



GAS EXPLORATION IN THE OTWAY BASIN

SUBMISSION FROM: Friends of Lorne
TO: Resources Victoria
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Contact: committee@friendsoflorne.org.au

WHO WE ARE

Friends of Lorne is a planning and environment conservation organisation based in a small community of 1300 people on the southern coast of Victoria, two hours' drive from Melbourne. The organisation was founded in 1966. We are dedicated to conserving the natural fauna and flora of Lorne whilst ensuring that there are services and activities suited to the needs of permanent residents, holidaying residents, campers and tourists.

OUR OBJECTION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the possibility of the Victorian Government opening up a lease for undersea mining exploration in our region. **We are strongly opposed to it because it represents an unacceptable risk to marine life and ecosystems.**

The Otway Basin contains the only calving ground for Southern Right Wales in southeastern Australia.¹ Evidence on Southern Right Whales indicates that our local population is especially vulnerable.¹ Already, calving intervals are increasing, possibly as a result of climate change and consequent change in food and prey/predator distribution. In 2020, three females were expected into the calving ground. None came. Three returned in 2021 and in 2022 two familiar female-calf pairs returned, along with two new female-calf pairs. Meanwhile, elsewhere in Australia, Southern Right Wales are increasing in numbers.¹

Our very small numbers need protection from loud noise. Sound blasts from seismic surveys can kill zooplankton one km away.² Among marine mammal populations all alterations to feeding, orientation, hazard avoidance, migration and social behaviour caused by seismic surveys are classed as adverse effects.³ For Southern Right Whales permanent auditory damage is assumed to occur within 40k from the source.³ Startle, fright, avoidance, and changes in behaviours and vocalisation have been observed in other whale species at ranges of 10-100s of kilometres.³ Around the world, scientists are calling for more and better research to fill the gaps on what is not known, alongside calls for international policy and regulation to reduce unnecessary underwater noise.⁴ In some cases, this could be as simple as reducing the speed of cargo vessels.⁵ A "no brainer" they argue therefore, is to avoid deliberate noise in sensitive areas.

Our little town is a beauty spot for tourism, because of its legacy of marine and land habitat conservation. That beauty and habitat is the real "resource" that the Victorian Government should be safeguarding for

future generations, as DEECA well knows. We refer here to the environment and conservation aspects of your mission. The Friends of Lorne also have an in-principle objection to further fossil fuel exploration as we believe Australia should be devoted to resource management that has less impact on carbon emissions.

Penny Hawe, President.

Friends of Lorne

PO Box 68 Lorne VIC 3232

www.friendsoflorne.org.au

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