

Oil exploration

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livelihoods from the very industry it is promoting.

When did the protection of marine habitat get placed in the hands of the petroleum industry? DFO bureaucrats act as if conservation requirements start and stop with excessive regulation of the inshore fishery.

"Co-existence"?

Nova Scotia's Minister of Fisheries believes we should co-exist with the petroleum industry. We have been co-existing with industrial corporations for a long time. We co-exist with pollution such as the Kimberly Clark pulp and paper mill in Pictou area that has been spewing out 26 million gallons of effluent a day for over forty years into the Northumberland Strait. We co-exist with the pesticides from PEI's farms, with the mines and industrial plants along New Brunswick's coast, and with pollution from the St. Lawrence river that has been dumped into the Gulf for decades. How much pollution from such industrial plants impedes the ability of fish species to grow and reproduce? What about the persistent organic pollution that has the Globe and Mail reporting that PEI lobsters are among the most contaminated species in this country? Media like this does not help our fish prices, our markets or the future of these stocks. It has us realizing that we have more "co-existence" in the Gulf of St. Lawrence than we want and we don't need anymore.

If you look at the large number of leases in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, we don't have co-existence; this is a takeover. The oil and gas industry has arrived like a freight train and their greed knows no limits, as these shoreline permits prove. These permits were approved without consultation with Atlantic fishers and coastal communities. Any one of these going into production will pose a risk to the Gulf and its fisheries.

Seismic blasting; how much abuse can the Gulf withstand?

Will waters laden with heavy metals, oil and gas spills and ballast from oil tankers jeopardize recovery of declining stocks and conservation of healthy stocks? Will seismic blasting jeopardize juvenile and adult cod, hake and American plaice which, according to the most recent report of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, are still not recovering.

The oil and gas industry says seismic blasting only kills juveniles and larvae within a few metres of the blasting gun. What they do not disclose is that seismic blasting is actually done with up to 32 air guns towed on a one hundred foot wide grid at varied depths and ranges, blasting every 10-12 seconds by sound wave generators up to 150 atmospheres aimed at the floor of the ocean. Corridor Resources is proposing a 10-day seismic test in the fall of 2001 that will generate 2,837,000 blasts. This will leave a path of destruction as wide as a football field that is 1,200 miles long, crisscrossing over sensitive spawning and migratory grounds. Seismic blasting alters the behavior of adult fish, whales and dolphins. A Barents Sea study shows the groundfish catch rates dropping by two thirds, with the fish not coming back by the end of the study. Studies off California showed a similar effect.

The Georges Bank Review Panel determined that petroleum exploration and development is not worth the risk to fishing grounds 100 miles offshore. How can it be worth the risk along our shoreline in the midst of our multi-species inshore fishery that thousands depend on?

Our coalition wants the impacts of petroleum exploration on the Gulf species studied with microscopic scrutiny, as inshore fishers themselves have been subjected to. The investigation must look at not just the commercial species but also the food chain and habitat for these



Seismic Blasts

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species. It must consider impacts of all stages of petroleum exploration, drilling, transportation and use.

Consider these facts:

1. The Gulf waters are virtually land-locked and covered in ice every winter. The limited back and forth tidal action of the Southern Gulf makes it more vulnerable to accidents than the Scotian Shelf or Grand Banks.
2. Parcel 1 lies along the migratory routes of most of the Southern Gulf migrating species.
3. The ecosystem on which the Parcel 1 permit has been staked provides spawning habitat for most species that live in the Southern Gulf.
4. The strongest component of the Southern Gulf's recovering American plaice stock either migrates through or is resident in Parcel 1.
5. The strongest component of Southern Gulf White Hake, which is under moratorium, either migrates through or is resident in Parcel 1.
6. Due to FRCC recommendations to increase lobster egg production, fishermen have been releasing larger lobsters in the area.
7. Due to the vulnerability of the Southern Gulf's unique ecosystem, groundfish stocks are being protected so they can recover.
8. There is a lack of scientific documentation on the effects of seismic testing and petroleum development on crustaceans, pelagics and groundfish.
9. There is lack of scientific documentation on the spawning of southern gulf stocks. We cannot even answer the question: "where do our juveniles spend the winter?"

Quite simply, if proper consultation with coastal communities and aboriginal representatives had taken place and if the economic and social value and vulnerability of our Gulf of St. Lawrence fishery had been established at the onset of this process, Parcel 1 would never have been approved.

Inadequate process

Let's talk about the process we are being subjected to. Fishermen in Gulf Nova Scotia first heard that this area had been put up for bid by the Canada Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board (CNSOPB) and bid upon by Corridor Resources of Halifax in January of 1999. In addition to Parcel 1, Corridor - whose web site indicates a strong link with Shell Oil and Lasmo - holds an additional 5 million acres of leases in the Gulf, around the Magdalens and Anticosti islands. The Gulf fishermen clearly stated their disapproval of seismic blasting and of a process that did not consult with coastal communities to identify sensitive marine areas before putting them up for bid.

The Gulf fishermen then requested in writing that federal and provincial ministers exercise their power of veto to stop this permit.

Our requests were ignored. We also corresponded with DFO and Environment Canada, asking why they are not exercising their legislated mandate to protect marine habitat and our environment. We received letters back saying that Environment Canada had signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CNSOPB which deferred their mandate to protect the environment, that this was now the primary responsibility of the CNSOPB and that DFO was in the process of signing a similar MOU. When Parcel 1 was approved by the Petroleum Board, there were no Gulf fishermen or even representatives from DFO Gulf region on the Fisheries Advisory Committee.

