



GOR COMMUNITIES NETWORK

1 March 2024

Hon. Tania Plibersek
Minister for Environment and Water
Parliament House, CANBERRA

Opposition to Seismic Blasting exploring for Gas and Oil

Dear Minister,

I write on behalf of the organisations listed below, which are members of the Great Ocean Road Communities Network (GORCN). These groups represent communities spanning the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, a region renowned for its extraordinary scenic beauty, its exceptional ecological values, and as a major site for tourism, with related economic importance for Victoria and beyond.

We are writing to ask you to reject and if possible prohibit the imminent seismic blasting program, which aims to explore for gas and oil in the Southern Ocean between North West Tasmania, Cape Otway and the South Australian border over an area encompassing 5,500 million hectares of federal waters.

The proposed seismic blasting program – using air guns to create blasts of sound that travels into the seabed at ten second intervals, 24 hours per day, for weeks - is opposed by our communities for two immediate reasons.

First, this activity has harmful impacts for marine wildlife. Second, it conflicts with Australian efforts to limit global warming.

If seismic blasting proceeds, it will undermine national policies intended to protect and preserve marine life, and to limit global warming by ending greenhouse emissions.

These impacts, in combination, would also prove harmful to the economic and social capacities of our region – affecting social and ecological sustainability along and beyond the Great Ocean Road.

Impacts on protected marine species and sanctuaries

The rate of endangerment and extinction of terrestrial and marine fauna is accelerating as a result of human impacts on habitat in general and directly on individual species.

Seismic blasting is a technology known to displace, injure and kill marine life. The intended seismic blasting program will take place in areas of the coast valued for their marine life. It will occur in protected sanctuaries for Blue Whales, Southern Right Whales, and their calves, causing whales to move away from feeding grounds and breeding areas and possibly harming those animals. The proposed blasting area includes two Commonwealth Marine Parks, containing globally significant values, and rare and unique species.

Whales and other cetaceans, and the Southern Rock Lobster, are among the affected species critically important for marine-based tourism and for fisheries that support our local communities.

Potential climate change impacts

The extreme impacts of climate change – catastrophic wildfires, floods, and storms - are increasing in frequency and intensity. Meanwhile climate change's slower effects - sea level rise and ocean acidification, and changes in rainfall and temperature - are harming the longer term health and survival prospects for most terrestrial and marine species.

It is internationally agreed that if we are to hold global warming to as close to 1.5 Celsius as possible, as per the United Nations Paris Agreement to which Australia is a party, we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero in the near future.

Existing reserves of all fossil fuels are far in excess of what can be used if this ambition is to be realised. Nor can natural gas and oil be used as 'transitional' fuels if we are to meet our global goals.

The proposed blasting program intends to expand the known reserves of gas and oil – and potentially lead to their exploitation. Australia does not have a shortage of natural gas – it has a shortage of regulations to ensure that our existing reserves are not exported ahead of domestic need.

Your government is now working hard to combat pressures threatening the health and the survival of native species, and to limit the impacts of climate change. We have strong laws and regulations and a significant system of terrestrial and marine conservation reserves, to protect our remaining – and rare and endangered – wildlife and flora.

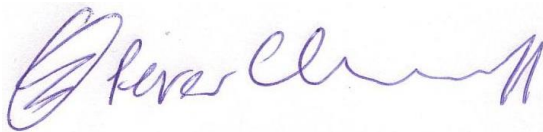
To reduce our contribution to global warming, your government has introduced interim targets, and regulations and programs, for transitioning Australia towards a net-zero emissions economy.

We therefore call on you, and the Australian Government, to do everything in your power to stop seismic blasting off our shores, for it is clear that seismic blasting directly contravenes and undermines these appropriate goals and policies.

We, as the GORCN, will do our utmost also to ensure that this exploratory activity does not occur. As a network of communities, we are also heartened and strengthened by the positions taken by our coastal Shire councils – the Warrnambool City Council, Moyne Shire Council, Colac Otway Shire Council and the Surf Coast Shire Council - also calling for a total ban on seismic blasting for similar reasons.

We would be grateful for your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Peter Christoff', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Dr Peter Christoff (Chair)
Great Ocean Road Communities Network

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Groups supporting this letter include:

Aireys Inlet and District Association (AIDA)
Anglesea Community Network
Apollo Bay Community Voice
Bellbrae Residents Association
Friends of Lorne
Friends of Point Grey, Lorne
Geelong Environment Council
Greater Torquay Alliance
Kennett River Association
Otway Forum
Port Campbell Community Group
Princetown Wetlands and Estuary Preservation Group
Save Anglesea
Skenes Creek Progress Association

Southern Otways Landcare group
Southern Otways Sustainable group
Wye River Separation Creek Community Association