Submission No 5

MINERALS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (OFFSHORE DRILLING AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE PROHIBITION) BILL 2023

Organisation: Surfing Australia

Date Received: 24 August 2023

Partially Confidential

August 24, 2023

The Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning

Strong Support for the Ban on Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration in NSW Waters - The Bill

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning
We, Surfing Australia, are a passionate community of surfers, ocean enthusiasts, and environmental advocates deeply connected to the ocean and coastal ecosystems. Representing thousands of members and supporters across Australia, with a significant presence along the stunning New South Wales (NSW) coastline, our organization is dedicated to promoting ocean health, conservation, and sustainable practices. Our connection to the ocean is not just recreational; it's a profound appreciation for the natural beauty and vital role our oceans play in maintaining the ecological balance of our planet. The waves we ride, the beaches we cherish, and the ecosystems we explore drive us to take action to protect and preserve the oceans for current and future generations.
We stand united in our unwavering support for 'the bill' that seeks to ban offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW waters. **We represent 1500 people who live in NSW**. Our reasons for this strong stance are rooted in scientific evidence, environmental responsibility, and the urgent need to address climate change:

- **Emissions Reduction and Climate Change:** The scientific consensus is clear – we have a limited window to reduce emissions significantly in order to avert irreversible environmental damage. Pursuing new offshore oil and gas reserves will only exacerbate the climate crisis by locking us into prolonged emissions. This directly contradicts the NSW Labor state objective of achieving a 50% emissions reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050.

- **Leadership and Coastal Communities:** Our coastal communities are at the forefront of climate impacts, facing rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and ecosystem disruptions. By supporting the ban on offshore oil and gas, we are taking a vital step towards responsible leadership in carbon reduction. This is crucial to secure the well-being of our coastal areas and ensure that the ocean remains a vibrant and thriving environment for generations of surfers, fishers, and beachgoers.

- **Seismic Surveying's Ecological Impact:** The exploration phase of oil and gas projects involves seismic surveying, which has devastating effects on marine life and industries dependent on healthy oceans. The intense airgun blasts used in this process can cause hearing loss, disrupt essential behaviors like feeding and breeding, and even lead to mass mortality of zooplankton – the foundation of marine food chains. These impacts extend to tourism and fishing, industries integral to the economic health of coastal regions.

In conclusion, we strongly advocate for the passage of 'the bill' to prohibit offshore oil and gas activities in NSW waters. Our commitment to ocean conservation and the well-being of

coastal communities drives our support for this important legislation. We believe that by acting responsibly today, we can secure a sustainable and thriving ocean ecosystem for tomorrow.

We would also like to inform the Committee that we have attached evidence showcasing the overwhelming support from our members and supporters for ending new oil and gas ventures in NSW waters. This collective sentiment reinforces the urgency of this matter.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to preserving our oceans and safeguarding the future of our coastal communities. We trust that you will make the right decision for the well-being of our environment and its inhabitants.

Sincerely,

Chris Mater
CEO, Surfing Australia

1. **Evidence of support from our members and supporters**

1.1 Statement of Surfing Australia Stakeholders & Memebers:

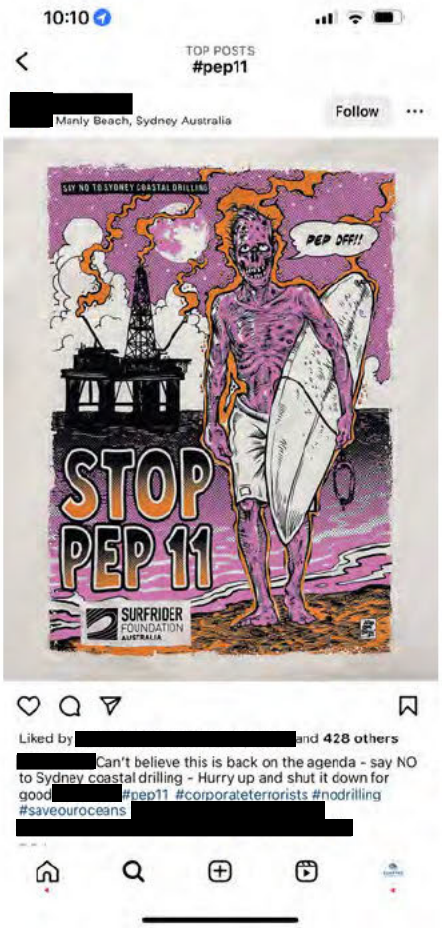
Surfing Australia Deputy Chair Ace Buchan:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cwb5V5LPpOI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==

