

Senate Environment and Communications References Committee 25 March 2022**Question on Notice Origin Energy****1. Local Business**

Senator McCARTHY: On the area of the Daly Waters region, I ask: what kind of investment goes into some of these roadhouses and the Daly Waters Pub area from your companies? I leave that open to both of you.

Ms Winters: I would have to take that on notice. I am not aware of any investment in those things, but I can certainly take that on notice and investigate.

Mr Nish: I can ask Mr Cote to respond if he has any of that information.

Mr Cote: Thank you for the question, Senator. I will answer it in part, and then I'll be able to provide more specifics on notice. We always look at opportunities to work with any of the businesses, especially businesses that are as local as the ones in Daly Waters. We do use their services, from accommodation to working with locals on the use of laydown yards and other aspects that can support our business. That goes beyond just the business owners within Daly Waters directly. With companies like Triple P, to provide services to our well sites, we are very actively engaged. We are always looking to expand the business opportunities to local companies within the Daly Waters and Barkly region.

Senator McCARTHY: Are you able to provide to the committee a list of the businesses that you work with there? You mentioned Triple P, and I am certainly aware of Triple P. I know that they are an Aboriginal company. Are you able to provide further—

Mr Cote: Thank you for the question, Senator. Yes, if I can take that on notice, I can provide you with a full list of local companies that we do business with.

Senator McCARTHY: That would be good. Thank you.

Answer:

In the past 12 months (March 2021 - February 2022) Origin has spent \$9.6 million out of a total \$39 million with Northern Territory businesses, listed as follows. This represents 24.4% of the total funds spent on Origin's exploration program during that time.

Supplier Name
AECOM AUSTRALIA PTY LTD
AM CRANES & RIGGING PTY LTD
ARNHEM EARTHMOVING & MECHANICAL
DALY WATERS WAYSIDE INN PTY LTD
HARDY AVIATION (NT) PTY LTD
HELI-MUSTER (NT) PTY LTD
INTEGRATED RF SOLUTIONS PTY LTD

MACS HIRE SERV
PHILLIPS EARTHMOVING CONTRACTORS
TERRABOS CONSULTING
TERRITORY INSTRUMENTS
TRIPLE P CONTRACTING PTY LTD
SILVER CITY DRILLING
TRUSTEE FOR AHERN FAMILY TRUST

Senate Environment and Communications References Committee**WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO ORIGIN ENERGY LTD**

Senator Thorpe asks:

- 1. Our water is a vital and integral to our cultural heritage and cultural practices. What assurances can you give us in terms of water table protection and environmental protections?**
- 2. How much water does each well site use? Will you be extracting that water for free, or will you be paying a commercial rate to our communities for the water you extract?**
- 3. What will you do if a gas well leaks into our underground water systems?**
- 4. What is your plan to clean up spills? What will that look like?**
- 5. Will First Nations people be equity stakeholders in this industrialisation of their land? Will they be receiving shares/ share portfolios that can directly benefit their communities? And if not, why not?**

Please provide your response by **5:00pm on Monday, 4 April 2022.**

Answers:

- 1. Our water is a vital and integral to our cultural heritage and cultural practices. What assurances can you give us in terms of water table protection and environmental protections?**

We acknowledge the importance of water resources, both above and below ground, to Traditional Owners and local communities.

Sub-surface cultural connection is considered by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) certification process under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act. In certifying, AAPA must be satisfied that the relevant Native Title holders and custodians are consulted.

Furthermore, in AAPA's submission to the *Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into the Destruction of 46,000 Year Old Caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia*, AAPA defines sacred sites as being both above and below the ground:

'Sacred sites can exist on land and in both freshwater and marine environments. They are typically landscape features such as hills, rocks, trees, plains, reefs or water places such as rivers, soaks and springs, and they extend to include any subsurface features of these places. Sacred sites are enlivened by the traditional narratives of Aboriginal people that give meaning to such places. As such, sacred site areas are associated with a corpus of intangible cultural heritage associated with oral traditions, ritual, language, Aboriginal knowledge and social and economic practices. They may hold significant bio-cultural and biodiversity values that are also likely to be significant in Aboriginal tradition. They are typically not discernible to people who are not versed in local law and custom.'

Origin's activities comply with the legislative requirements designed to avoid impact on sacred sites – including water. Prior to commencing work, Origin's exploration activities are cleared through the

sacred site avoidance and clearance survey process by Native Title holders at every proposed work location, then certified by AAPA. AAPA certification is also a prerequisite for an Environmental Management Plan being approved by the Northern Territory Minister for Environment.

Origin commenced a program of regional groundwater monitoring in the Beetaloo in 2014, before exploration activities commenced. This monitoring supports a body of independent baseline data that already exists and is being further expanded upon.

Origin complies with the Northern Territory's regulations which requires that dedicated groundwater monitoring bores are installed prior to an exploration well being hydraulically fractured. An important part of the fracture stimulation process is monitoring water levels and water quality before, during and after each fracking stage is completed.

Above ground, a range of physical barriers, controls and monitoring practices are applied on site during operations to prevent spills to surrounding land or waterways.

2. How much water does each well site use? Will you be extracting that water for free, or will you be paying a commercial rate to our communities for the water you extract?

Origin's existing exploration wells in the Beetaloo have used approximately 20-25ML of water per well to drill and stimulate.

All groundwater extraction to support exploration activities is undertaken under the approved Water Extraction Licence (WEL) GRF 10285. While there is no charge now, we expect this will change following implementation of Recommendation 7.2 of the *NT Scientific Inquiry* later this year.

3. What will you do if a gas well leaks into our underground water systems?

The engineering standards of Origin's wells are purpose built for the geology and have the most barriers of any in the world – so that drilling and fracking does not create a pathway between underground layers of rock and aquifers nearer the surface, nor deteriorate over time. There have been no barrier failures with wells of this standard and a key recommendation from *NT Scientific Inquiry* is that all new wells are now built to this standard.

The *Code of Practice: Onshore petroleum activities in the Northern Territory* (the Code) outlines stringent requirements to design, maintain, monitor and remediate petroleum wells to protect aquifers through multiple concentric casing and cement strings, minimising the risk of aquifer contamination occurring.

In the remote event any contamination occurs, remediation plans would be developed and executed in accordance with the process outlined in *Schedule A of the National Environmental Protection (Assessment of site Contamination) Measures*.

4. What is your plan to clean up spills? What will that look like?

In accordance with the *Code of Practice: Onshore petroleum activities in the Northern Territory* (the Code), each operator must develop and implement a spill management plan which is submitted with each Environmental Management Plan.

A spill management plan contains all the required actions required to prevent, detect, remediate and report spills under a range of different scenarios.

Origin's plans are publicly available at <https://depws.nt.gov.au/onshore-gas/environment-management-plan/approved-emps>.

5. Will First Nations people be equity stakeholders in this industrialisation of their land? Will they be receiving shares/ share portfolios that can directly benefit their communities? And if not, why not?

The negotiation of a future Production Agreement between Origin Energy and Native Title holders will include discussion and agreement about financial benefits. Origin is happy to discuss options around equity participation by Native Title holders however the form of those financial benefits will be a matter for agreement between Origin and the Native Title holders. Regardless of what form of financial benefits is agreed between Origin and Native Title holders in any Production Agreement, there will be financial benefits that can be applied to directly benefit their communities.