



Sea Shepherd Australia
PO Box 1215, Williamstown
Victoria, 3016

Australia@seashepherd.org.au
Jeff@seashepherd.org.au

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100 Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
Phone: (02) 6277 3526 Fax: (02) 6277 5818
Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Senate Inquiry to probe BP's Plans for Great Australian Bight re-adopted, submission by Sea Shepherd Australia

25th October 2016

Dear Committee Secretary,

Sea Shepherd Australia is a non-profit conservation organisation whose mission is to end the destruction of habitat and slaughter of wildlife in the world's oceans in order to conserve and protect ecosystems and species.

Sea Shepherd Australia uses innovative direct-action tactics to investigate, document and take action when necessary to expose and confront illegal activities on the high seas. By safeguarding the biodiversity of our delicately balanced oceanic ecosystems, Sea Shepherd Australia works to ensure their survival for future generations.

I am writing to you today as a key stakeholder into what happens into the Great Australian Bight. Sea Shepherd has been defending the oceans since 1977 globally and closer to home, for over a decade, the whales of the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, which also frequent the Great Australian Bight.

The Great Australian Bight

The Great Australian Bight is a large oceanic Bight or open bay off the central and western parts of Australia. The coastline is characterised by sheer cliff faces that soar up to 80 metres high, iconic surfing places like cactus beach and rock platforms ideal for whale watching. Summer and autumn seasonal upwelling of deep ocean water along the coast of the Eyre Peninsula in the eastern part of the Bight brings nutrients and zooplankton to the surface waters, with the resulting fertility creating an important marine hotspot.

As the nutrients are swept up from the deep water ocean floor and pushed in towards the coast, the food chain is injected with a massive influx of the bottom rung that feeds an abundance of life that call the Great Australian Bight home. The Bight provides critical habitat for many fish species from sardines, anchovies and southern blue fin tuna to iconic great white sharks, mako, whaler, blue, school and gummy sharks, to numerous seals, dolphins, penguins, orcas and giant squid and marine birds like albatross, rock parrots and white bellied sea eagles.

Then there are the whales from the largest animal ever on our planet, the magnificent blue whale still hanging on from the brink of extinction, to sperm, beaked, minke and humpback whales. The Bight is also sanctuary to one of the world's most significant southern right whale nurseries as they too fight for their survival recovering from our previous whaling past.

The Bights coastal shores and offshore islands are also critical habitat for endangered Australian sea lions and long nosed fur seals. The Great Australian Bight is truly a remarkable place, a place where nature is front and centre, the grandest and greatest show on earth.

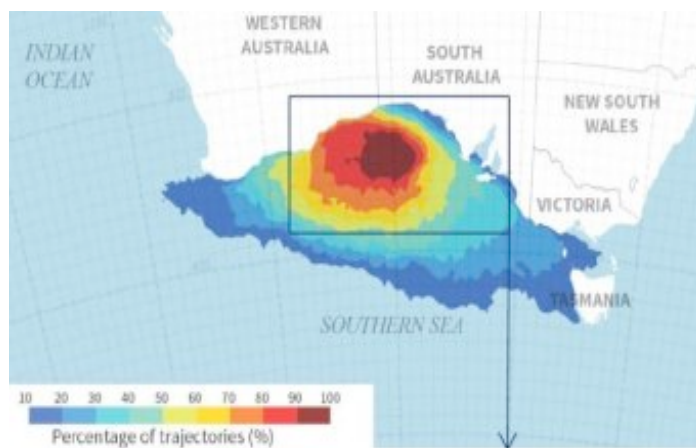
BP's plans

Although BP has pulled out of drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight, as of October 10, 2016, its worth highlighting what BP were proposing as other leases still exist by other oil and gas companies that risk the Bight and a livable climate.

BP wanted to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight, in waters far deeper, rougher and more remote than in the Gulf of Mexico. Other companies such as Chevron, Santos, Karoon and Bight Petroleum currently hold leases in similar depths and sea conditions.