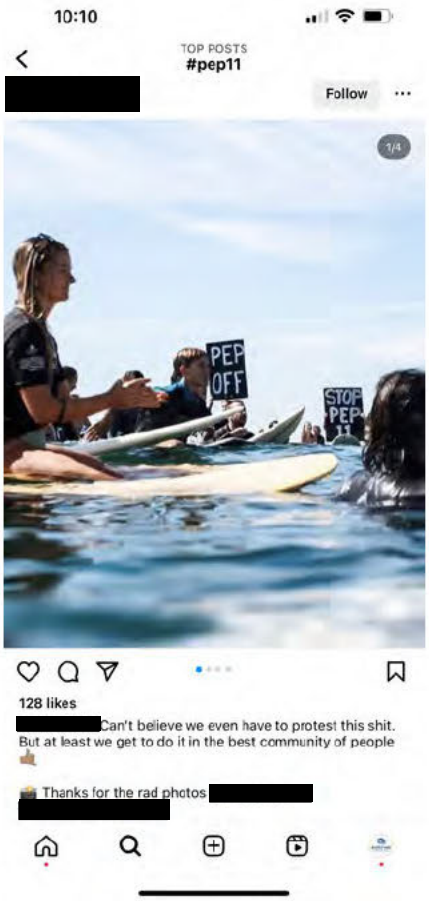
Surfing Australia Chair and 7x Surfing World Champion Layne Beachley:
https://www.9news.com.au/national/sydney-surfers-protest-offshore-oil-drilling-nsw-coast-northern-beaches/f12803e3-3bf0-4f35-a2f9-d089fccd4d85

Professional Longboarder and Surfing NSW member, Tully White:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/CwY4spSt-4_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==

3x World Champion Professional Body Boarder Ben Player:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/CwTdh7Ks86K/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==

2. **1.2 Surf community engagement in Paddle-Outs and petitions:**





[redacted]
Mona Vale Basin

Follow ···

Liked by [redacted] and **400 others**

[redacted] A decent amount of people turned up at Mona Vale yesterday to protest #PEP11, the proposed drilling for fossil fuels and construction of oil rigs to litter our horizon between Newcastle and Sydney.

It's a ridiculous idea and one that so many people oppose. If you didn't get the chance to get down there and paddle out head to [redacted] and [redacted] to sign a petition and have your voice heard 🌊

📸 [redacted]

18 April 2021

[redacted]

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TOP POSTS
#pep11

[redacted]

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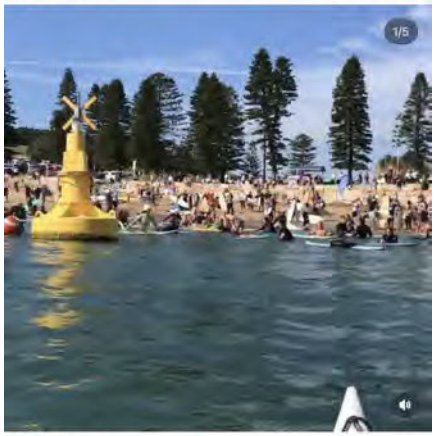


12 likes

[redacted] Brilliant turnout today in Terrigal to let fossil fuel vandals [redacted] know the community won't stand for their BS when it comes to #pep11 drilling off [redacted] No way we will stand by and let it happen. Great work [redacted]

What a fabulous community

24 April 2021

[redacted]

Follow ···

#pep11

acebuchan

Following ···

Liked by [redacted] and **1.453 others**

acebuchan Honoured to pen a piece for [redacted] the environmental organisation of @richardbranson and @virginunite as part of their #RiseUP4TheOcean series. Advocating for the global goal of highly protecting 30% of the worlds oceans by the year 2030...what is now being referred to as #30x30

The ocean is our global climate control system producing the oxygen that we breathe and food for millions of humans. A thriving ocean maintains the equilibrium for life on our planet. But in Australia for example we are losing both the coral reefs, giant kelp and the diversity of the animals that call the ocean home at an alarming rate. Without a healthy ocean there is no healthy us....we have to start protecting vast

10:11

TOP POSTS
#pep11

[redacted]
Byron Bay, New South Wales

Follow ···

Liked by [redacted] and **350 others**

[redacted] Epic turnout for the [redacted] and [redacted] paddle out against PEP11 🎉

.

