



Environmental Response

The Montara Wellhead Platform had an uncontrolled release of oil, gas and condensate between 21 August and 3 November 2009. Environmental considerations were a key aspect of the Australian Government's response to the incident.

Oiled wildlife

The Australian Government developed and implemented a plan of action to help any wildlife that might have been affected by the oil spill in Commonwealth waters. The plan was developed by a wildlife expert from Queensland's Department of Environment and Resource Management who coordinated the wildlife response to the Moreton Bay oil spill on 11 March 2009.

The plan included regular on-ground surveys of Ashmore Reef marine reserve, which is home to the largest breeding and nesting seabird colony in the region. In addition, aerial and water-based surveillance of the region was undertaken daily and trained wildlife observers reported any sightings of wildlife in the area.

Any birds found affected by oil in the region were collected and treated at a stabilisation centre set up at Ashmore Reef reserve. This included providing the birds with adequate housing, a controlled and ventilated environment, and food. Stabilised animals were provided with a quick wash (rinsing and drying) to remove the worst of any oil contamination. Birds that survived these processes were released on veterinary advice or transported to Darwin and placed in veterinary care prior to release. In total, 29 oil-affected birds were found and treated. Of these, six were successfully released. Unfortunately the remaining birds did not survive.

A wildlife response centre was also set up in Broome in the event that a larger number of oil affected birds required care. Fortunately the response centre was not activated.

More information on the wildlife response can be found at www.environment.gov.au/coasts/oilspill.html and more information on the region can be found at www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/north-west

Environmental monitoring

The Australian Government worked with PTTEP Australasia, the operator of the Montara Wellhead Platform, to develop a long-term environmental monitoring program to understand the short and long term impacts of the spill on the marine environment. The plan includes marine life surveying, wildlife and habitat studies, water quality testing and shoreline ecological assessments. It consists of five operational monitoring studies, which were implemented during the response to the incident and seven scientific monitoring studies.

Experts from the Australian Institute of Marine Science, CSIRO and relevant state and territory agencies provided input into the plan and into its implementation to ensure that the monitoring program was appropriate and robust.

Montara Fact Sheets

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- 2 Australia's Offshore Petroleum Regulatory Framework
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As at November 2010 all operational and six of the seven scientific monitoring studies have been triggered. No confirmed reports of impacts to marine megafauna (whales and dolphins) were received, so the remaining scientific monitoring study, Marine Megafauna Assessment Surveys, has not been triggered. When complete, all monitoring reports will be publicly released.

More information on the monitoring study and released monitoring reports can be found at www.environment.gov.au/coasts/oilspill.html

Oil and gas industry and the national environmental law

Australia's national environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* aims to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places. Under the EPBC Act, activities that are likely to have a significant impact on a nationally protected matter must be referred for assessment before they can proceed. All proposals referred under national environment law are subject to a rigorous and transparent assessment process, including an opportunity for public comment.

Environmental audit

The Montara oil field development was assessed under national environment law and approved with conditions in August 2003. The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC) undertakes regular monitoring and audits of projects approved under the national environment law. In January 2009, prior to the Montara incident, DSEWPaC wrote to

PTTEP AA to inform them that the Montara project was on the list of projects that could be audited. On 16 October 2009, DSEWPaC confirmed with PTTEP AA that following the incident, it would be conducting an audit of compliance with the approval conditions for the Montara project and the legislation more broadly.

The audit has been undertaken and its outcomes will be released in the near future on the DSEWPaC's website.

Improvements to regulation under national environment law

Since the Montara oil spill greater rigour has been applied to the assessment of offshore petroleum drilling proposals. For example, as a result of the Montara incident DSEWPaC has gained a new understanding of the potential duration of a worst-case-scenario spill. The assessment of every oil and gas project under the national environmental law now includes a worst case scenario spill of 11 weeks. The plans, technologies and processes a company has in place to respond to this type of spill are also subject to greater scrutiny.

DSEWPaC will ensure that all relevant information and lessons from the Report of the Montara Commission of Inquiry are factored in, where appropriate, to assessments of new offshore petroleum wells and production facilities. This will include working with the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism and other relevant agencies to progress necessary amendments to Australia's legislation to reflect the Inquiry's recommendations.

More information on the oil and gas industry and the national environmental law can be found at www.environment.gov.au/epbc