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EDS questions EPA role in Anadarko approvals

The Environmental Defence Society has questioned whether the Anadarko exploration project off the coast of Raglan is lawful.

“The Environmental Protection Authority is required to accept the company’s Environmental Impact Assessment. But the EPA has confirmed to us that it has not seen the Emergency Response Plan, part of the EIA, which Anadarko has prepared, that covers off what would happen in the event of an oil well blow-out,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“As Anadarko’s EIA conceded, a blow-out has a low probability but would have severe consequences for the marine and coastal environment. It is the biggest concern that we have and I think that would be shared by most New Zealanders.

“It is therefore surprising and disturbing that the EPA has not seen the ERP and has instead relied on Maritime New Zealand doing so. But the *Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects) Act 2012* requires the EPA to do that - and it can’t simply pass that responsibility to another agency.

“To do that is arguably unlawful and that means that Anadarko may not be authorised to drill under the Act’s transitional provisions.

“EPA Chief Executive Rob Forlong has advised EDS that *“Anadarko provided us with an overview of their Discharge Management Plan as an appendix in both their Taranaki and Canterbury Impact Assessments. The full emergency response plan is contained within an annex of the Discharge Management Plan that Maritime New Zealand approved on the 15th of November”*.

“By failing to even see the company’s full plans to deal with an oil spill, the EPA is failing in its statutory duty to confirm the completeness of the EIA.

“Moreover, Maritime New Zealand has failed to act transparently with its separate approvals process and intends making a decision about whether to make the Discharge Management Plan and Emergency Response Plan available only after drilling has started. This is unacceptable. It means the public has no idea what arrangements have been made to respond to an oil spill and whether they amount to best practice or something less.

“Overall, the regulators of the Anadarko project are behaving badly. This will have a corrosive effect on public confidence that the regulators been thorough,” said Mr Taylor.