The Petroleum Exploration Permit 11 (PEP11) threatens the stunning coast of NSW and more importantly the diverse and thriving marine eco system that calls it home - including dolphins, whales, turtles and sharks

.

As surfers we are connected to the ocean and it was great to see the community take a stand against this - sending a clear message to the politicians that we want to enjoy the ocean, not see it exploited.

10:11

TOP POSTS
#pep11

[redacted]

Follow ···

30 likes

warrenwhitemixedbag #pep11 protest yesterday was amazing to be part of ..so many people turned out to help fight this danger to our fantastic coastline

#Terrigal

#centralcoast

25 April 2021

[redacted]

10:12

TOP POSTS
#pep11

[redacted]

Follow ···

1.609 views · Liked by **surfinglife** and **swillpics**

[redacted] · .

"Never turn your back on the Ocean"

[redacted]

"The Surfers Code"

.

[redacted]

Narrator Mick Fanning
for Surfrider Australia

———————

The powerful words of
Shaun Tomson's
Surfers Code,
written back in the 80's
for the Surfrider Foundation
to encourage local surfers to
respect the sport,
each other
and the ocean
still ring true.

———

Support the SurfRider Foundation Australia locally

10:12

TOP POSTS
#pep11

[redacted] Follow ···

14 likes

[redacted] Saturday 1st May, Newcastle.
#surfing #surfer #surfers #surflife #surfnewcastle #newcastlensw #newcastlesurfing #huntervalley #hunterriver #pep11 #environment #climatechange #nopep11 #nobbysbeach #mayday #maydaynewcastle

30 April 2021

10:27

SURFERSFORCLIMATE
Posts

surfersforclimate
Boney M. - Sunny (feat. Connor Price)

10:28

pep11

laynebeachley
Freshwater Beach
Following ···

Liked by [redacted] and 1.599 others

laynebeachley PEP11 covers 4500sq/km of ocean, in places just 5.5km from the shore, from Manly through the Central Coast to Newcastle. It is believed to contain significant natural gas reserves under the ocean bed.

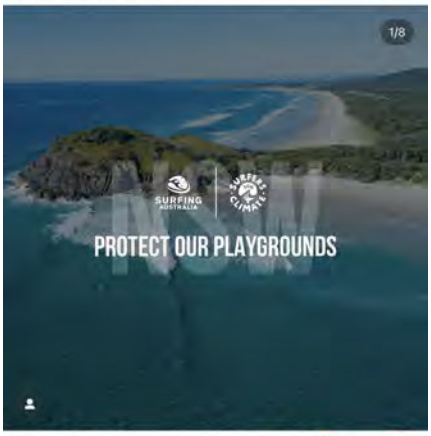
The gas industry argues gas is a cheap, clean energy source that helps prevent global warming. This is NOT TRUE. In fact, gas is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and a huge threat to our planet.

Wind and solar energy are already cheaper than gas – and getting cheaper. Studies show that, when combined with

10:26

SURFERSFORCLIMATE
Posts

surfersforclimate and surfingaus
NSW Parliament House



View Insights Boost post

[redacted] Liked by [redacted] and 118 others

surfingaus Protect our Playgrounds and make history in NSW!

Right now #NSW Parliament is considering a bill to ban all new offshore oil and gas projects, and associated infrastructure in NSW waters. This bill will protect our oceans, reduce the risk of beach pollution, prevent future carbon emissions that worsen climate change and ensure we can keep riding waves in thriving oceans for generations to

1.2 Media Reports of Surf Community engagement:

Echo
byron healing

[redacted]

Featured | Local News

Updated: May 7, 2021

Join Clarkes Beach paddle out this weekend to stop massive oil and gas field project

By Paul Bibby · May 7, 2021 · 4

Like 22

Latest News

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Paul Bibby

Hundreds of local surfers and water-lovers will paddle out at Clarke's Beach over the weekend to protest against a massive oil and gas field proposed for the NSW coast.

The locals will stand in solidarity with their southern counterparts in opposing the Petroleum Exploration Permit 11 (PEP11) gas field, which would cover 4,500 square kilometres of ocean from Newcastle to Manly.

The recent stop Byron Bays paddle out. Photo supplied

'It's just absurd that this project is being considered on one of the most popular and pristine coastlines in the world,' surfing legend and former world champion Layne Beachley said.