BP and the Great Australian Bight

Back in 2010, BP was responsible for the world's biggest oil spill accident, the Deep-water Horizon tragedy, when 800 million litres of oil spewed into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days. BP then used dispersant that made the spill 52 times more toxic to the ocean, marine life and people of the Gulf of Mexico. Six years on, industries, tourism and the environment have not recovered and millions of litres of oil sit on the ocean floor and dolphin mums are giving birth to stillborn calves.



Spill modelling

As BP's spill modelling was not forthcoming after a year of requests, Independent spill modelling was commissioned by the Wilderness Society showing that an oil spill in the Bight from a deep-sea well blowout would be devastating for fisheries, tourism and marine life. Showing that an oil spill could result in the closure of fisheries in the Bight, Bass Strait and even the Tasman Sea. Even a low-flow oil spill could impact all of southern Australia's coast, from Western Australia right across to Victoria through Bass Strait and around Tasmania.

However, in September 2016, BP finally released their own spill modelling that showed the Wilderness Societies spill modelling to be very conservative.

BP's spill modelling showed that all of Southern Australia's coasts could be impacted by a spill. The NSW coast has a 41% chance of getting hit by a spill if it occurred in winter, while Apollo Bay and Wilsons Promontory in Victoria would have a 91% chance of being hit by a spill if it occurred in winter. The spill could reach as far as Western Australia and iconic tourism destinations like Kangaroo Island have a greater than 90% chance of oil hitting their coasts regardless of the time of year. BP modeled a 149-day spill (the time it would take to drill a relief well to permanently stop a blowout), but even if BP could cap the well in the 35 days it claims it would still have a high chance of impacting Adelaide, Port Lincoln and Kangaroo Island. BP's Deepwater Horizon blowout spilled 800 million litres of oil into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days.

The modelling further showed that a spill could hit Adelaide in 20 days and Port Lincoln and Kangaroo Island in 15 days. The modelling shows impacts on wildlife, but does not actually model the more far reaching impacts that could be expected on fisheries, which could be closed if affected by much lower concentrations of oil. The results are for oil concentrations that will harm coastline wildlife such as seals and sea lions (100 grams per square metre), which is 10 times the concentration that will impact marine life in the sea (10g/m²). It's also 10,000 times the concentration that will require the closure of fisheries (US standard 0.01 g/m²). Impacts forcing the closures of fisheries will spread further and faster.

Putting drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight into perspective, economically and environmentally



Kangaroo Island Kangaroos



Seal Bay – Kangaroo Island

The majority of global oil spills occur during the exploratory phase. The Deep water horizon disaster was exploratory and BP's plan in the Bight that was with NOPSEMA was also exploratory.

In BP's own environment summary, they have said that jobs during the exploratory phase would be negligible, yet they were prepared to put at risk over 10,000 jobs, worth over AU \$2 billion dollars to the South Australia economy.

If we burn the remaining fossil fuels around the world we have already taken out of the ground, we will take our temperate past 2 degrees, which is in violation the Paris Climate agreement of 1.5 degrees. So expanding the fossil fuel industry goes completely against the Paris Climate agreement.

If we are to have any hope in a livable climate into the future for our children, we cannot allow the expansion of the fossil fuel industry. We simply cannot, this is public health issue and the most important issue humanity has ever faced on whether we continue to live on this planet or not. No industry is worth sacrificing a future for our children on this planet, we call home.

The Gulf drilling attempt by BP was the deepest BP had tried to go, at a depth of 1.6km to the sea floor and 1-2 km down below that. BP wanted to go deeper still in the Bight with a depth of up to 2.5km down the ocean floor then a number of kilometres after that.

Faulty offshore equipment and snapping deep-sea bolts.



