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Montara Commission of Inquiry

Dear Commission of Inquiry,

This public submission is in relation to the Montara Well Head Platform Uncontrolled Hydrocarbon release which took place between August 21st and November 3rd 2009. Thank-you for the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry regarding these events.

Cape Conservation Group Inc. (CCG) is a local not-for-profit volunteer community group of approximately 50 members whose charter is "to protect the Northwest Cape now and for future generations". We are based in Exmouth at the southern end of the oil and gas region of the WA northwest shelf.

CCG is represented on the community stakeholder groups of several local off-shore oil companies in the southern Pilbara region (Exmouth sub-basin). These companies typically rate the risk of this type of event (well blow-out) as a "one in a million years" event. Something considered to have "virtually no chance of occurring" and "not a credible risk" (BHP Billiton Pyrenees Development Draft Environmental Impact Statement, 2008, p. 165). In light of the events this year we would argue this is an example of inappropriate risk assessment.

Having liaised closely with the industry for a number of years now CCG has a number of grave concerns being;

- a) the companies do not take the risk of oil spill seriously enough;
- b) mitigation factors are limited to those required by regulatory bodies;
- c) there is limited co-operation between companies with preparation and preparedness, including the sharing of resources; and
- d) the industry appears to self regulate, with no policing by government agencies to see if actual practice matches claimed practice.

Rumours abound regarding actual practice but is difficult to ascertain their validity due to a) the inaccessibility of the sites and b) those reporting are reluctant to speak out as employees.

CCG believes there needs to be greater protection for the marine environment along the West coast from the oil and gas industry. Decisions to make the Muiron Island Marine Management Area (the most diverse portion of the Ningaloo reef) to allow for potential oil development where the remainder of the reef is protected in a Marine Park shows the previous lack of concern by government in protecting our marine areas. This attitude needs to change. The government needs to be more responsible to the Australian and global community to protect our pristine marine areas by;

- a) implementing measures to fully protect our marine areas of significance;
- b) closer regulation and inspection of companies operating within our waters (Commonwealth and State);
- c) combined-company practical mock scenarios to be carried out (not limited to desktop as recommended by NOSPA);
- d) upgrading regulations to require companies to use the closest practicable resources in the event of a spill; and
- e) putting greater resources into alternative energies which have minimal, or no, associated pollution.

May the outcome of this enquiry be a reduction in risk to our marine environment,

Yours Sincerely,

Jack

Jacqueline Hine
Secretary/ Oil and Gas Representative

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