

MEDIA RELEASE – 4 September 2009

Poor response on oil leak emergency demands Kimberley LNG rethink

Environment groups today called on the Commonwealth and State Governments declare a national emergency response to the oil spill off the Kimberley coast after recent reports from Broome-based fishing boats confirmed severe damage to marine life.

Piers Verstegen, director of Conservation Council WA said in Broome “Today’s reports from fishing boats of sick turtles and oil ‘from horizon to horizon’ confirm that the extent and impact of this disaster is far more significant than the authorities have been prepared to admit.”

“The area in the vicinity of the oil spill, including the Northern Kimberley coast and Ashmore Reef is home to an astonishing variety of sea-life, including 12 species of whales and dolphin as well as sea snakes and turtles which all need to surface to breathe”

“Despite this, we have to rely on information from fishing boats about the extent and impact of the spill as Minister Ferguson and the LNG industry continues to downplay the extent of the problem”

“What we need now is a national emergency response effort - instead we are seeing a complacent oil and gas industry and Minister sitting on his hands in Canberra while our marine life is choked to death by oil pollution.”

Environs Kimberley Director, Martin Pritchard said “The oil leak situation demands a re-think on LNG developments planned for the Kimberley coastline.”

“This appalling scenario demonstrates the enormous risks inherent in this industry, while also exposing the authorities as hopelessly ill-prepared in managing these risks.”

Last weekend, an aerial whale survey located 162 endangered humpback whales in the vicinity of James Price Point – the location planned for a massive LNG port and processing plant. Recent research shows this area can be included as part of the most significant region in the world for humpback whale calving.

Mr Pritchard said “We simply cannot risk this type of disaster in the Kimberley coast. Just one accident like this could see the devastation of our unique marine environment, along with the sustainable economic opportunities it can bring for generations.”

Mr. Verstegen Said “Despite the incredible marine biodiversity values in the Kimberley, less than 1% of the area is currently protected in marine conservation parks.”

“We need to see large marine sanctuaries in the Kimberley to protect its world-class values, not a risky oil and gas industry managed by unresponsive regulators and complacent Ministers.”

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