

Dear Sussan Ley,

Oil and Gas Production in the Great Australian Bight

I am contacting you regarding the proposed plans brought forward by petroleum company BP, to permit oil and gas exploration sites within the Great Australian Bight and the potential environmental, social and economic impacts related to this proposal.

During 2010, BP was responsible for one of the most catastrophic oil spillages in the history of marine oil drilling (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2016); The Deepwater Horizon Oil Blowout, in the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 168 million gallons of oil contaminated the ocean over an 87 day period after the rig explosion, resulting in devastating, long-lasting and lingering effects (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2013). The explosion led to the death of 11 workers, as well as a polluted ecosystem as currents and winds spread the oil. Oil is toxic to animals and can affect their ability to breathe, move and in some cases regulate body temperature. Therefore, the spillage caused the death of many animals such as sea turtles, whales, dolphins and birds (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2013). Fisheries were also impacted as fishing grounds were forced to close due to exposed seafood being potentially unsafe for human consumption (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2013). Along with these consequences, nearby communities also may have suffered from chemical exposure, which can present serious health risks for many vulnerable persons such as children, elderly and asthmatics (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

Keeping in mind the grave and afflictive results from the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, I want you to ponder the hazards we face if BP are granted permission to drill in the Great Australian Bight. The iconic curve is a place of unparalleled, untouched natural beauty and is home to many threatened marine species. These include but are not limited to; Humpback, Southern Right and Blue Whales, Sea Lions and Great White Sharks (The Wilderness Society, 2016) and is also estimated to contain 85% endemic species, meaning they are nowhere else in the world (The Wilderness Society, 2016). If an oil spill were to occur here marine life would be devastated. Many of the species in this area are endemic or endangered; an oil spill could potentially cause the majority of these already at-risk species to become extinct.

The Great Australian Bight is known as one of the largest breeding grounds for Southern Right Whales to rest, breed and give birth. The area is best known for the close-up whale watching, which boosts tourism and the economy. Tourism has fallen significantly in the Gulf of Mexico as a result of the oil rig explosion. If an oil spill were to occur in the Great Australian Bight, there would no longer be a demand to watch marine life as many species would be departed. This could then potentially result in the loss of employment opportunities as businesses may be forced to cut hours or close due to lack of customers and tourists.

Chemical exposure is another risk to be taken into consideration when deciding whether BP should be granted permission. There are many different methods of which people can be exposed to hazardous substances related to the spillage. These include; air, food and water or by skin (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). Children tend to have a higher risk than adults as something that could be "annoying" for an adult may be a serious concern for a child (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

In conclusion, oil and gas drilling in the Great Australian Bight represents a fundamental threat to the environment and BP's proposal presents unacceptable risks to the coastal industries (fishing and tourism), surrounding communities and marine environment and life that rely upon it. Therefore, oil and gas drilling within the Great Australian Bight should not be allowed to proceed.

References:

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