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Media Release

EDS says proposed new oil drilling regulations not adequate



The passing of the Marine Legislation Bill this week means that the Minister for the Environment is now able to make regulations to reclassify oil and gas exploration drilling in our deep oceans.

“But Minister Adams could be about to make a big mistake,” says EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“The Cabinet has proposed extremely soft regulation for oil drilling. A *non-notified discretionary application* would be fast-tracked through the EPA, in house, with no public notification, no hearing, no rights to test expert evidence and all within 60 days. It is weak, lacking transparency and relies on the newly minted EPA to get it right.

“The lesson from the Deepwater Horizons spill was that soft regulation like this contributed to the disaster. Inexplicably, we are heading down the same path.

“Like most New Zealanders, we are not opposed to oil and gas exploration – provided the best possible environmental safeguards are in place. But it has now become clear that, under the government’s current trajectory, they won’t be.

“If there was a major oil blowout off the Kaikoura coast, say, it could destroy Whalewatch and Dolphin Encounters, decimate our inshore fishery, pollute beaches and have massive implications for New Zealand’s reputation.

“Seeing the Minister of Energy and Resources on television earlier this week, acting as a cheer-leader for the industry, further underlined just how far the international oil and gas industry appears to have New Zealand Ministers in their collective thrawl.

“EDS calls on the Minister for the Environment to resist pressure from her gung-ho colleague and to seriously consider the consequences of something going wrong in our oceans. Assurances from the industry, including those culpable for the Gulf spill, that we should just trust them should be treated with deep scepticism, not naivety.

“A well blow-out off New Zealand’s coast may be a low probability, but it would have huge consequences if it occurred. In order to ensure that those risks are robustly addressed, we need best practice environmental regulation in place and we need to apply it in a robust and transparent manner,” Mr Taylor concluded.