

The Commissioner
Montara Commission of Inquiry
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21 December 2009

Dear Sir,

Submission to The Commission of Inquiry into the Uncontrolled Release of Oil and Gas from the Montara Wellhead Platform in the Timor Sea

The seas off the Kimberley coast are internationally recognised as one of the last great unspoiled marine environments in the world. These shallow water tropical ecosystems are home to globally significant populations of internationally threatened species (e.g. whales and turtles). However, less than 1% of Kimberley marine waters are protected in marine sanctuaries.

The oil spill from the Montara Well Head Platform was estimated to have affected 50,000 square km of seas off the Kimberley and oil slicks came within 69km (see Australian Maritime Safety Authority website) off Australia's coast.

The Montara spill released up to 23 million litres of oil and condensate into the Timor Sea off the Kimberley. The company, PTTEP said they didn't know exactly how much petroleum polluted our Kimberley seas but their estimates of flow rates were much lower than those suggested in Senate debates.

PTTEP took 74 days to plug the flow temporarily, spent 3 weeks towing a repair rig to the site and declined an offer of another rig nearby. The company made several failed attempts to plug the leak and aborted other attempts over several months. Yet their practices were considered to be "world's best practice" by the petroleum industry. It appears that when accidents happen the petroleum industry is unable to act quickly to stop the pollution.

Once petroleum is released into the sea it cannot be easily contained or removed. Any "cleanup" is only partial leaving behind petroleum polluting the marine ecosystem. Also, there is no clear science on the best methods to "cleanup" oil spills. Dispersants, a mix of toxic chemicals that kill coral spawn, were used in the "cleanup" of this oil spill and this procedure has been criticised by leading scientists.

Also of concern is the impact that developing a huge new petroleum industry would have on the ability of Australia to satisfy its responsibilities in reducing carbon emissions.

To give the planet its best chance of long term survival the current scientific thinking supports keeping global temperature increases to less than 2°C, above which the impacts will be extremely damaging.

Development of the Browse Basin gas resource off the Kimberley coast alone will create a minimum of 10 million metric tonnes of carbon emissions each year for Australia and prevent Australia from reaching its targets and meeting its global climate change responsibilities.

I therefore strongly believe there should be no further expansion of the petroleum industry on the North-West shelf of Australia's Kimberley region until such time as:

1. A network of marine parks with large sanctuaries is established in the Kimberley region to serve as protection from events like the Montara oil spill (**Term of Reference 10**);
2. It can be shown that proposals for expansion of the North-West petroleum industry are fully compliant with national climate change policies and targets (**Term of Reference 11**); and
3. Faster response time mechanisms and improved oil spill procedures are developed and adopted – with strong independent compliance enforcement (**Term of Reference 8**)

Yours sincerely

Coral Robinson