

## Dissenting report by the Australian Greens

1.1 The Senate inquiry into the Great Australian Bight Environment Protection Bill 2016 (the bill) received a number of submissions from organisations who are deeply concerned about the potential environmental, social and economic risks that drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight represents. These concerns were largely ignored and disregarded in the Chair's report.

1.2 The Wilderness Society noted in their submission:

The extraordinary environmental values of the Great Australian Bight, and their ecological health, support significant industries in coastal and regional South Australia. These values are threatened by current oil and gas exploration proposals from a range of companies that hold exploration permits in the region...The Wilderness Society considers that the case is now clear that the Great Australian Bight is not a safe or appropriate place for new oil and gas exploration or industrialisation.<sup>1</sup>

1.3 In their submission, Greenpeace Australia Pacific details their strong support for the objectives of this bill, stating:

Oil production in the Great Australian Bight poses an unacceptable risk to the Australian marine environment due to the oil industry's established inability to prevent and mitigate the effects of a catastrophic oil disaster.<sup>2</sup>

1.4 In reference to the ability of the regularity structure to adequately protect the Great Australian Bight, the Humane Society International submission states:

We maintain that NOPSEMA is not an appropriate body to be the sole regulator of environmental approvals for offshore petroleum activities in Commonwealth waters. As a result we have called for the EPBC Act to be amended to revoke the accreditation of NOPSEMA to approve significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance...<sup>3</sup>

1.5 The Australian Greens are concerned by the Chair's disregard for these concerns and the significant danger that exploratory activity and the drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight represents.

1.6 The Australian Greens recognise the concerns raised by the Law Council of Australia in their submission and the potential amendments to the bill that would clarify its impact, strengthen its enforceability and increase penalties for infringements.

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1 The Wilderness Society, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

2 Greenpeace Australia Pacific, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

3 Humane Society International, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

1.7 The Australian Greens acknowledge the submissions from companies such as Chevron, BP and Murphy Australia Oil Pty Ltd, who want to exploit the natural resources of the Great Australian Bight for financial profit and thank them for their contributions.

1.8 While these companies have, in related inquiries, drawn attention to the scale of their investments and their apparent potential for job creation the Australian Greens remain concerned that the highly specialised workforce that would be employed on any drilling rig would result in a relatively small number of local jobs being generated from these projects. Indeed, the Australian Greens contend that the small number of local jobs created by these projects would pale into insignificance in comparison to the number of fisheries and tourism jobs that they would put at risk, especially in South Australia.

## **Conclusion**

1.9 The Australian Greens are deeply concerned by the very real risks that mining for oil or gas in the Great Australian Bight represent. Questionable economic and employment benefits need to be weighed against the impact that a catastrophic oil spill from such projects would represent to fisheries and tourism jobs across the southern states, especially South Australia. The pristine marine environment of the Great Australian Bight contains critical habitats for endangered whales, including the Blue Whale and Southern Right Whale, threatened sea lion populations and white sharks. At this time of climate emergency, we need to be investing in clean, green and renewable energy and not the old, dirty fossil fuel industries of the past.

## **Recommendation 1**

**1.10 The Australian Greens recommend the Senate consider the amendments to the legislation proposed by the Australian Law Council.**

## **Recommendation 2**

**1.11 The Australian Greens recommend that the bill be passed.**

**Senator Peter Whish-Wilson  
Deputy Chair  
Senator for Tasmania**

**Senator Sarah Hanson-Young  
Senator for South Australia**