In December, 1999, the Atlantic Policy Congress of Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy Chiefs voted unanimously to stop Parcel 1. The Oceans Act states: "For greater certainty, nothing in this Act shall ... abrogate... from any existing aboriginal or treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982." In light of the Marshall decision, Parcel 1 should have been revoked when the Atlantic Policy Congress spoke last December.

In February, a 5,000-signature petition was tabled in

Parliament by Peter Stoffer, MP. The only public meetings were held by the SOS coalition and the clergy of Inverness County, apart from two information sessions.

Inadequate science

In December, the Petroleum Board put up \$50,000 for a study paid for by the petroleum industry to do a literature search on the Southern Gulf fishery to find a window of opportunity to proceed with exploration.

Major fishing organizations - Maritime Fishermen's Union, the PEIFA, the Gulf NS Fleet Planning Board and the Gulf NS Fishers Petroleum Advisory Board - all refused to participate in this study, i.e., a literature search of science that does not exist.

Need for more scientific studies

The state of DFO science and the lack of support for even basic stock assessments is common knowledge. Universities also do too little basic marine research. There are no studies on the effects of seismic blasting on female egg-bearing lobster and snow crab. Vulnerability of juvenile fish urgently need study. Scientists have yet to catch up with traditional fisheries knowledge. No documentation exists to prove what we know; fishermen believe the small fish born on the spawning grounds of Parcel 1 never leave the Southern Gulf for the first years of their life. They do not migrate with the adults.

Written data comes from the fishery and from DFO's research vessel, the *Alfred Needler*, which conducts an annual groundfish survey in a two week period in September. In September 1998, the *Needler* inadvertently conducted their annual groundfish survey a week after seismic blasting around the Magdalen Islands. This survey indicated the stocks had fallen off sharply in this area.

When oil and gas are extracted from the earth, they are accompanied by contaminated water. The older a production well, the more water is 'produced' and the more contaminated it becomes. Hibernia, after only two years of production, discharges huge volumes of produced water and evidence of effects - deformed fish gills - are seen miles from the Hibernia site.

DFO admitted they know very little at a workshop at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in March. Projects to determine effects of produced waters on fish, habitat and the ecosystem are in experimental stages and scientists may have no conclusive documentation for 20 years.

We have no intention of risking our fishery for experimental purposes. Yet we are confronted with the persistent attitude of the petroleum industry and board that exploration is going to proceed and the fishing industry must decide when it can proceed, **not if it should proceed.**

As matters now stand

Due to lack of consultation, absence of proper documentation and breakdown of trust, fishermen have taken this position:

1. Parcel 1 must be withdrawn;
2. a proper, independent environmental assessment on all species must take place;
3. an independent socio-economic study must occur; and
4. an independent review panel similar to Georges Bank must be set up before exploration is to occur in the southern Gulf.

The Fisheries Resource Conservation Council this year asked for a halt on all petroleum exploration and development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence until proper study has taken place to determine the impacts on fish stocks. Representatives from major fishing organizations in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI, Quebec and Newfoundland, have also unanimously endorsed this recommendation.

If entire blocks of seabed continue to be leased off, where does protection of commercial marine species and establishment of marine protected areas fit in? We fail to understand why governments give away our rights and resources to corporations rather than protect historic Aboriginal, Acadian and Gaelic fishing communities. The only thing escalating at the same rate as petroleum exploration on Canada's east coast is the disillusionment, cynicism and anger of citizens.

While the environment, fish habitat, the fishery and conservation are all being sacrificed to accommodate the oil companies, DFO fails to assume a role of prevention and precaution regarding the petroleum industry's takeover of our inshore seabeds.

Inshore fishers are doing our job following conservation recommendations. We are asking the Standing Committee on Fisheries to apply the same moratorium and precautionary approach that we have been functioning with for the past decade, to protect our fish stocks from the petroleum industry. Until science exists to prove that any petroleum activity will not impede groundfish stock recovery or damage healthy species, in accordance with Canada's Oceans Act, precaution must be taken immediately, Parcel 1 revoked and a moratorium placed on oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



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Mi'kmaq, fishermen condemn new U.S. oil tests

Amherst, NS—The Atlantic Policy Congress (APC) of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat Inc. and the Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU) have jointly denounced the plan of Hunt Oil, Texas, to perform seismic testing this fall in the waters of Sydney Bight, specifically in the waters off Port Morien to Cape Smokey, without first completing an extensive environmental assessment (see map, page 5).

Last December, the APC Chiefs demanded that two similar exploration surveys be stopped in the Port Hood to Cheticamp area, where a lease is held by Corridor Resources.

Now, the Canada/Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum board has chosen to by-pass the environmental assessment process regarding oil

and gas exploration, and plans to issue these permits.

"These permits will have major impacts on the eco-systems in those areas," said Chief Lawrence Paul, APC co-chair, "and may damage or destroy many of the fish stocks that are there."

"We are concerned about the lack of both the federal and provincial government regulations to protect these inshore areas," said Chief Peter Barlow, APC co-chair.

"The precedent they are setting by issuing permits without conducting environmental assessments endanger the marine life and the communities reliant on those resources."

Jeff Brownstein is president of Local 6,

Maritime Fishermen's Union. He said, "the commercial fishery in Sydney Bight remains the backbone of the economy of coastal Cape Breton. Our groundfish stocks show signs of rebuilding, our crab stocks are booming and we have put into place conservation measures to improve our lobster fishery by doubling egg production. It is absolutely criminal to consider seismic exploration which could kill shellfish and fish eggs and larvae as well as disrupt their migration patterns."

The Atlantic Chiefs and the MFU are demanding that Herb Dahliwal, DFO minister, put a halt to the issuance of these permits and live up to his responsibilities laid out in the legislation regarding protecting the habitat.