

Organisations object to offshore oil and gas drilling

Environmental organisations have called for a stop to all offshore oil and gas drilling, citing the lack of adequate public participation, and the potentially significant impact of drilling on the environment and local communities. The situation has been given added impetus with the recent arrival of the DeepSea Stavanger oil drilling rig in Cape Town on top of the current oil spill disaster in Mauritius.



Communities protest drilling

The Green Connection (GC) has therefore submitted its comments on the government's Draft Scoping Report in which Total E & P South Africa (Tepsa) is seeking a permit to drill an additional 10 wells, 40 to 110km south of Knysna and Mossel Bay.

Another concern was that the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA) appeared to be making decisions on behalf of Tepsa and the government. "We believe that PASA's job is to comment on the environmental impact assessment (EIA) and not make decisions. Decisions should be made by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy," says Green Connection's Liziwe McDaid.

Environmental impact

"In our submission, we point out that in trying to assess the environmental impacts of individual projects such as this, we also need to look at the cumulative impacts. How the environment will be further impacted based on previously approved drilling, such as that which the DeepSea Stavanger is planning for Mossel Bay. We cannot look at this this one well in isolation," she says.

“To date, public participation has been far from adequate. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen that the EIA public participation has continued, and yet affected communities, without adequate access to the internet, have no idea about what has been planned. We are also very concerned that the issue of climate change and its impact on the project is not outlined in the scoping report. We would like to see the inclusion of a mitigation and adaptation risks, with regards to the impact of climate change,” she says.

“The government and public at large need no reminding of the devastating effects of potential oil spills on the environment, its deadly impact on marine life as well as the risks to the coastal flora. However, the potential damage to the coastal communities, including fishers in the area, could be catastrophic in that ecosystem damage would affect the livelihoods of those coastal communities that have been dependent on the ocean for many years,” McDaid says..

Impact on communities

Green Connection’s Neville van Rooy has been engaging coastal communities who could potentially be affected by the detrimental consequences of the drilling. “On a recent visit with small-scale fishers who were affected by the oil spills that happened on the West Coast in the areas of Saldanha Bay, Langebaan and Paternoster in 1983, people spoke of the months-long consequences of the oil spill. They said the contamination was still prevalent months after the oil spill. This in turn had a real-time effect on the community’s ability to fish and make a living.”

Van Rooy says that major gas and oil companies like Total had to look at viable alternatives to fossil fuels. “There are proven alternatives, with less negative impact on the environment and communities,” he says.

Chairperson of Coastal Links Eastern Cape Ntsindiso Nongcavu says that the community-based organisation – which helps small-scale fishers secure their livelihoods and their human rights – is concerned about oil and gas drilling because the government officials did not do proper consultation with the affected communities.

“Coastal Links EC says no to oil and gas drilling because there are too many risks for us small-scale fishing communities. We would lose of our fishing rights in the area around the drilling, and many ocean species will migrate as a result of the drilling. Already there are no job opportunities to help develop us as poor communities because we don’t have a skill. Our future is in fishing and tourism.”

The South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in conjunction with the KZN Subsistence Fisherfolk Forum and the youth of South Durban says, “This ocean grab for oil and gas is wrong for so many reasons. The South African coastline is highly sensitive with a wide range of marine biodiversity and we have just marked a decade since the BP Deep Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, where lives, livelihoods and biodiversity were lost. Still to this day, the communities have not recovered.”

Director at Justica Ambiental/Friends of the Earth Mozambique Anabela Lemos says: “Since the entrance of the gas industry (including Total), the communities of Cabo Delgado have lost everything – access to their farmlands, the ocean and their entire livelihoods. Their struggle has been exacerbated by the war which started in 2017, in which over 1,000 people have been killed. These communities are terrified, not only of the insurgents, but also of the military, facing continuing human rights violations, including sexual assaults of women in villages. Journalists and outspoken people are randomly detained or disappeared.

One journalist, Ibrahimo Abu Mbaruco disappeared in April and a community member, who spoke out against military violence, has been missing since May. What is happening in Cabo Delgado is a horror story, becoming more and more terrifying every day.”

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