Around the world since 2003 enormous bolts that secure offshore oil equipment to the seafloor have been snapping in half or coming loose, with US regulators describing the problem as a "[very critical safety issue](#)" and working with industry to replace more than 10,000 of the bolts in US waters. Oil rigs poised to begin drilling in the Great Australian Bight could use faulty equipment that US regulators say is very likely to cause a "catastrophic incident" like the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/12/call-to-halt-great-australian-bight-oil-drilling-amid-faulty-equipment-fears>

A leading global expert on oil disasters, who investigated Deepwater Horizon, blasted BP and Australian

regulators, calling their response to concerns about faulty equipment an 'early warning sign' of a potential disaster. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/16/oil-disaster-investigator-alarmed-by-bp-great-australian-bight-response>

The location that BP had been granted the leases to drill for oil in the Bight is right in the middle of the Great Australian Bight Marine Park. If approved, they would be drilling into the benthic protection zone, one of the only places in the world where the seafloor is protected. Each drill site would smother this bio-diverse rich habitat in one square km of drilling muds.

A spill that no one could clean up



Bunda cliffs – whale nursery



Pearson Island

A spill implies that it can be cleaned up, however a spill in the Bight would be impossible to clean up. The Bunda cliffs that soar from the ocean straight up vertical to a height of between 50 and 80 metres would be impossible to access and clean up. They don't have sandy beaches to come ashore to capture the oil and are often being hit by large swells off the Southern Ocean.

The very remote offshore island groups, like Person and St Francis would also be impossible to clean up as they too can be hit by large swells and then there is the nooks, crevices and crannies of these islands and seal haul out and breeding sites that would be impossible to clean up.

The Gulf of Mexico is a millpond compared to the Bight and seas of up to 10 and 15 metres are not uncommon, which would mean that cleanup tactics like booms would not be feasible at all.

A critical point that must not be overlooked is that the Gulf of Mexico is an industrialized area, however, the Bight is not. It's a pristine wilderness area. However even with the support infrastructure in the Gulf, rig to drill relief wells and support vessels, the blowout still took 87 days to cap and 4.9 million barrels of oil went into the ocean.

BP's environment plan and spill modelling was under resourced and overly optimistic with only 122 people expected to clean up a maximum of 1,200 km of coastline. That's one person for 10km of coastline, which grossly inadequate.

BP's spill report showed that a clean up would take more than four months and more than 35 days to stop the flow of oil in the Bight. The plan draws on experience from the Gulf disaster when BP leaked 800 million litres for 87 days.

In comparison to the 20 cleanup boats highlighted by BP in the Bight (in far rougher and more remote waters), the Gulf of Mexico disaster used 6850 vessels, 117 aircraft, 46,000 personnel and 17,500 National Guard troops.

Councils opposing drilling for oil in the Bight

Seeing what impacts BP had in the Gulf and what is at stake in the Bight, many councils also came out against BP's plans to drill for oil in the Bight. Kangaroo Island was the first council to come out, followed by Victor Harbor, then Yankalilla, Yorke Peninsula and being a large fishing town, Port Lincoln were reviewing their position.

Operation Jeedara



Steve Irwin off Bunda Cliffs – Great Australian Bight



Bunna Lawrie – Mirning elder

On Thursday 4th August 2016, I led an expedition on-board the *MY Steve Irwin*, titled Operation Jeedara. The expedition was a critical strategic component of Sea Shepherd's Bight defence campaign, as part of the Great Australian Bight Alliance, which includes Wilderness Society South Australia, Bob Brown Foundation, Surfrider Foundation and many other community groups.

My friend, Bunna Lawrie is the Mirning (Indigenous) Elder and whalesong man of the Nullarbor, Great Australian Bight. Bunna Lawrie speaks of the place in the poetry of a people who have lived at the edge of that frontier for maybe 50,000 years.