'If something goes wrong it will be catastrophic, we need to let the people in power know that we will not accept this and they have to get this out of our backyard,' she said.

While the permit for the gas field project officially expired in February and has not yet been renewed by Federal Resources Minister, Keith Pitt, the current permit holders – Advent Energy (85 per cent) and Bounty Oil and Gas (15 per cent) – are pressing on with plans to drill.

Advent Energy announced last week plans to increase the depth of their drilling at their Baleen prospect off Catherine Hill Bay from 2150m to 3150m.

'This proposal has been the best kept secret hiding in plain sight with the majority of NSW residents having no idea this was even a threat,' Surfrider Foundation Campaign Director, Damien Cole said.

'These paddle outs have brought attention to this potentially disastrous project and of course people are instantly horrified and vehemently opposed to it when they find out what is being proposed" says Surfrider Foundation Campaign Director, Damien Cole.

Surfrider Foundation's first three Stop PEP11 paddle-out rallies were held over the last three weekends at Mona Vale on the Northern Beaches, Central Coast's Terrigal Haven and in Newcastle.

Momentum has been building, with an increasing number of community members attending each week, alongside Ms Beachley, fellow surfing icon Tom Carroll, and internationally acclaimed musicians Ash Grunwald & Lime Cordiale.

'The fact that a gas field was ever proposed off the most populated coastline in Australia is one thing,' says Surfrider Foundation Chairman, Sean Doherty.

'But the fact it is being allowed to proceed despite almost unanimous public opposition is mind blowing. Nobody wants this apart from the gas companies, and Surfrider holds grave concerns the PEP11 permit will be renewed against the wishes of the people of the coast.'

The Byron Bay PEP11 Paddle-Out takes place at 11am Saturday, May 8th, at Clarke's Beach. The event is run with Covid-safe protocols, and attendees are asked to register via Surfrider Foundation Australia's website at surfrider.org.au.

ENDS

Like 22

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

4 comments

Darren Gray May 8, 2021 At 5:18 am

A paddle out is a way off far welling and expressing feelings for someone who surfed and held the ocean near to them. Not anymore. the look at me surf culture and the people who have organised this should be ashamed of the use of a paddle out.

Reply

Barry May 8, 2021 At 8:04 am

I will attend only if this is a silent protest.

Reply

Peggy Young May 10, 2021 At 1:57 pm

I'm 100% with Darren Gray regarding the abuse of the 'paddle out'. The 'paddle out' is a scared event up until recently reserved for the memory and honoring one that has passed.
I propose a street march against 'paddle outs' !
Either that or we have a paddle out for potholes in Ocean Shores, floodwater in Billinudgel, AND "lets bring back The Ribcage!!
"Look at me surf culture" is correct. FOOLS!

Reply

Peggy Young May 10, 2021 At 1:59 pm

Amended:
I'm 100% with Darren Gray regarding the abuse of the 'paddle out'. The 'paddle out' has always been a sacred event up until recently reserved for the memory and honoring one that has passed.
I propose a street march against 'paddle outs' !
Either that or we have a paddle out for potholes in Ocean Shores, floodwater in Billinudgel, AND "lets bring back The Ribcage!!
"Look at me surf culture" is correct. FOOLS!

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Terrigal paddle out surfers celebrate, cautiously

TOPICS: Lead Paddle Out PEP11 Save Our Coast Surfrider

Surfers and swimmers take to the water at Terrigal Haven to protest against PEP11

APRIL 24, 2021

Over 200 people took to the water at Terrigal Haven on Saturday, April 24, to protest with Surf Rider Foundation and Save Our Coast against PEP11.

The protest included men, women, and children with boards of all kinds paddling out together to show their support in the campaign against oil and gas exploration drilling off the Central Coast.

In a development welcomed by the crowd, *Liberal MP Lucy Wicks, said 'that under the Morrison government PEP11 won't go ahead'.*

"There are some processes that are currently underway, there is a decision as we know to be made, and there are a lot of technical decisions under the joint authority....that process is underway, but the Prime Minister has made it clear that he is saying no to PEP11."

Damien Cole, from Surfrider addresses the campaigners at Terrigal Haven

Surfrider Foundation Australia National Campaign Director, Damien Cole, welcomed the news but said the fight was not over.

"I wanted to let you all know that this is not over yet," Cole said.

