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Media release: New oil drilling regulations totally inadequate

The Environmental Defence Society has expressed profound concern at the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects – Non-notified Activities) Regulations 2013 which have just been released by the Minister for the Environment for a short round of consultation.

“We understood, following a meeting with the Prime Minister, that the Government was considering a different and more robust approach to these regulations,” said Gary Taylor, Chairman of the Environmental Defence Society.

“But the regulations are unchanged from what was originally proposed and give oil and gas exploration drilling an easy pathway to approval.

“There will be no notification of applications for oil and gas exploratory drilling, no public hearing, no rights to cross-examine applicants on their track record and no ability to bring expert evidence on the adequacy or otherwise of spill mitigation measures.

“Instead, we will have to rely on the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to properly assess applications behind closed doors and with no transparency whatsoever. This is poor process and is even more extraordinary in light of the high risks associated with deep-sea exploratory drilling.

“The EPA, in administering the current legal regime, which is itself inadequate, has yet to demonstrate its competence.

“For those New Zealanders who might not oppose oil and gas drilling provided the environmental effects are properly assessed, this approach will be deeply disconcerting.

“To ensure safe and effective environmental oversight of exploration drilling, we need world-class regulatory oversight. Instead, we have a proposed regime that would seem more suited to a third world country.

“As a New Zealander I find this profoundly disappointing,” Mr Taylor concluded.