

**Submission
No 6**

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

Organisation: Doctors for the Environment Australia

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NSW Minerals Legislation Amendment (Offshore Drilling and Associated Infrastructure Prohibition) Bill 2023

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Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is an independent, self-funded, non-government organisation of medical doctors and students in all Australian states and territories.

DEA's work is based on the premise that humans need a future with clean air and water, healthy soils capable of producing nutritious food, a stable climate, and a complex, diverse, and interconnected humanity whose needs are met in a sustainable way. We are therefore interested in environmental protection and restoration to promote human health and social stability.

Recommendations

DEA supports a ban on offshore petroleum and mineral development, based on:

- climate impacts of any fossil fuel development
- local environmental and health impacts.

Climate and health

The recent AR6 Synthesis Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) confirms the urgent need for ambitious action to limit global warming to secure a liveable future for us all.¹

The report highlights the profound impacts climate change is already having around the globe and that these will continue to intensify. Every increment of warming will intensify multiple concurrent hazards, with the people most affected being those least responsible.

The IPCC report makes numerous references to human health, ranging from the mental health impacts associated with increasing temperatures, to trauma from extreme events, and loss of livelihoods and culture. Most importantly, it reconfirms that there is **no room for new fossil fuel projects** – deep and rapid cuts to emissions are required this decade if we are to even have a 50% chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C.

Human health is also well covered, along with adaptation responses, in the latest Medical Journal of Australia–Lancet 2022 report on health and climate change.²

There is no doubt in the medical and scientific community that global health, and consequently the health of the NSW population, is fundamentally dependent upon limiting climate warming to 1.5°C. Minimising the impact of climate change on the health of the people of NSW cannot be achieved with **any** new fossil fuel projects.

Local impacts of developments

Approximately 84% of the over 8.17 million residents of NSW live in Greater Sydney or along the coast. The physical and mental health of this large majority is dependent on the interconnected services provided by relatively unpolluted coastal ecosystems. Not least is the self-evident impact on wellbeing and quality of life that comes from access to clean beaches, water and air, that most in NSW fairly consider to be a birthright. As a state, we love our coast and any desecration of its integrity or purity has a direct impact on our health.

Risks from development are not confined to petroleum, but petroleum development provides an exemplar of potential risks. Dangers of a significant oil spill are present even with the first drilling and subsequently from further drillings, production and transport. The local health impacts of petroleum development are potentially vast, up to and even beyond the devastating impact of the Deepwater Horizon Spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The environmental, social, and economic impacts of the Deepwater Horizon spill were massive for the Gulf of Mexico and its coastal communities and they are still being felt today. Further information, including relevant scientific evidence can be found in the DEA fact sheet *Oil spills & health don't mix*.³

The history of the petroleum industry indicates that no drilling operation can ever be considered entirely safe. To suggest it can be made safe is the same as maintaining that the most technically advanced aircraft will never crash. Both aircraft and oil development are subject to human error, technical failure and extreme weather events, which we all recognise as an increasing reality of life in the 21st century.

NSW has a world leading system of marine protected areas, including marine parks, that were established to protect iconic seascapes and biodiversity and to help preserve nurseries for marine species of economic and recreational importance (see Figure 1).