"We have to keep pressure up until it gets properly knocked on the head.

"It is your responsibility to go out and spread the word about PEP11."

Save Our Coast Youth Representative, Asha Niddrie, said stopping PEP11 was important for the youth of the Central Coast.

"As a new voter this year, I speak for myself and young people, we ask Minister Keith Pitt that PEP11 does not go ahead because we want leaders who care about our future and care about the places we love and depend on."

Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast, Adam Crouch, was there to show his support and he said the state government has opposed PEP11 since 2017 and reaffirmed it's opposition earlier this year.

Professional surfers, Ace Buchan and Amee Donohue were there for the paddle out, as were Labor MPs Emma McBride and Liesl Teche who also joined the popular protest.

Federal Resources Minister Keith Pitt (Nationals) is the Minister responsible for approving the PEP11 licence or not.

More to come...

Jacinta Counihan

Previous post Next post

4 COMMENTS ON "TERRIGAL PADDLE OUT SURFERS CELEBRATE, CAUTIOUSLY"

Adam | April 25, 2021 at 10:08 am |

What a bunch of (edited out)..... happy to mooch off Vic and qld for power, but don't want to actually generate enough electricity In their own state. I can't wait until new has rolling blackouts.

https://aemo.com.au/Energy-systems/Electricity/National-Electricity-Market-NEM/Data-NEM/Data-Dashboard-NEM

Darren | April 26, 2021 at 9:22 am |

I see a couple of people(Edit: names hidden) I know of. Have you seen the size of their gas stove in their house? Biggest I've ever seen! Where do you think the gas comes from? And they put gas stoves in every development. The rig will be 30km out. (Editors note: According to reports the rigs could be between 5 – 30km offshore)

Andrew | April 28, 2021 at 10:17 am |

Wonder where all these brave commenters are from, probably BPH shareholders, far away from the Central Coast.

Miranda squire | April 28, 2021 at 9:29 pm |

Really ?? ..... I think you need to look at the lawful processes with this decision ... or are you alluding to Scott Morrison will be doing some form of Illegal dirty deal to railroad this for a political agenda ?? .... or is this an 'alternative fact ' , or an outright lie ...or perhaps you have jumped on a soapbox without doing your homework ?? Whatever the case is you may need a spatula to remove the egg from your face over these comments ..

Comments are closed.

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Paddle-out against the proposed PEP11 gas exploration project at Nobbys on Saturday

By Matthew Kelly
Updated April 30 2021 - 5:34pm, first published 5:14pm

0 Comments

Nobbys Beach Paddle out to protest offshore drilling, 2019, Picture: Surfrider Foundation & Save Our Coast.

0 Comments

Matthew Kelly
Journalist
Matthew Kelly has worked as a journalist for more than 25 years. He has been working as a general reporter at the Newcastle Herald since 2018. In recent years he has reported on subjects including environment, energy, water security, manufacturing and higher education. He has previously covered issues including the health and environmental impacts of uncovered coal wagons in the Hunter Valley, the pollution of legacy of former industrial sites and freedom of information issues.

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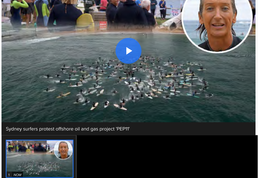
[redacted]

Sydney residents protest proposed offshore oil drilling on NSW coast

By Olivana Lathouris • Reporter | 6:29pm Apr 17, 2021



Sydney surfers protest offshore oil and gas project 'PEPTI'

Sydney surfers protest offshore oil and gas project 'PEPTI'

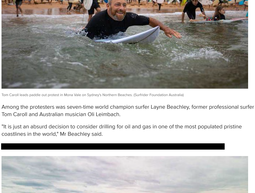
Tweet | Facebook | Mail

Around 250 surfers have gathered for a paddle out on Sydney's Northern Beaches in protest of a proposed oil and gas project on the NSW coast.

The protest, organised by Surfrider Foundation Australia at Mona Vales Beach, was the first in a series of community paddle-outs to oppose the development.

The Petroleum Exploration Permit 11 (PEPTI) covers 4500 square kilometres extending off the coast between Newcastle in the north and Manly in the south.

[redacted]

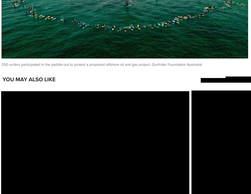


Tom Carroll leads paddle out protest in Mona Vale on Sydney's Northern Beaches. (Surfrider Foundation Australia)

Among the protesters was seven-time world champion surfer Layne Beachley, former professional surfer Tom Carroll and Australian musician Oli Leimbach.

