

Background Information on proposed changes to the level of Environmental Assessment required for exploratory drilling

- At present the first exploratory well in an offshore area requires a level of environmental assessment called a Comprehensive Study (CS). A CS level of environmental assessment requires mandatory input from the public and typically undergoes a greater level of scrutiny from the scientific community. It is considered a more detailed and thorough Environmental Assessment and involves the independent consideration of the Minister of Environment. A screening tends to be a simpler Environmental Assessment which requires neither the involvement of the public nor the scrutiny of the Minister of Environment.
- The first Comprehensive Study of exploratory drilling is only now underway on the east coast. This fact alone indicates that we have no information to conclude that the Environmental Assessment requirements should be lowered.
- It cannot be rationally and generally concluded on the basis of the science that there are no likely significant adverse effects from offshore exploratory drilling. The impacts of exploratory drilling depend on the location of the drilling, timing of activities and properties of the discharge.
- Finally, CEAA now includes the precautionary approach under the purposes of the Act. Given the science gaps and the known impacts of exploratory drilling, the recommendation to remove exploratory drilling from the CS list flies in the face of this approach.

A recent scientific review of the impacts on exploratory drilling identified a number of other matters that indicate there may well be significant environmental impacts from exploratory drilling including that there:

- are impacts from the drilling of one exploratory well as far as 1000 metres from the drill site. On the east coast of Canada over 400 wells have been drilled.
- are significant knowledge gaps about the impacts of exploratory drilling on the marine ecosystem, specifically on cumulative impacts of exploratory drilling.
- is a lack of developed methods and indicators for assessing effects on juvenile and larval marine organisms.
- is a lack of baseline data collected prior to the drilling of an exploratory well. We therefore know very little about the detailed impacts of exploratory drilling.
- could be unknown effects, including the effects of persistent toxins and other minerals released such as barite and bentonite.

- are unknown effects on coral habitat, long term growth, reproduction & survival of various coral species.
- is an ongoing controversy around the toxic effects of Synthetic Based Muds & Water Based Muds, and their long term impacts.
- is poor understanding of chronic impacts of underwater sound from industrial activity such as exploratory drilling on marine mammals.
- has been little effort to study bird mortalities caused by flaring.