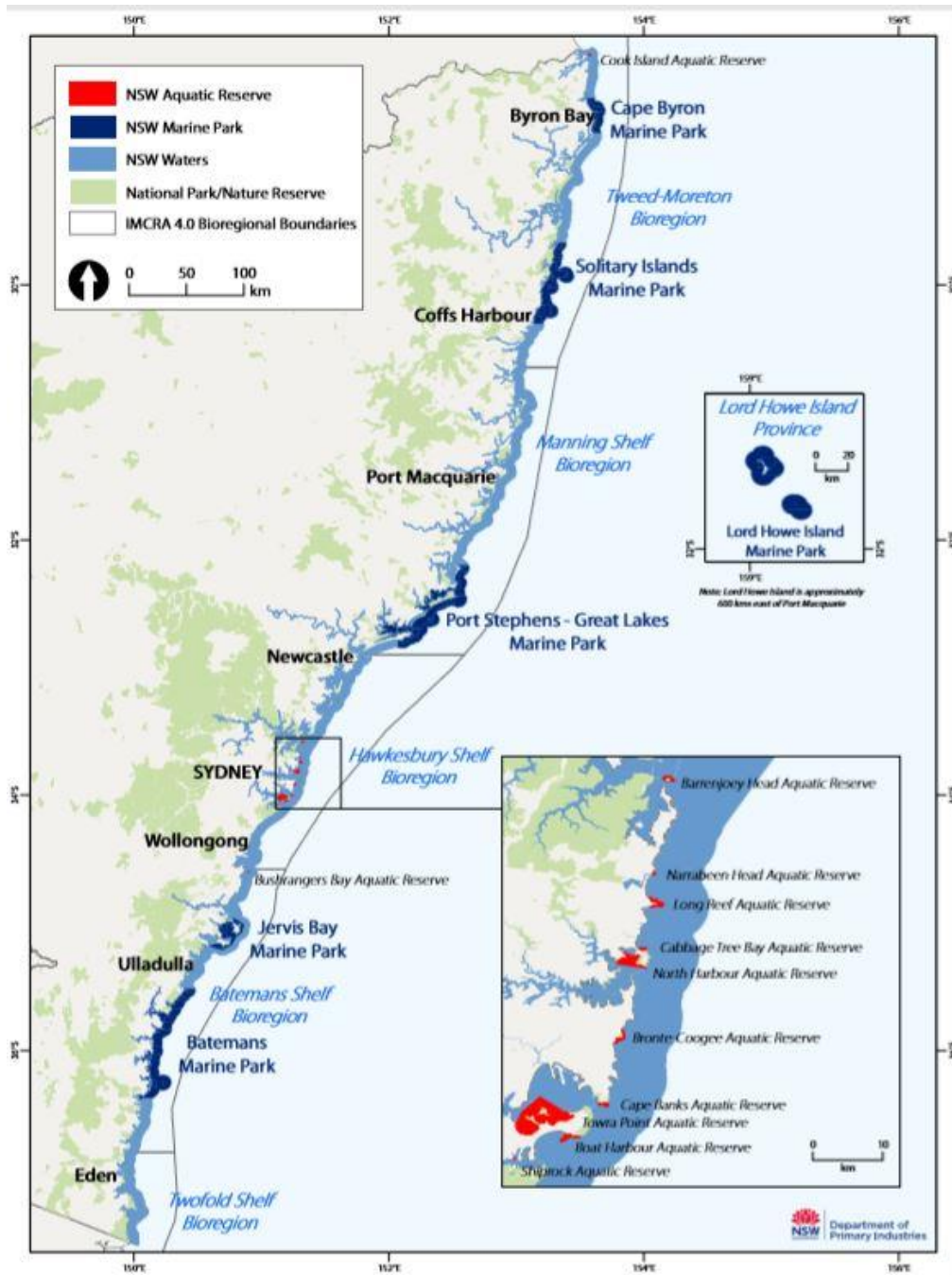


Figure 1 – [NSW National and Marine Parks, Nature and Aquatic Reserves](#)

Many coastal and marine environments have already suffered damage from climate change, coastal development and river system contamination and degradation. Further damage from climate change is already built into the system, including an uncertain degree of sea level rise. As a consequence, our coastal ecosystems do not have the resilience to survive and recover from potential ecological damage resulting

from petroleum or mineral exploration. For so many of us, identity and quality of life is connected to our coast. Consequently, it is imperative that we take a precautionary approach to any offshore development – to borrow from the foundation of medical ethics: ‘first do no harm’.

To protect the health and wellbeing of the people of NSW as well as that of coastal and marine environments of the state, any further fossil fuel developments should be prohibited.

References

¹ IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). AR6 synthesis report: climate change 2023 - summary for policymakers 2023 [cited 23 August 2023]. Available from: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>.

² Beggs PJ, Zhang Y, McGushin A, Trueck S, Linnenluecke MK, Bambrick H, et al. The 2022 report of the MJA–Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: Australia unprepared and paying the price. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 2022;217(9):439-458. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51742>

³ Doctors for the Environment Australia. Oil spills and health don’t mix. [Internet] 2019 [cited 23 August 2023]. Available from: <https://dea.org.au/oil-spills-health-dont-mix/>