"It is just an absurd decision to consider drilling for oil and gas in one of the most populated pristine coastlines in the world," Mr Beachley said.

[redacted]



250 surfers participated in the paddle-out to protest a proposed offshore oil and gas project. (Surfrider Foundation Australia)

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE [redacted]

[redacted]

"Lets just get this out of our backyard and let the people in power know we will not accept this."

The PEPTI permit officially expired in February, and has not been renewed however current permit holders – a joint venture between Advent Energy and Bounty Oil and Gas – are pressing forward with plans to drill.

Today's paddle-out rally will be followed by rallies at Terrigal on April 24, and Newcastle on May 1.

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[redacted]

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The Fight For The Bight

Sean Doherty / 10 Min Read / Surfing, Activism

While Australia burns, its government is greenlighting oil drilling in the unspoiled Great Australian Bight. But surfers and coastal communities are saying no—and uniting to keep Big Oil out.

A former competitor on the elite World Championship Tour, Heath Joske has a different focus these days—keeping Equinor's oil rigs out of the Great Australian Bight, the unspoiled ocean wilderness where he lives, fishes and surfs. RICH RICHARDS

***Update from Patagonia Australia:** In a major victory for the people of the Australian coast, Norwegian energy giant Equinor has abandoned its plan to develop the Great Australian Bight as a deep water oil field. In doing so they became the fourth major oil company in four years to walk away.*

The Fight For The Bight has been a line in the sand. It is the single biggest coastal environmental action in Australian history. It has grown from a tiny grassroots group down in the Bight to a national movement involving tens of thousands of people—surfers and coastal communities stood alongside campaigners from The Wilderness Society, the Great Australian Bight Alliance, and Surfrider Foundation Australia.

We'd like to extend our deepest thanks to everyone who paddled out and spoke up for one of the last great tracts of marine wilderness on earth.

For now, the Bight will remain wild and free.

Heath Joske drives a 1997 Toyota Hilux truck. It's rusty, dusty and held together by protest stickers. The truck has done half-a-million miles, most of them off-road.

Joske lives with his young family on an old sheep run outside of Streaky Bay, a small fishing town in the Great Australian Bight. The tarred road from town ends just up from his driveway, and from there it's all dirt roads to the coast. The Bight is a sprawling, sparse coastline, and chasing waves here needs a reliable set of wheels. The Hilux has served him well.

"It's an old banger but I'm quite attached to it," he offers dryly. "Down here as a surfer, you spend half your life driving. You get to know your car pretty well."

Chasing surf on this coast requires a lot of miles and a lot of fuel. It's with just the faintest irony, then, that Joske's car sports a "Big Oil Don't Surf" sticker, and Joske has found himself leading a campaign against the development of a deep-water oil field out in the Bight. It's been a controversial issue, and he's stuck his neck out. He's heard every criticism and made peace with them all.

"The 'not in my backyard' line, I get that a lot," he says. "The 'hypocrite' line, I get that a lot too, and it's true. Absolutely. I drive a car that burns fuel. My boards are made from oil derivatives. But what choice have I got? The system here in Australia and all around the world is rigged to keep us using oil, despite knowing full well it's killing off any kind of liveable future."

Dave Rastovich charging in the Bight. The storms and swells that make Australia's southern coastline a dreamland for surfers also make it an incredibly dangerous place to drill for oil. A spill here would be disastrous for local communities and the Bight's incredible diversity of marine life. RICH RICHARDS

The transition away from fossil fuel use has been glacially slow—particularly in Australia, where governments act as agents of the fossil fuel industry and continue to drive a wholesale expansion of the coal, oil and gas industries. But for now, if Joske wants to keep driving to the surf, he doesn't have a lot of options.

"I heard the other day they're bringing out an electric Hilux in 2024," he adds with a wry laugh. "I'm just not sure my truck is gonna last that long."

