

WCA East Coast Oil Drilling Response Action Plan

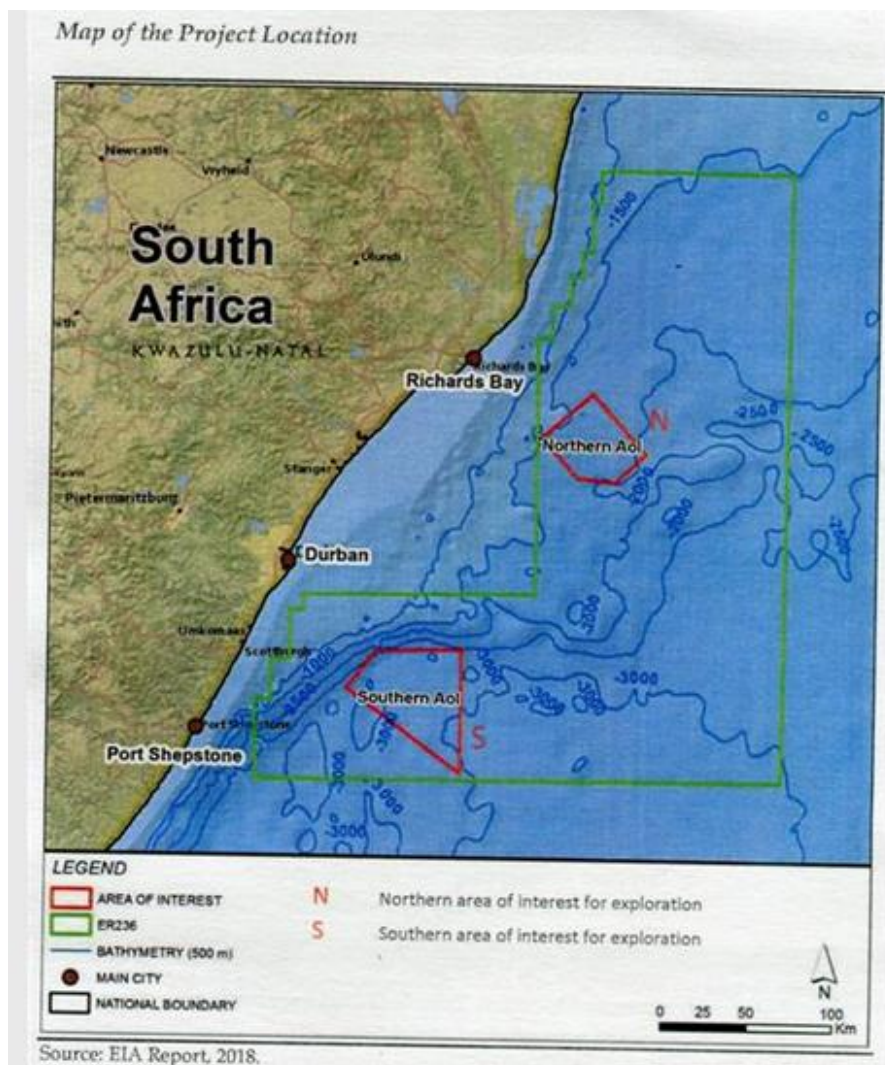
Current scenario

The South African Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMR) has leased off large portions of marine space for oil exploration, including areas on the rapid East Coast and in the Agulhas stream. Italian oil company, Eni, is one of the prospecting companies wanting to search for oil, 62km of the shore of Richards Bay, and 65km off the coast of Port Shepstone.

The scoping and reconnaissance phase of the current project has now passed and the consultants as well as the offshore industry wish to move into the exploration phase which involves drilling into the seabed. This phase required its own Environmental Authorization and therefore the stakeholder notification was distributed in order to make aware all interested parties about the granting of environmental authorization.

An Environmental Authorization follows an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The Environmental Authorization (EA) to go ahead with exploration drilling was granted on the 6th September 2019. WILDOCEANS and a number of other environmental organisations requested an extension for comments and appeals against the EA; this was granted and appeal submissions need to be submitted by 20th October 2019.

The area of exploration drilling is as below in Figure 1.



Risks

Oil exploration has many risks, including pollution, destruction of the seabed, degradation of biodiverse marine ecosystems and risks to marine life. There is also the risk of an oil spill which would, if this occurred at the proposed drilling sites, have a significant impact on the Bluff Whale Heritage Site, killing sea life and putting a halt to tourism activities. Relating to Cetaceans, sound pollution (noise from undersea surveys and drilling), chemical pollution, light pollution and seaward environmental degradation are all distinct impacts of oil drilling. Some of these impacts are believed to affect the feeding and migration patterns of Cetaceans including whales.

Action Plan

Project Partners WILDTRUST (through their programme WILDOCEANS) are a key role-player in marine conservation in South Africa and are leading a campaign against Oil & Gas drilling along the South African Coastline. WILDOCEANS have funding from the Rockefeller Foundation (through Oceans 5) for a project addressing Marine Protected Area expansion in South Africa, with the goal to increase South Africa's Marine Protection to 30% by 2030 (we currently have only 5%). A key element of this campaign is to engage in the public participation process around oil & gas prospecting such as this, and as such funding has been allocated for legal support in this regard.

The next steps in the Eni public participation process allow organisations like WILDOCEANS and others to appeal the decision, which we are doing with support from a legal team and a number of experts. A number of other interested parties including the South African Association for Marine Biological Research (SAAMBR), South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), WESSA, Oceans not Oil and others will also be appealing.

If the appeal is lost, WILDOCEANS will be raising funds through international partners to continue along a legal appeal route.

WILDOCEANS will, along with the appeal process, also be running a media and advocacy campaign to garner public support. See *@OceanImpact* social media platforms to gain insight into the level of advocacy employed to date.

WILDOCEANS, together with its partners and other environmental stakeholders are dedicated to curbing the threat of oil & gas and have the resources and funding networks to enable a long-term defence, if this is what is required.

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