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Media Release

Corrected version from Monday 3 February: (see additional wording in bold)

“Trust us – we know what we’re doing.” EDS calls for offshore Oil and Gas Regulations to be dropped

In its submission to the Government’s proposed offshore oil and gas regulations, the Environmental Defence Society has called for the regulations to be dropped.

“We argue, along with many New Zealanders, that if we are to have oil and gas exploration in our deep oceans, we should have world class environmental oversight,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“But the proposed regulations are inadequate and weak. They leave our environment at an unacceptable risk.

“The proposal to make exploration drilling non-notified leaves the environmental approvals process up the Environmental Protection Authority with no public scrutiny, involvement or hearing. We are being asked by the EPA to “trust us – we know what we’re doing.”

“This creates a real possibility of regulatory capture by the industry, one of the factors that a Presidential Inquiry found contributed to the Deepwater Horizons spill.

“Regulatory capture is made even more likely by the fact that Ministers are acting as outspoken advocates for the sector in order, presumably, to counter pressure from interest groups that don’t want any oil and gas exploration. How can the politically appointed EPA Board be immune from those pressures from their masters?

“From a technical point of view, we note that there has been no risk analysis of **the threat from oil spills during** exploration drilling to inform the regulation-making process. Ministers are contending that there is a low probability of an oil spill. But risk is calculated by multiplying probability by consequences – and the consequences of a spill in New Zealand waters are enormous.

“We note that in order to make regulations under the EEZ Act, the Minister must have adequate information. In the absence of a proper risk assessment, we cannot see how this test can be met.

“EDS has argued that there may be other options for consenting exploration that have not been examined. We would be happy to engage in a process of reviewing those alternatives.

“Meantime, the Government should reconsider these regulations. By not proceeding with them, exploration drilling would remain a notified discretionary activity under the Act. That is the best outcome,” Mr Taylor concluded.

More: Gary Taylor (09) 810 9594

See EDS’s submission on their website.