That said, if you were wondering what the "Big Oil Don't Surf" sticker is all about, it's a reference to the fact that Norwegian fossil fuel leviathan Equinor has its eyes on a well site 230 miles out in the Great Australian Bight, in waters almost a mile-and-a-half deep. If drilled, it would be the deepest, most remote oil well in Australia—and one of the deepest and most remote wells anywhere in the world. It's frontier drilling. The Bight is currently free from any offshore oil and gas development and is one of the last great tracts of marine wilderness on earth. It's home to breeding grounds for southern right whales, blue whales, Australian sea lions and southern bluefin tuna. Eighty-five percent of the species in the Bight live nowhere else, and a worst-case spill would present a potential extinction event.

Joske knows the Bight well. As well as surfing huge swells along the Bight coast, he's worked for years as a fisherman on an oceangoing prawn trawler. He knows the ocean out there, and has challenged the oil company about its assessment of the sea state.

"I've had arguments with these guys face-to-face about the swells they're going to be drilling in, and they're almost arrogant about it," says Joske. "It's like, 'We drill in the North Sea, we can drill anywhere!'"

On the National Day of Action, 20,000 people in 60 coastal towns paddled out to protest Equinor's plans to drill in the Bight. It was the largest coastal environmental action Australia has ever seen. JARRAH LYNCH

The immediate argument against the drilling is the danger of a well blowout. If that happened, the Southern Ocean would do the rest. The oil would move quickly east on the Leeuwin Current, and Equinor's own spill modelling shows the potential for oil across almost the entire southern coast of Australia. When that spill modelling went public, what had previously been an issue for the small towns down in the Bight quickly became an issue for the whole nation.

Now, surfers are joining forces with other passionate campaigners to Fight for the Bight. There was a time, generations back, when surfers in Australia were frontline activists. In the '70s, they led protests against sand mining and coastal development; they spoke for the coast and they spoke loudly on big social issues like Vietnam and Apartheid. In the '90s, surfers massed in protest against ocean sewerage outfalls and French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. But for decades now we've had it almost too good. On the whole, the Australian coastline remains breathtakingly beautiful. For surfers, this is the land of milk and honey, and there hasn't been much to protest against. But in recent years there's been a slow creep of development, some of it just over the horizon in both a literal and figurative sense, and many surfers have felt it. There's been a movement waiting to happen and Australia's surf community just needed an issue to kick-start it.

The Bight was that issue.

Joske has become a figurehead for the campaign, and in May he travelled to Norway to deliver a speech to shareholders at Equinor's annual general meeting, also leading a symbolic paddle-out protest in Oslo's harbor. Equinor is two-thirds owned by the Norwegian people, and its oil revenue has helped make Norway one of the richest countries in the world—and, paradoxically, also one of the most progressive. Domestically, Norway is well down the road of a clean energy transition, yet, through Equinor, continues to develop massive fossil fuel reserves in other parts of the world. The Bight issue landing back on Norway's doorstep has raised some big questions.

"These weren't radical activists; they were coastal communities taking a stand. Most of them had never protested anything before in their lives, and that's why these gatherings were so powerful." MATTY HANNON

After arriving back in Australia, Joske loaded up the Hilux and hit the road to produce a short film, ***The Head of the Bight***, that tells the story of the people living along the Bight coast.

Most Australians never visit the Bight. It's a long way from the east coast and a long way from the east coast consciousness. It's a mythical coastline where the red billiard table of the Australian continent drops off squarely into the sea; the Bight's cliffs are the Great South Wall beyond which lies the great Southern Ocean. The area's remoteness initially made it more difficult for the oil-drilling issue to gain widespread traction, so Joske grabbed a camera and spoke to the surfers, fishermen, scientists and local activists along the Bight coast who've been battling oil and gas leviathans for years now, largely on their own. [Patagonia, through its Environmental Grants program, has been supporting the Bight campaign since 2016.]

The Head of the Bight also features conversations with the Bight's traditional owners, who have been largely excluded from the consultation process over the oil drilling. They've already experienced a history of tragic dislocation from country and culture. Anangu elder Mima Smart tells the story of her people being moved on from the Spinifex country to the north in the '50s, when the British military used the area as a test range for nuclear weapons. Mima's people called the atomic clouds "the black mist." Now they're facing the prospect of another black mist, this time sweeping in from the ocean.

Heath Joske on his home coast. The fight for the Bight is far from over, and surfers from all across Australia are realizing that the future of their waves can't be decided by oil company executives—it's up to us to protect what we love. RICH RICHARDS

The Bight campaign gained momentum this year with a series of protest paddle-outs around the country, followed by 31,000 people lodging formal submissions on Equinor's environmental plan with the oil and gas industry regulator. A global social media campaign then followed, forcing Equinor to shut down its social accounts. As to why the surf community rallied and stood up for the Bight despite most surfers never having been there, Joske has a theory.

