

1 November 2016

**Waitakere Ranges Local Board submission on Block Offer 2017 – Proposal for  
Petroleum Exploration Permit Round**

1. The Waitakere Ranges Local Board of Auckland Council wishes to submit in opposition to the Block Offer 2017 – Proposal for Petroleum Exploration Permit Round.
2. Waitakere Ranges Local Board area covers the western coastline of Auckland from Te Henga / Bethells to Whatipu, and the northern edge of the Manukau Harbour edge from Whatipu to Titirangi / French Bay. The rural coastal areas are in the parliamentary seat of Helensville.
3. We have heard significant concern in our communities about the prospect of oil exploration off the coast and the risks posed.
4. To put it simply the Waitakere Ranges Local Board does not support any form of oil exploration off the west coast of Auckland because of the risks associated with it, and asks that the precautionary principle be adopted to protect the coastline of the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area, and the surrounding coastal marine area. This is a strongly held community view.
5. Our main concern is that if an oil spill occurred on Auckland's west coast, it would affect a highly sensitive ecological area that has high landscape, recreational and cultural values. This coast has breeding areas for several seabird species and is home to the endangered Maui's dolphin and New Zealand fairy tern. The importance of the area is recognised in the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008.
6. All the main planning instruments available to the Council give this coastline the highest possible protection. The Unitary Plan designates almost the entire coastline as Outstanding Natural Landscapes. Specific features are designated as Outstanding Natural Character Areas and Outstanding Natural Features.
7. The coastal marine area is designated as either Significant Ecological Areas Marine 1 or Marine 2. The Whatipu Sand Accretion is a Scientific Reserve with a unique landscape of dune lakes and wetland vegetation and is home to a number of endangered birds.

8. The surf breaks of the area are considered to be regionally significant and are protected in the Unitary Plan. The vast majority of the land area on the West Coast is the Tasman Sea border of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. Considerable parts of the Manukau Harbour coast are also part of the regional park. The core of this parkland was created in 1941 by Act of Parliament as the Auckland Centennial Memorial Park, chosen by the people of Auckland as their centenary project for the founding of Auckland City.
9. As previously mentioned the coastal marine area is home to the “critically endangered” Maui’s dolphin of which it is thought there are only 63 remaining. A Marine Mammal Sanctuary has been created on the coast to try and protect the dolphin in the hope it may come back from the brink, though this is estimated that this will take 300 years even with the best conditions for the mammal.
10. Maui’s dolphins are highly sensitive to seismic noise such as the noise that would be produced by drilling and their range offshore is not well understood.
11. The snapper fishery on this Coast is in a poor state through over-fishing and, at 8% of virgin biomass, is considered to be in a state of collapse. The Kaipara Harbour contains important snapper breeding grounds. As a result of over-harvesting, shellfish beds on the Coast are in a poor state, with a permanent ban on the taking of toheroa.
12. The West Coast is home to a number of seabirds, particularly the Australasian gannet which forms dense colonies at Otakamiro Point and Oaia Island at Muriwai. Also breeding on the coast are the grey-faced petrel, common diving petrel; recovering variable oystercatcher; declining pied stilt, white fronted tern, little penguin; nationally vulnerable caspian tern, red-billed gull, flesh footed shearwater, New Zealand dotterel; and the nationally critical fairy tern (Papakanui spit).
13. The West and Manukau Harbour coasts are a huge recreational resource for Aucklanders, and to visitors from further afield, for boating, fishing, tramping, swimming, and surfing. Auckland derives considerable economic benefit from these activities, with national and international surfing competitions regularly held at Piha, film companies using the areas as film settings for feature films and commercials, and tourism companies able to offer tours of the areas scenic beauty and wildlife. The iconic Hillary Trail has been included in the Lonely Planet and is a popular draw card for overseas visitors.
14. What all these activities depend on is a pristine environment with spectacular unspoiled natural beauty and the sense that visitors are far away from industrial and city life. This is what is at risk from oil drilling off the coast. The risks may be small but the consequences would be enormous and potentially irreversible.
15. We wish to draw your attention to another risk which we appreciate through our knowledge of the area. As much of the area is regional parkland, there is very limited access to the coast. There are many places where beaches and rocky platforms are reachable only on foot or not at all. The cliffs on the West Coast are the highest in the Auckland region, and there are equally challenging access issues along much of the Manukau Coast.

16. The high energy coast means launching boats is impossible much of the year, and the coast is not approachable by sea. Some techniques that are used to attempt to deal with oil spills would be useless on this coast.
17. This would make dealing with any oil spill hugely problematic if not impossible. Any clean-up programme or bird rescue operation after an oil spill would be dangerous and difficult in the extreme.
18. We ask you not to risk the catastrophe that an oil spill would create by issuing exploration permits. Auckland has invested too much in protecting this coast to see it put at risk by petroleum drilling.
19. To achieve climate change targets, there is a strong case for leaving many identified deposits of fossil fuels in the ground. Recent petroleum prices suggest that the appetite for drilling in this area will be subdued and the overall economic benefit, if there ever was one for New Zealand, will be limited. We believe that rather than encourage further oil exploration, efforts should be put toward developing low-carbon energy sources.
20. This submission reiterates our position in submitting in opposition to the Block Offers over the past three years.

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