seed exist because although the future of young Australians depends on choices made today, young people rarely have a seat at the table when these decisions are made. On behalf of our 110,000 members we urge the committee to make a strong recommendation cancel all remaining leases over the Bight and place a permanent ban on oil drilling in the Bight.

Ensuring a safe climate future for our generation is possible, but will require urgent action in line with the latest climate science.

**AYCC and Seed members urge the Senate Inquiry to recommend that the Federal Government stop all oil companies drilling in the Bight to protect the pristine environment and act to stop dangerous climate change.**