"There's two things. There's the spill modelling that could see oil wash up anywhere between Albany and Port Macquarie. That's a hell of a lot of coastline, and Australians are coastal people who enjoy surfing and fishing and whatever else. That's one side of it. The other side is they're sick of the government going down a dead end of history, pushing ahead with these huge fossil fuel projects at a time when we need to be building some kind of a sustainable future."

Other issues have flared and converged, too. The eastern states of Australia are in the grip of one of the worst droughts on record. Inland rivers are dry and temperature records are being broken all over the country. Great stretches of the New South Wales and Queensland coastlines have been on fire for weeks, and most politicians have flatly refused to answer any questions about climate change and its contribution to the severity of these fires. "Not today" was their stock response, their positions severely compromised by their almost evangelical support of the fossil fuel lobby. The temperature of the nation rose.

This was the background to the National Day of Action for the Bight. With a decision on the Bight's future looming, it was designed to be a show of unity—people all along the Australian coast paddling out *en masse* to save the Bight and call for meaningful action on climate change. Saturday, November 23, was set as the date. Damien Cole—son of iconic surfboard shaper Maurice Cole, and the guy who'd led the first round of paddle-outs earlier in the year—spent weeks on the phone, rallying surf and coastal communities around the country. They didn't need much encouragement. They were more than ready to show up.

Early that morning, I'd stopped by Byron Bay's Main Beach, where the crew from the Surfrider Foundation and Patagonia Byron Bay were getting ready for their paddle-out. Byron is a former country soul enclave and the original activism capital of the country, and the Byron paddle-out promised to be something else. Surf artist Ozzie Wright pulled up and dragged a 12-foot, three-headed, humanoid bat creature out of his van with "Fight For The Bight" splashed across its wings. It became the mascot of the Byron protest. The paddle-outs taking place all over the country were united in cause, but took on their own local feel. Byron was always going to be a little different.

From Byron I headed north to the Gold Coast. By the time I arrived, I had to park four blocks back from the beach, and by the time I walked into the Currumbin Alley, there was a crowd of two or three thousand people already there. The crowd didn't much look like your usual protest crowd, though—it looked more like an average Gold Coast day at the beach. There were coast lovers of every stripe: surfers, lifesavers, fishermen, beach walkers. Half of the crowd were family groups, and there were kids everywhere.

Just the week before, while addressing a meeting of mining and energy industry executives, Australian prime minister Scott Morrison promised to draft new laws to penalize anyone specifically protesting against fossil fuel companies. He'd labelled them "radical activists" and promised to throw the book at them. Looking around at Currumbin, I didn't see anyone who looked arrestable. These weren't radical activists; they were coastal communities taking a stand. Most of them had never protested anything before in their lives, and that's why these gatherings were so powerful. There was nothing fringe about this crew, and they weren't easily dismissed as a result. The protests tapped into possibly the most Australian thing you can do—going to the beach and throwing yourself into three-foot shorebreak.

The real power of the paddle-outs, though, was their sheer number. They spot-fired all around the Australian coastline, far beyond the reach of any potential oil spill. From Kalbarri in the northwest to the Capricorn Coast in the northeast, 60 surf towns and more than 10,000 people paddled out in what was the largest collective coastal environmental action Australia has ever seen.

Heath Joske returned to his childhood home of Coffs Harbour to lead their paddle-out. Having been there at the start of the campaign, when just a handful of Bight locals stood up against the oil companies, he took a moment as hundreds of people, thousands of miles from the Bight, paddled out in support.

"I couldn't believe it," he offered later. "To know this was happening all over the country—from coast to coast—was hugely powerful. This campaign had started around kitchen tables down in the Bight, in tiny towns like Penong, Elliston and Streaky. It was just them against these ruthless, billion-dollar oil companies, but look where it's come. Look how big this movement has become. There's a long way to go, and I'm not having a beer to celebrate just yet, but Saturday was a proud day to be a surfer, for sure."

To learn more and support the #fightforthebight, take action here.

Author Profile

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Sean is a surf writer based out of Byron Bay, Australia. He's written bestselling biographies, and his work has appeared in *Surfer*, *Tracks* and *Surfing World* over two decades. He's also Patagonia's Australian Brand Manager.

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