



1 April 2016

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

File No: CO.186  
In No:  
Out No: OLT4821316

Dear Senate Standing Committee,

**RE: OIL EXPLORATION IN THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT**

I refer to the current Senate inquiry into the potential environmental, social and economic impacts of BP's planned exploratory oil drilling project, and any future oil or gas production in the Great Australian Bight.

The Fleurieu Peninsula, to the south of Adelaide, is the number 1 tourist destination in South Australia with an estimated 3.1 million annual visitors expending \$435 million. Victor Harbor is the principle destination for visitors to the Fleurieu Peninsula with around 1.2 million visitors generating an estimated \$136.2 million in expenditure.

Day trippers from Adelaide and surrounds contribute significantly to our economy. Many of the day trippers come during the winter months to marvel at the Southern Right Whales that visit our coast to congregate and to calve. This is a migration that has occurred since well before European settlement.

Each year the Southern Right Whales are sighted at the head of the Great Australian Bight several weeks before they appear on our coastline. It has taken many years for this migration to re-establish since commercial whaling ceased and it has become a marketable experience to view the whales up close and in their natural environment. For our region, which relies heavily upon tourism and hospitality, the day trippers for whale watching during the quieter winter months provides some economic stimulus that may not otherwise exist.

Whale watching also provides great social and healthy living opportunities. Many people walk or cycle our coastline spotting whales. Families enjoy the experience together. Volunteers dedicate many hours each year scanning the ocean for whales and providing information to those who want to observe the whales. Photographing whale activity has also become a significant leisure pastime and opportunity to showcase our natural environment.

The exploratory drilling by BP in the Great Australian Bight represents a high risk to the values and our economy as described above. An oil spill within the Bight may represent a

low **occurrence risk**, however such an event would represent a potentially catastrophic **consequence risk**.

The Great Australian Bight is a relatively pristine ocean environment and a critical sanctuary for many threatened species. There are species found in the Bight that are found nowhere else in the world. And it is an important migratory path for several marine species. It is these unique qualities that our South Australian Marine Parks network was established to protect for future generations.

In addition to the environmental significance, the Great Australian Bight supports two significant industries – commercial fishing and tourism. The economic and employment outcomes, generated by these industries, is significant to the West Coast as well as to the State of South Australia.

Many will claim that seismic exploration and drilling disturbs the marine inhabitants, however the major concern relates to the potential of accidental oil spills into the marine environment. An oil spill in the Great Australian Bight will impact the pristine waters of the Bight. A significant spill will affect habitat and negatively impact marine mammals, fish, birds and plants including a number of unique and/or endangered species.

Given the remoteness of the Great Australian Bight it is not inconceivable that there could be considerable time lost before an oil spill is contained. Ocean currents and prevailing weather patterns could see the spread of an oil spill in an easterly direction along the South Australian coast potentially impacting considerable pristine coast line (much of which is isolated or difficult to access), commercial fisheries, aquaculture activities, marine habitat and recreational pursuits. Whether such an oil spill would extend to the Fleurieu Peninsula is doubtful, however the consequences may be felt in our region. If an oil spill interfered with or discouraged the annual migratory habits of Southern Right Whales or other migratory species, there will be economic and social consequences for our community and our visitors. One only needs to reflect on the 2010 BP deepwater drilling rig blow out in the Gulf of Mexico to understand how extensive the consequences could be.

From a more philosophical perspective, investment dollars should be redirected from our current over reliance upon fossil fuels to renewable energy options. Climate change is creating slow but noticeable changes in our marine and broader environment. More of the same in our use of fossil fuels is not an option if we wish to arrest the climatic and habitat changes that are already occurring.

This submission is presented on behalf of the City of Victor Harbor (i.e. Victor Harbor Council) and reflects the strategic objectives of the Council as documented in the City of Victor Harbor Community Plan 2022. The key strategies that relate to this matter are –

- Protect ecological values and biodiversity.
- Protect and enhance the coastal environment.
- Assess opportunities within an effective risk management framework.

In addition to Council's strategic objectives, the functions of a council under section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999 include—

- to take measures to protect the Council's area from natural and other hazards and to mitigate the effects of such hazards;
- to manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment in an ecologically sustainable manner, and to improve amenity; and
- to promote the Council's area and to provide an attractive climate and locations for the development of business, commerce, industry and tourism.

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Council I have the delegated authority to make submissions on behalf of the Council that are consistent with Council's strategic objectives and that are within the ambit of council's functions under the Local Government Act.

Yours faithfully

~~Graeme Maxwell~~  
**Chief Executive Officer**