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**Ecological Disaster from Australian Oil Spill
Should Give Florida Elected Officials Grave Concern**
Massive Ongoing Oil Spill Uses Same Technology Proposed for Florida

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TALLAHASSEE - In a letter to Governor Charlie Crist today, eight conservation groups highlight the ongoing disastrous oil spill off the coast of Western Australia and ask the governor to make sure it doesn't happen here. The best way to do that is to protect the existing moratorium on drilling in Florida waters.

The "state-of-the-art technology" oil drilling rig off Australia is the same type of "jack-up rig" that drillers say they will use in the Gulf Mexico off Florida beaches. The jack-up rig in Australia has been spewing 400 barrels a day of oil since August 21st, and ocean cleanup crews haven't been able to stop it. The spill now covers an astonishing, 6,500 square miles of ocean and is growing every day.

The first attempt to shut down the uncontrolled spill has failed. Drillers attempted to intercept the damaged well at a point more than 8,500' below the seafloor and pump enough heavy mud into it to stop the flow.

The spill is "a major ecological disaster in the making," according to The Australian Marine Conservation Society.

"This ongoing marine disaster shows that spills do happen, even with the so-called state of the art technology that the drillers are proposing in the halls of the Florida Legislature," said Gary Appelson, Policy Coordinator with the Caribbean Conservation Corporation and Sea Turtle Survival League. "Florida should not risk its invaluable marine and coastal resources for vague promises of oil revenues."

Florida Energy Associates, a group of out-of-state oil drillers which refuse to identify themselves, has been passing out promotional material which trumpets “modern technology” and crows: “In Western Australia, visionary leaders are establishing the region as the sub-sea oil and gas capital of the Asia Pacific, overcoming significant technical challenges through the innovation of undersea oil production technology.”

The ongoing spill disaster starkly exposes that untruth.

The Australian spill is happening in the West Kimberley region of the Timor Sea, one of Earth’s last untouched marine wilderness areas. Whale and sea turtle migration routes lie in the path of the spreading slick. The nearby Kimberley Coast is a remote mangrove-dotted coastline, with countless islands and shoals.

“Florida can prevent such a tragedy here, by keeping the moratorium on offshore oil drilling in place,” said Susan Glickman, a consultant to Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. “There’s good reason that Florida’s leaders banned offshore oil drilling – because the risk to Florida’s tourism-dependent economy isn’t worth it.”

Florida’s tourism industry is valued at \$65.2 billion and provides about one million jobs.

“Lawmakers should reject a proposal which would allow companies to apply to drill 10 miles from the shore,” said Eric Draper of Audubon of Florida.

“Drilling for oil within rowing distance of Florida’s beaches would gamble our vital sport and commercial fisheries, our coastal wildlife, and our tourist industry to further the interests of an industry devoted to perpetuating our addiction to oil,” said David Cullen of Sierra Club Florida.

To see a graphic representation of what the Australian spill would look like if it happened in Florida, click here: <http://progressflorida.org/page/speakout/faxatwater>

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