

Drilling safety fears

Taranaki Regional Council spokesman Gary Bedford's comments concerning the risks of industry self regulation of offshore drilling in New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are apt: as indeed are councillor Peter Horton's comments on the need for government control and monitoring.

Mr Horton's comment that Anadarko, who intend drilling here, has a "pretty sound background" is, however, disputable. Anadarko came to global prominence as a 25 per cent stakeholder in the Deepwater Horizon (Macondo) operation in the Gulf of Mexico.

The investigation of that disastrous spill pointed to multiple failures of management. Rig workers had earlier reported poor equipment reliability, attributed to drilling priorities taking precedence over maintenance – a failure of self-regulation.

Impacts to the ecosystem, fisheries, tourism and other industries will be generational. Clean-up and other costs are estimated in excess of \$40 billion, a figure well worth comparing with the New Zealand Government's estimates of future royalties of \$12b.

The EEZ Act gives oil companies too much power, as indeed does the Crown Minerals Act, as pointed out by Taranaki dairy farmers to Prime Minister John Key yesterday.

This is of real concern in our deep offshore waters, with the prevalence for different companies to "play monopoly" with leases in an unforgiving environment of episodic seismic activity, wild storms and massive seas.

Globally, the peer-reviewed science is clear – our continuing addiction to fossil fuels is driving rapid climate change. Why are we hell-bent on looking for more, while allowing the "pushers" to self-regulate – a case of the "tail wagging the dog" perhaps?

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Published in Taranaki Daily News, 6 May 2013.

Greenhouse gas role well understood (Response to Sharp letter)

Les Sharp (letters, May 10) makes some important points in response to my May 6 letter on the oil industry, notably the fact that earth's temperature has and will continue to change over time. Unfortunately however, Mr Sharp's reliance on Ian Plimer's book 'Heaven + Earth', and criticism of the peer-review process in science, are both misplaced. Like all human pursuits, the scientific method is not perfect. But it has proven itself highly worthwhile across virtually every field of human endeavour and development. Importantly, science is based on proof or disproof (hypothesis testing). The proof has to be demonstrable and repeatable, as checked (peer-review) by recognized specialists in that field of inquiry. For climate science, the basic physics of our atmosphere, and the crucial role of 'greenhouse' gases, have been well understood since the pioneering work of Fourier, Tyndell and Arrhenius more than a century ago. The peer reviewed science is clear: continuing changes in earth's temperature, sea level and ocean chemistry are all being driven by burning fossil fuels. As for Plimer, a mining geologist, a review by Michael Ashley, professor of astrophysics at UNSW, in the Australian newspaper (9 May 2009) states: "Plimer has done an enormous disservice to science, and the dedicated scientists who are trying to understand climate and the influence of humans, by publishing this book. It is not "merely" atmospheric scientists [eg. Michael Mann] that would have to be wrong for Plimer to be right. It would require a rewriting of biology, geology, physics, oceanography, astronomy and statistics".

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Published by Taranaki Daily News on 17 May 2013.