



David
Suzuki
Foundation



To: Press Gallery,

NEWS RELEASE

Offshore oil plan not supported by majority of British Columbians

For immediate release

March 28, 2003

VANCOUVER – Today’s federal government announcement that it will proceed with first steps towards lifting the ban on oil drilling off the BC coast is a political ruse that will create false expectations and keep coastal communities in the economic doldrums, the David Suzuki Foundation and Living Oceans Society said today.

“This plan is a political move to appease Premier Campbell that will further entrench the misguided goldrush mentality about offshore oil that is not supported by the facts,” says David Hocking, communications director for the David Suzuki Foundation and a former oil industry executive.

“In spite of the rhetoric, drilling for oil will not be the economic saviour for coastal communities. We know that from experience on our East Coast. Spending money on a panel to study the issue here is a waste of resources.”

Mr. Hocking points out that on Canada’s East Coast, it took billions of dollars in taxpayer-funded subsidies to the big oil companies and several decades before offshore oil production began. Even then, most of the jobs went to people brought in from outside the region.

“Ottawa and Victoria should be focussing on realistic and sustainable economic options for British Columbia’s coast, not a false panacea that could ruin the tourism and fishing industries that we depend on,” says Jennifer Lash, Executive Director of the Living Oceans Society.

Over the past 10 days, more than 3,000 people have faxed Minister Dhaliwal’s office, urging the federal government not to lift the ban.

Polling done for the David Suzuki Foundation also shows that the majority of British Columbians don’t want the moratorium lifted. A telephone survey of 508 BC residents conducted by McAllister Research March 14-18, 2003, found that more than 50 per cent said the ban should stay. Less than 40 per cent supported lifting the ban.

“Despite Premier Campbell’s boosterism of offshore oil drilling, British Columbian’s don’t want it,” says Mr. Hocking. “They don’t believe the rhetoric and they don’t want to see an Exxon Valdez on our coast.”

British Columbia’s North Coast is home to some of Canada’s largest waves and biggest storms, and it is the most seismically active area in the country. It is also one of the most ecologically rich.

“Scientists tell us that drilling simply cannot be done safely in this area,” says Ms. Lash. “There are simply too many risks. Even seismic testing done before drilling begins can harm the marine life that is so vital to our communities.”

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The Living Oceans Society and the David Suzuki Foundation are part of the Oil Free Coast Alliance – an organization of more than 100 First Nations, labour, conservation and tourism organizations that are opposed to lifting the moratorium.

“The fact that so many diverse organizations are opposed to this process should tell our governments something,” says Mr. Hocking. “It’s just going to divert badly needed resources away from developing more sustainable options.”

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Offshore Oil and Gas Moratorium Poll

Conducted by McAllister Research, March 14-18, 2003

Contact: Angus McAllister

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Question:

1. There has been a ban on oil & gas development off the BC coast since 1972 because of environmental concerns. Premier Gordon Campbell's government now wants to remove the ban to encourage an offshore oil & gas industry. But removing the ban also requires agreement from the federal government. In your opinion, should the federal government agree to remove the ban, or keep the ban in place?

Keep the Ban	51.5%
Remove the Ban	38.5%
DK/NA	11%

Methodology

The findings of this research are based on a provincial, random sample of 508 adults, age 18 and above, living in British Columbia, drawn using random digit dialing methodologies. All interviews were completed in the 5 days between March 14 and March 18, 2003.

- A random sample of this size has a margin of error of 4.4%, 19 times out of 20.

- Due to rounding, totals may add up to slightly more or less than 100%.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	DK/NA
Because of Kyoto - should put efforts into supporting clean energy instead of developing more fossil fuel sources like BC's offshore oil.	46	22	17	9	7
Developing an offshore oil/gas industry would put the BC coast at great risk of being polluted by an oil spill like the one that occurred with the Exxon Valdez in Alaska	44	21	20	11	4

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