

Oil and Water Don't Mix: Report Summary

Written by

Wednesday, 25 February 2004 03:38 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 February 2004 03:38

The government of Canada is on the verge of deciding if it will revisit lifting a moratorium on oil and gas exploration and tanker traffic off the coast of British Columbia. The government of British Columbia is encouraging this as it is eager for oil to flow in BC waters even though there is no proof that any potential reserves are economically viable. British Columbia's coastline is one of the most magnificent in the Pacific region, stretching almost 30,000 kilometres. The marine environment here is a natural treasure teeming with precious sea life and natural resources. It is a major cradle of marine life for the entire west coast of North America, and is recognized internationally as globally significant. To consider risking this natural splendour with industrial oil and gas drilling is reckless, especially when the products of such exploration will further contribute to marine and air pollution and global climate change.

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To consider risking this natural splendour with industrial oil and gas drilling is reckless, especially when the products of such exploration will further contribute to marine and air pollution and global climate change.

The report, [*Oil and Water Don't Mix: Keeping Canada's West Coast Oil Free*](#), outlines the effects of oil and gas drilling on the ecological riches of BC's marine ecosystems. Author Stuart Hertzog examines the potential for disasters, implications for climate change, economic issues, legal and ethical issues, the role of politics and the oil and gas industry, and the need for marine parks and preserves. For example:

- While the government of BC and some federal officials promote oil and gas production for economic reasons, the industry itself shows little interest in pursuing offshore development in British Columbia because it is considered to be too speculative and expensive.

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- The promise of jobs for economically depressed coastal communities is deceiving as, for most of the work, companies would bring in experienced crews from other projects, limiting possibilities for local people. This industry is specialized, global and competitive in nature, and few local residents have the required training and experience in offshore surveying, exploratory drilling and production, or specialized facility construction.

- The inherent risks and uncertainty of offshore oil and gas activity jeopardizes employment in tourism, and sports and commercial fishing. Investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects would be more prudent.

- The waters of Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound are the stormiest and most seismically active in Canada, and the area has a history of major earthquakes and ocean tsunamis. Such severe natural disturbances will certainly continue and it is unlikely that any manufactured structure set in the water would escape damage, including oil wells, pipelines and shipping facilities.

Climate change

Producing and burning oil and gas causes climate change. Canada has committed to implement the Kyoto Protocol on climate protection, yet the BC government is pressuring Ottawa to expand oil and gas production ? including perilous offshore exploration.

We need energy efficiency and clean energy sources, not more oil and gas, if we are to address climate change successfully. All government analysis to date has completely ignored the issue of climate change and the greenhouse gas emissions associated with oil and gas production and use.

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The last time Canada seriously considered lifting the moratorium was in 1986 when a government panel set out 92 conditions that had to be met before the ban could be lifted. Then, on March 23, 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, releasing 200,000 barrels of unprocessed Alaska crude oil that devastated the marine environment, killing marine mammals, sea birds and myriad fish and invertebrates.

Ironically, the world's most ecologically damaging oil spill helped to protect British Columbia's northern waters from possible damage by the oil industry. The *Exxon Valdez* disaster stopped plans to lift the federal moratorium and led the province to establish one.

Today, while government is eager for offshore oil exploration, industry is less enthusiastic because of the risk and expense involved.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers has identified three specific concerns, aside from the moratorium, that would need to be addressed before its members would consider resuming activity off the BC coast.

- There must be a clear, integrated federal-provincial regulatory framework to govern all activity.
- All related First Nations land claims issues must be resolved.
- All ecologically sensitive areas of the region must be clearly identified in advance and set aside.

This report shows that the risks of opening up offshore activity in British Columbia waters far outweigh any possible rewards. And, in light of the energy alternatives that could be pursued, it is foolhardy to take such risks in these sensitive waters.

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