

Canada's Moratorium on New Arctic Oil and Gas Licenses

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Greenpeace Canada

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Reacting to the news from Prime Minister Trudeau's office that Canadian Arctic waters are now indefinitely off-limits to new oil and gas licenses, Jessica Wilson, head of Greenpeace Canada's Arctic campaign, said:

Today's announcement is a groundbreaking step for the Arctic, its inhabitants and the planet. Offshore oil drilling poses a serious threat to the region and the entire world because of the risk of oil spills and out-of-control climate change. The science is clear: if Canada is to meet its climate commitments to keep global warming below 2C, and as close as possible to 1.5C, we must leave extreme oil like Arctic oil in the ground. Greenpeace welcomes this moratorium as a significant step towards the government applying a science-based approach to economic development in the Arctic.

While this is positive news, today's announcement could go further in terms of securing more permanent and comprehensive protection for the Arctic, as Obama has achieved in the US. Today's moratorium excludes a number of existing oil exploration licenses in the Canadian Arctic. Regardless, no development of any kind should go ahead without the explicit free, prior and informed consent of impacted Inuit or Indigenous communities.

Seismic companies are still planning to blast Canada's fragile Arctic waters this summer in Baffin Bay in search of oil and gas, despite strong opposition from Inuit and civil society, due to the risks that seismic blasting poses to Arctic ecosystems, wildlife and the communities that depend upon them. With this new moratorium in place, seismic blasting makes less sense than ever. The government should immediately halt all oil and gas exploration in the Canadian Arctic pending its climate assessment of Arctic oil in five years' time. There's no sense in proceeding with risky and controversial seismic surveys when the government is indicating it is unlikely to grant new oil drilling licenses.

The government should move immediately to eliminate existing oil exploration licenses in the Canadian Arctic. If the government abides by its promise to apply a meaningful climate test, Arctic oil will be dead in the water.

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