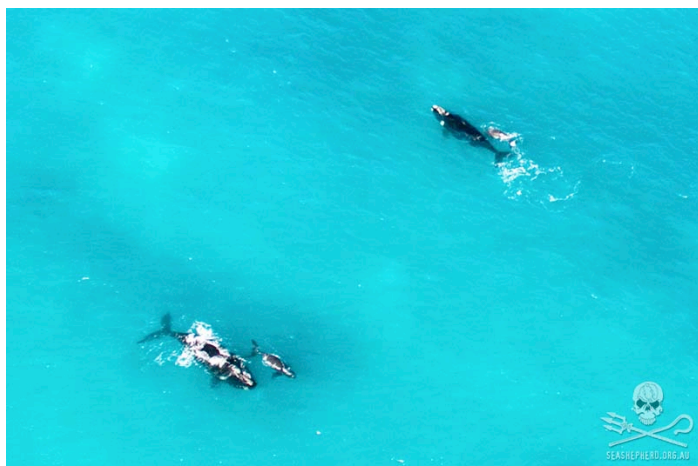
"I'm the whale song man from the Nullarbor on the Great Australian Bight, the Great Australian Bight is the greatest whale nursery on this planet. The whale story where I come from is my university, my school. It's the place where our beautiful Southern Right Whales come to calve their young, to teach their young to travel on the next journey. Whales like Sperm Whales, Blue Whales, Pygmy Blue Whales, Killer Whales, Humpback Whales – they travel down there to honour that great journey, that song, that story of the great white whale Jeedara that is there now." - Bunna Lawrie, Mirning Elder - whalesong man.

In honouring Bunna and the Mirning and the great white whale, with permission, we named our campaign *Operation Jeedara*, Sea Shepherd's Bight defence campaign.

We departed our ships operations base in Williamstown, Melbourne en route to the Great Australian Bight. The expedition showcased the Great Australian Bight to highlight what is actually at stake - a wilderness of global significance. From the Nuyts Reef, the Isles of St Francis, Pearson Island, Neptune Islands, areas around Kangaroo Island, Fowlers Bay and Head of the Bight, one of the worlds most significant southern right whale nurseries, right through to the iconic Bunda Cliffs of the Nullarbor Plain.

Much of the landscapes and diversity of life in the Great Australian Bight is unknown to the world. It is Sea Shepherd's aim to showcase what we would all lose if BP and other companies were allowed to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight and had another Gulf of Mexico, Deep Water Horizon oil spill of lesser or equal value.

The Great Australian Bight is worthy of World Heritage – not an oil field



Southern right whales – head of bight



Nuyts Reef – Great Australian Bight

With Sea Shepherd I have been lucky enough to visit the Galapagos and I must say that what I witnessed in the Great Australian Bight is on par with the Galapagos, and therefore worthy of World Heritage recognition. The offshore islands, with places like Pearson Island where we were greeted by endangered Australian sea lions and black footed rock wallabies, which are endemic to Pearson. We felt like early explorers. We had to get permits from the South Australian Government to visit and film these places, not to mention many of them are marine sanctuaries.

Then there is places like Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island, where you can see mother endangered Australian sea lions nursing their young and male bull seals charging one another while other seals surf the wave to show. Endangered marine life going about their day as though your not even there. There are very few places left on the planet like this. This is as good as it gets in terms of Natural wonders.

Then standing at Head Of Bight and in my peripheral vision being able to easily sit and watch and count 50 mother and calf southern right whales, in the stunning turquoise ocean alongside soaring sheer Bunda cliffs that stretch 50 to 80 metres high.

Where else can you sit and watch whales at play and at rest, mothers nursing their young each day from dawn to dusk? The Bight is a place that the whole world will want to see and a place that Australian's should feel very proud of, as this is the true spirit of Australia and what people all over the world come to Australia to see, not for our café strips.

Just days earlier we were sailing along the Bunda cliffs and could not go within 3 nautical miles off the coast, due to vessel restrictions, and rightfully so. The whole area is a whale nursery stretching from just near Head of Bight to the Western Australian Coast. However we were always reminded that an oil spill would not respect that 3-mile limit and that nursery would be covered in oil and impossible to cleanup.

