



Comment on Otway Exploration Drilling Program

17th December 2023

The Tasmanian Climate Collective would like to provide the following feedback and objections to the proposed ConocoPhillips Australia Otway Exploration Drilling Program.

We would like to initially express our exhaustion and overwhelm in being involved in ongoing community representation for off-shore gas exploration around Tasmania. As a community of Tasmanian volunteers we are trying to grasp if there is anything for us to gain from spending so much of our personal time responding to these processes which are shown to consistently favour powerful profit making entities over local communities and everyday Australian citizens.

We recognise that this limited exploratory drilling program (therefore limited scope for opposition within the approval framework) is a gateway for new and extensive fossil gas production in Bass Strait when the world needs to urgently slash fossil fuel use to combat climate change. Continuing a role in fossil fuel expansion will leave ConocoPhillips vulnerable to current (e.g. State of California action) and future legal actions for the serious harm, knowingly caused.

As a community we are compelled to continuously challenge the development of more polluting fossil fuel projects here in the Otway Basin, but also across the Tasmanian landscape, because the science is very clear that fossil fuel extraction has to stop if we are to have any hope of a safe climate future. Plans to continue exploration here in the Otway Basin are incompatible with achieving the Paris target of limiting global warming 1.5 C. Please do not ignore the elephant in the room - climate change. We ask that you cease plans to explore for and extract off-shore gas in the Otway Basin.

Specific NOPSEMA relevant objections to the proposed ConocoPhillips Australia Otway Exploration Drilling Program include the following:

Unacceptable impacts on Tasmanian fishing communities

Tasmanian wild fisheries contribute significantly to our island identity and economic value. We have high-value markets for shellfish, crustaceans and scale fish and there are also almost 100,000 recreational fishers in Tasmania (according to the Tasmanian Association of Recreational Fishing). The proposed gas exploration will impact on many of our local fisheries and reliant communities including the ports at Currie on King Island, Stanley, Strahan and other smaller harbours. It is pleasing to see the potential for compensation for lost income to Tasmanian commercial fishers and we would like to see this opportunity extended to other Tasmanian community groups and industries, recognising that the many impacts and 'costs' of gas exploration activities may not be as tangible as loss of access to commercial fishing resources.

Unacceptable impacts on pakana/palawa cultural resources

The proposed exploration drilling program has the potential to negatively impact on significant cultural sites and values across north-west Tasmania. The North-West tribe of Tasmanian Aboriginal people were a maritime people occupying the coastal strip and the islands off the west and north-

west coast of lutriwita/Tasmania, with eight tribes within the north-west tribal grouping. These coastal areas continue to be important to the palawa/pakana people for seasonal yula (mutton bird or Short-tailed Shearwater), other traditional shellfish harvesting, connection to country and traditional cultural practices.

Palawa/pakana culture, like so many other cultural and economic activities in north-west Tasmania, relies on a healthy marine environment. The Short-tailed Shearwater breed and feed their chicks throughout summer in Tasmania, flying long-distances off the coastline to gather food for their growing chicks, with krill the most important part of their diet. Earlier this year a cold-water upwelling off western Tasmania saw local naturalists recording krill being washed up on beaches in large numbers from Strahan through to Marrawah on Tasmania's west coast. These small creatures thrive in this proposed exploration area and underpin a healthy marine environment for Tasmania and Victoria.

Short-tailed shearwaters, as long-distance migratory birds, are under stress due to many other environmental factors, including increasing light pollution from activity within their range and it is important that their food source is protected in their breeding grounds. Short-tailed Shearwaters are also a licensed commercial and recreationally harvested species, highly valued by the north-west Tasmanian community.

Unknown and unacceptable impacts on marine ecosystem

Throughout the year, this area has a resident population of blue whales and a variety of species of whales present during their migration routes. Sperm whales have been recorded in the deep water areas of the operational area off the west coast of Tasmania, with the greatest number of sightings occurring in October and November.

Tasmanians are enjoying an increase in whale presence and awareness which is bringing much joy to coastal communities of King Island and NW Tasmania. Many of our popular coastal tourist towns like Stanley and Boat Harbour regularly attract visitors to look for whales (including this winter 2023), in the usually quiet winter months, where we have experienced Southern Right Whales close to shore for extended periods. The marine drilling activities and discharges of hydrocarbons and other pollutants into this area could have serious detrimental impacts on these species and many others.

Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a known biodiversity hotspot and it is also widely recognised that this area is a significantly understudied biological area. Any development in this area will have unknown impacts on this marine ecosystem, which is already under significant stress due to marine warming from climate change.

The Shy Albatross's threatened species listing was recently upgraded from vulnerable to endangered and it only breeds on three Tasmanian offshore islands, including Albatross Island within this project's potential impact area.

Many important and critically endangered species utilise this area as a migratory route including the Orange Bellied-Parrot, the Swift Parrot, Eastern Curlew and the lesser understood Bogong Moth. Increased activity and light pollution in this project area all has the potential to impact on these already vulnerable species.

Unacceptable impacts on Marine Parks

We are quite shocked that the proposal includes large areas of the Zeehan Marine Park off the NW coast of Tasmania. Marine parks are established especially for the conservation of biodiversity under

the World Conservation Union Guidelines. They act as a reference or baselines in scientific studies to assess the impact of other activities, like fishing, or in this instance, oil and gas exploration. The development of gas proposals in a marine reserve makes a farce of our marine parks systems, as our Federal government celebrates the expansion of our marine reserve system around Macquarie Island. It is completely unacceptable to undertake gas exploration activities that include impacts within a marine reserve.

Negative impacts on tourism, developing industry and the Tasmanian Brand

Brand Tasmania was established in March 2019 under the Brand Tasmania Act 2018. Brand Tasmania plays a leading role in developing a Tasmanian Brand which differentiates and enhances Tasmania's appeal and national and international competitiveness, and that it is maintained, protected and promoted.

Brand Tasmania's mission is to inspire and encourage Tasmanians, and those who want to be Tasmanian, to "*quietly pursue the extraordinary*".

Quiet: Tasmanians are humble, quietly confident, and cool while the rest of the world is increasingly loud and hot.

Pursuit: We're isolated, so we've had to be inventive. We were underestimated, so nothing is ever "good enough." We've had to work harder together, to make determination a core of our culture. The Bass Strait means everything from here is more expensive, so we have learned to focus on the boutique, the bespoke, on "better, not more."

The extraordinary: This is about quality taking precedence over quantity, on privileging the unusual, and on our choice to protect the wilderness and our environment. Brand Tasmania is industry and community led, and government enabled.

The Powered by Tasmania campaign is aimed at getting our Tasmanian community on-board with our required rapid transition to renewable energy sources. ConocoPhillips exploratory drilling operation for the expansion of the fossil gas industry around Tasmania tarnishes our Tasmanian Brand as an island that treasures and protects our environment and also hinders our community efforts to rapidly move to a decarbonized economy. How will ConocoPhillips take steps to preserve the Tasmanian Brand and community decarbonization efforts?

About Tasmanian Climate Collective:

[Tasmanian Climate Collective](#) are a collective of Tasmanian climate action groups, environment groups and individuals. We are 100% run by volunteers and made up of people who care from all over Tasmania. We work together, support one another, share resources and ideas and are only limited by the capacity of members.

