



**bhpbilliton**  
resourcing the future

# Our History: Petroleum in the Bass Strait









# Introduction

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Australia's growth and development through the 1960s was heavily supported by BHP. The company's mining and steel making operations provided the nation with the raw materials to industrialise at a rapid pace. However, the missing link in Australia's industrialisation was a domestic source of oil and gas to provide the energy to fuel the booming nation. Under the leadership of Sir Ian McLennan, BHP would forge this missing link and discover Australia's first world-class hydrocarbon province.





# The discovery

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Following some unsuccessful studies into Australian oil prospectivity in the late 1950s, BHP Chief General Manager, Sir Ian McLennan sought the advice of Lewis Weeks, one of the oil industry's most highly regarded geologists. Over a lunch in 1960, McLennan asked Weeks where in Australia BHP should search for oil; without hesitation, Weeks replied 'Bass Strait'. Over the next few months, BHP moved to secure the acreage across much of the offshore Gippsland basin and established a partnership with Esso (later ExxonMobil), which endures to this day.

In 1965, after overcoming the many technical challenges of the deep water and extremely hostile weather conditions, BHP and Esso drilled Australia's first offshore well in the Bass Strait. The well successfully encountered hydrocarbons and discovered the Barracouta gas field. Additional gas bearing reservoirs were located in 1966 and oil was discovered in 1967. Through these discoveries, BHP confirmed that Bass Strait was a world class hydrocarbon province.

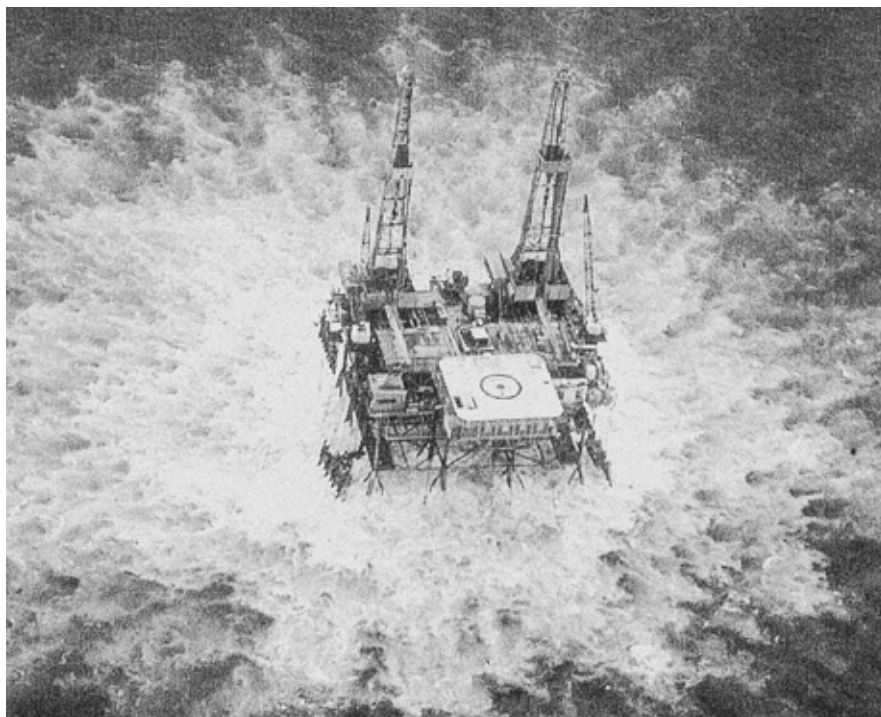
The discovery of oil and gas in Bass Strait was a watershed moment in the history of Australia and BHP: BHP transformed from being a steel maker and a mining company to a serious player in the offshore oil industry, a role it still holds today; and, Australia was provided with a degree of energy independence and self-sufficiency previously unimaginable.



# Today

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Bass Strait continues to be one of BHP Billiton's premier assets 50 years after discovery. To date, the oil and gas fields have produced over eight trillion cubic feet of natural gas and four billion barrels of oil. The fields continue to provide vast quantities of oil and gas for domestic use and export providing Australia with energy security and a great source of export revenue with production expected to continue for decades into the future.



## Celebrate the discovery

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For over a century, BHP Billiton has been developing and contributing to industry, communities and economies around the world. It's a rich and diverse history marked by significant discoveries that have shaped us into who we are today and will continue into the future.

In this, our 130th year since the incorporation of BHP, we look back and celebrate all the successes, and all the firsts, that have gotten us here. We invite you to celebrate the discovery and help us continue to build a proud legacy in Western Australia.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.bhpbilliton.com/ourhistory](http://www.bhpbilliton.com/ourhistory) or watch noted Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey speak about our history on our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/bhpbilliton](http://www.youtube.com/bhpbilliton).



