

Environmentalists and First Nations Demand Federal Government Keep the BC Coast Oil-Free

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For Immediate Release**

Ottawa – Environmentalists and First Nations arrived in Ottawa today to demand that the federal government maintain the moratorium on offshore oil and gas in British Columbia.

“Science and experience from around the world has demonstrated that oil and water don’t mix, causing harm to the environment, coastal economy, and coastal communities,” said Jennifer Lash, Executive Director of Living Oceans Society and spokesperson for the Oil Free Coast Alliance, which represents over 90 conservation, labour, and First Nations groups. “We are urging the federal government to consider the alternatives to oil and gas, alternatives such as wind power that can provide clean energy for Canada and jobs for the people of the coast.”

This proposal would support the federal governments’ commitment to ratify the Kyoto Accord. “Lifting the offshore moratorium stands in direct contradiction to the government’s commitment to ratify Kyoto this year and would grossly undermine development in renewable energy,” said Jo Dufay, Campaigns Director of Greenpeace Canada.

It also remains unclear whether the federal government has the jurisdiction to make decisions about this region of the BC coast.

The Haida First Nations of Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) have asserted ownership of much of the seabed in the region. They have asked the courts to determine who has jurisdiction over the area. “Until this is resolved and ownership of the seabed clarified, the federal and provincial governments must cease discussion regarding lifting the moratorium on offshore oil and gas,” said Charlie Bellis of the Council of Haida Nations.

The Tsimsian Nations --comprised of 7 First Nations communities on B.C’s North Coast-- maintain Aboriginal rights and title exist in their traditional territory of Hecate Strait, and the moratorium cannot be lifted without their consent. “The Tsimsian Nation supports the maintaining of the oil and gas moratorium on the Pacific coast until an independent environmental, economic, social, and legal impact analysis can be concluded,” said Debbie Jeffrey, President of the Tsimsian Tribal Council.

Representatives from all four groups will be meeting with politicians and government officials today and tomorrow to raise awareness about these issues.

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