



Petition of nearly quarter million says Shell's offshore drilling plans too risky to permit

25 November 2015 K'JIPUKTUK (HALIFAX) – A coalition of environmental groups and concerned community members delivered a petition today criticizing Nova Scotia's offshore oil regulator for allowing Shell to drill without a critical piece of oil spill response equipment, the capping stack, available in Atlantic Canada. The closest capping stack is in Norway and would take 12 days to be transported to Shell's drilling site in the event of a spill.

The petition was launched by SumOfUs, a global corporate watchdog, and has so far garnered more than 234,000 signatures. Joining SumOfUs to deliver the petition were the Ecology Action Centre, the Clean Ocean Action Committee, Greenpeace Canada, and a number of concerned community members.

The groups assembled in front of the offices of the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board (CNSOPB), which regulates oil and gas activities in Nova Scotia's offshore regions and has approved Shell's drilling plans. There, people were holding up signs and drawing chalk outlines of dead fish, representing the destruction an oil spill would bring to fish and fisheries.

Shell's controversial plans were also signed off on by former federal environment minister Leona Aglukkaq after an environmental assessment was completed earlier this year.

"We are alarmed that this project is going forward. Shell is getting a free pass while Nova Scotia takes on the risk - a major blowout would be catastrophic for Canada's fisheries, sea life, and coastal communities," said SumOfUs Campaigns director Rosa Kouri. "When Shell was drilling in Alaska it was required to have the capping stack onsite within 24 hours. Do Nova Scotia and its fisheries not deserve the highest safety standards as well?"

During the environmental assessment process for Shell's project it was suggested that the oil spill response time could be improved by keeping the capping stack in Halifax. Shell rejected the proposal as too expensive, and both the CNSOPB and Minister Aglukkaq sided with Shell. On October 20, the day after the federal election, the CNSOPB approved Shell's project.

"The approval of Shell's risky drilling plans by both the federal environment minister and the CNSOPB is a disturbing example of our government putting the interests of an oil company ahead of public safety," said Greenpeace campaigner Alex Speers-Roesch. "Given the

CNSOPB board is made up mostly of people from the oil industry — including the person who actually opened Shell’s offshore exploration office in Nova Scotia — its decision comes as no shock. It’s a sad testament to how our regulatory system has been captured by the oil industry. But with the Trudeau government now in place, it is imperative they start putting the public good ahead of the desires of the oil industry.”

“The fact that the oil industry is not required to have a capping stack on the East Coast and immediately available in a blowout is a gross regulatory failure,” said John Davis, Director of the Clean Ocean Action Committee representing the Scotian Shelf fishing industry. “The multi-billion dollar Scotian Shelf fishery is being put at unnecessary risk. This should be totally unacceptable to all Nova Scotians and to all Canadians.”

“With the Paris climate conference only days away and scientists telling us that most fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground if we’re to avoid the worst of climate change, Nova Scotia needs to rethink its energy strategy and commitment to renewables,” said Susanna Fuller, Ecology Action Centre’s Marine Conservation Coordinator. “We have an opportunity to build a green economy and ensure that protecting the environment and jobs go hand in hand, and that includes protecting our fisheries.”

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