Community impact



Victor Harbor Greeting



Council led community forum – Kangaroo Island

One thing that we were really not expecting was the level of support that we got as the Steve Irwin pulled into various key location, like Victor Harbor, Port Adelaide and Kangaroo Island. The worry, stress and strain that drilling for oil in the Bight has on many individuals was clearly evident with at times people breaking down and crying. People with deep concern for the potential loss of the natural beauty they have held so dear of their home from a young age, to the fact that their livelihood depends on healthy oceans and or tourism. It was also very humbling; inspiring and overwhelming the hope that many people we met had placed on our combined campaigns successful outcome. These are all very real and important impacts that should always be taken into account.

Below is a series of links to web posting editorials about key highlights of Operation Jeedara.

21st May 2016 - [Sea Shepherd launches Operation Jeedara, the Great Australian Bight campaign](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/sea-shepherd-launches-operation-jeedara-the-great-australian-bight-campaign.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/sea-shepherd-launches-operation-jeedara-the-great-australian-bight-campaign.html>

4th August 2016 - [Sea Shepherd's Steve Irwin sets sail for Great Australian Bight](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/sea-shepherd-s-steve-irwin-sets-sail-for-great-australian-bight.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/sea-shepherd-s-steve-irwin-sets-sail-for-great-australian-bight.html>

8th August 2016 - [Pearson Island Group - A wilderness area of global significance](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/commentary/pearson-island-group-a-wilderness-area-of-global-significance.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/commentary/pearson-island-group-a-wilderness-area-of-global-significance.html>

15th August 2016 - [Conservationist Bob Brown and Actor David Field join the Steve Irwin vessel in the fight for the Bight](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/conservationist-bob-brown-and-actor-david-field-join-the-steve-irwin-vessel-in-the-fight-for-the-bight.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/conservationist-bob-brown-and-actor-david-field-join-the-steve-irwin-vessel-in-the-fight-for-the-bight.html>

18th August 2016 - [The Great Australian Bight - Worthy of World Heritage recognition - Operation Jeedara Update](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/the-great-australian-bight-worthy-of-world-heritage-recognition-operation-jeedara-update.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/the-great-australian-bight-worthy-of-world-heritage-recognition-operation-jeedara-update.html>

19th August 2016 - [Steve Irwin vessel returns from Great Australian Bight into Port Adelaide](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/steve-irwin-vessel-returns-from-great-australian-bight-into-port-adelaide.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/steve-irwin-vessel-returns-from-great-australian-bight-into-port-adelaide.html>

22nd August 2016 - [Greens, Xenophon, Port Adelaide, Yankalilla and Kangaroo Island rally in defence of the Bight](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/greens-xenophon-port-adelaide-yankalilla-and-kangaroo-island-rally-in-defence-of-the-bight.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/greens-xenophon-port-adelaide-yankalilla-and-kangaroo-island-rally-in-defence-of-the-bight.html>

27th August 2016 - [Steve Irwin returns to Ships Ops Base](http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/steve-irwin-returns-to-ships-ops-base.html) - <http://www.seashepherd.org.au/news-and-commentary/news/steve-irwin-returns-to-ships-ops-base.html>

Operation Jeedara documentary film

A documentary of the Steve Irwin's journey in the bight will be completed by the end of 2016, with an aim to get on national free to air TV. So that all Australian's can see the beauty and wonder of the Great Australian Bight , in the hope that they too feel the same sense of pride that our crew felt as observers in one of the worlds truly great natural wonders and why it must be protected.

In the meantime, we have been showing a trailer and teaser of the footage collected to thousands of Australians at special events, talks and ship tours.

I would also welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee to present our case on behalf of our clients (our precious marine life), future generations and Sea Shepherd Australia.

Thank you for receiving and taking onboard Sea Shepherd Australia's submission,

For the Oceans & For Future Generations,

Jeff Hansen
Managing Director
Sea Shepherd Australia

DEFEND – CONSERVE – PRETECT

Sea Shepherd Australia
PO Box 1215, Williamstown
Victoria, 3016

Australia@seashepherd.org.au

Jeff@seashepherd.org.au



Sea Shepherd Australia

Board of Directors Laura Dakin, Jeff Hansen, Peter Hammarstedt (chair), Deon Hubner, Michelle Mossfield

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