

BP struggles for Great Australian Bight drill approval

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British oil giant BP's plan to drill in the Great Australian Bight has failed to win regulatory approval for a second time, although it can re-apply, with environmentalists urging the project be abandoned

British oil giant BP's plan to drill in the Great Australian Bight failed on Tuesday to win regulatory approval for a second time, although it can re-apply, with environmentalists urging the project be abandoned.

The company wants to drill four exploration wells at a depth of up to 2,500 metres (8,200 feet) off the South Australian coast to see whether commercial quantities of oil or [natural gas](#) are present.

It first applied for permission from the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) in October, but was denied for failing to meet strict environmental criteria.

It tweaked its application but has again been told it falls short of environmental standards.

NOPSEMA said BP had been offered "an opportunity to modify and resubmit their environment plan" by July 15.

The regulator said it typically provides two opportunities to modify plans and BP called Tuesday's decision "another step in the normal, iterative process with this regulator".

"We have allowed sufficient time in our programme schedule for this regulatory process and continue to work toward commencing exploration drilling in late 2016 subject to the acceptance of our environment plan," BP said in a statement.

Conservation groups are opposed to exploration by resource companies including BP in the Bight, saying it poses risks to the environment. BP was responsible for a massive oil spill in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico.



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"One would expect BP to go to great lengths to show the regulator it had learnt from the Gulf of Mexico disaster and submit an application that would far exceed the required standards," said Wilderness Society South Australia director Peter Owen.

"Instead it again submitted a substandard application in the hope it will be approved.

"It is time for BP to pull up stumps and write off this project as a bad idea. It's completely inappropriate to turn the Great Australian Bight into an oil field."

Environmental activist group Sea Shepherd added that "the whales of the Great Australian Bight can breathe a slight sigh of relief today".

"It's time that BP got the message and left the Great Australian Bight alone for our children's sake," said the group's Australia managing director Jeff Hansen.

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