

# BP abandons Great Australian Bight drill plans

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British oil giant BP abandons plans to drill in the Great Australian Bight after reviewing its global upstream strategy

British oil giant BP on Tuesday ditched plans to drill in the Great Australian Bight after reviewing its global exploration programme, a decision environmentalists hailed as a victory for the pristine wilderness.

The company had wanted to drill four deep exploration wells in waters

off the South Australian coast to see whether commercial quantities of oil or natural gas are present.

But it was a controversial move with the huge bight a haven for whales, seals, dolphins and penguins and home to sea eagles and albatross.

BP was responsible for a massive oil spill in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico and conservation groups were concerned about the risks posed to the environment.

The energy giant's managing director for exploration and production in Australia, Claire Fitzpatrick, said the decision not to proceed followed a review of the company's upstream strategy earlier this year.

"We have looked long and hard at our exploration plans for the Great Australian Bight but, in the current external environment, we will only pursue frontier exploration opportunities if they are competitive and aligned to our strategic goals," she said in a statement.

"After extensive and careful consideration, this has proven not to be the case for our project to explore in the Bight."

Greenpeace said BP should never have considered drilling for oil in "such a pristine wilderness".

"This news will be especially welcomed by the local communities near the waters of the Great Australian Bight like the tourism operators, oyster farmers and fishers who rely on it for their livelihoods," said Greenpeace Australia oceans campaigner Nathaniel Pelle.

"Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull should now heed this signal from BP, stop further oil exploration in the Great Australian Bight for good, and protect this unique wilderness while he still can."

Other oil and gas companies, including Chevron and Santos, are eyeing exploration in the bight and the Wilderness Society said they should take note of BP's decision.

"If BP with all its experience cannot produce an acceptable drilling plan for NOPSEMA, the remaining companies exploring in the Bight will be wasting their shareholders' money trying to pursue this folly," said the society's national director Lyndon Schneiders.

"The fact is that drilling here is far too dangerous for our environment and our communities and our Great Australian Bight needs to be permanently protected from the risks inherently associated with oil and gas exploration."

BP's application to drill had repeatedly hit hurdles at the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) for failing to meet strict environmental criteria.

But the company denied this impacted its decision.

"This decision isn't a result of a change in our view of the prospectivity of the region, nor of the ongoing regulatory process run by the independent regulator NOPSEMA," said Fitzpatrick.

"It is an outcome of our strategy and the relative competitiveness of this project in our portfolio."

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