

PETROBRAS AND THE CO²LONISATION OF AOTEAROA



On the 1st June 2010, just 42 days after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and 44 days before the well was capped, Brazilian company Petrobras was awarded by The New Zealand Government a five year exploratory license for oil and gas in the Raukumara Basin, situated in the East Cape / Bay of Plenty region of the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand). The license

starts from a mere 4 kilometres offshore and goes out to 110 km. The granted permit area is 12,330 sq km. The New Zealand government sees just 6% of the profit Petrobras makes. If the project goes ahead, Petrobras will bring in their own workforce and maybe offer a few short term jobs.

The area for exploration is the traditional fishing grounds of indigenous peoples from the tribes and sub-tribes of Te Whānau-a-Apanui and Ngāti Porou. There was no prior consultation with these communities whatsoever.

The New Zealand National Party was elected in 2008 to lead a coalition government that has been committed to opening up the land and sea around the country for oil, gas and other minerals extraction in the interests of national economic development. A policy to mine pristine conservation lands was abandoned in 2010 when huge public opposition, supported by many environmental organisations, expressed widespread opposition to the plan. The permits left open to exploitation cover an area 42 times greater than that which is currently being mined, across most of Aotearoa.

A vessel contracted to Petrobras has recently arrived in New Zealand waters and has already started working off the East Cape. In response to a call to oppose deep sea oil drilling from East Cape iwi (tribe) Te Whanau a Apanui, a flotilla of ships, has set sail from Auckland to arrive at the East Cape on Saturday the second of April where they will meet with Maori and decide on a plan of action. People are being asked to light fires on the beaches and hui (meetings) are being called along the coast to mobilise the communities on land.

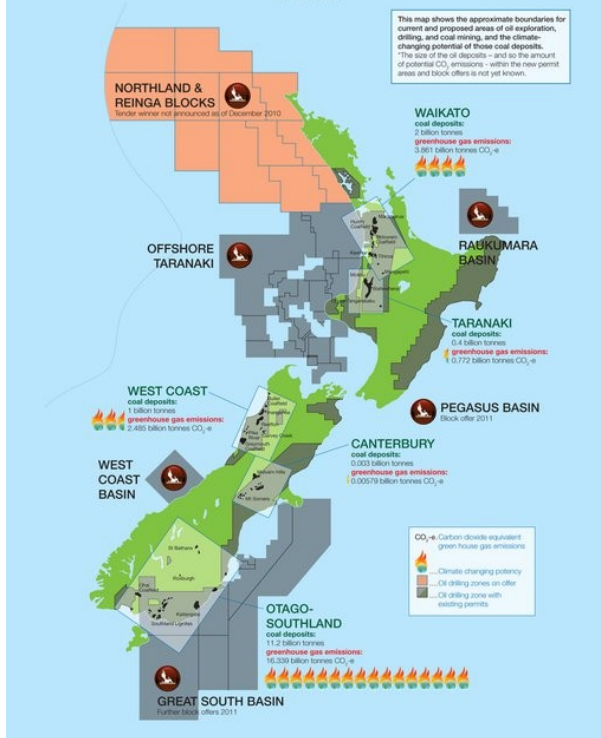
Te Whanau a Apanui spokeswoman Dayle Takutimu has called on the whole country to support their stand, at a time when seismic surveying by Brazilian oil giant Petrobras is expected to begin off the Cape.

"We are resolute in our defence of our ancestral lands and waters from the destructive practice of deep sea oil drilling. This is an issue for all peoples of New Zealand and we call on those who support our opposition to stand with us in defence of what we all treasure," she says.

The new fossil fuel frontiers

Oil and coal expansion in Aotearoa

As of December 2010



LOCAL IMPACTS

The Raukumara Basin sits on a major and active fault line. In a high seismic activity area such as the Raukumara Basin there is an extremely high possibility that there would be damage to any sub-sea installations (wells, pipe lines) in the probable event of an earth quake. The exploration area regularly experiences +4 or +5 magnitude quakes and lies on the same faultline as the one that recently devastated the South Island city of Christchurch.

The massive oil and gas spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which took three months to cap and spilled millions of barrels of oil, was an exploratory drill. The depth of this drill in the was 1500 metres. In the Raukumara Basin proposed depths range from 1500 metres to 3000 metres, yet New Zealand has almost no capacity to

deal with a major spill and has no adequate or enforceable means of compensation. It is entirely unknown what impacts the 240db sonic booms shot from the exploration vessel during the 2d seismic exploration phase will have on aquatic life, particularly regarding marine mammals. The area is at the heart of a well documented whale migration route.

The region's history revolves around the moana (sea) and the Iwi (Maori tribes) have many stories that speak of the cultural and spiritual significance of the sea. It holds some of the most central and important history of the iwi threatened by Petrobras's search for hydrocarbons and profit on behalf of its shareholders.

For as long as the Maori communities of the East Cape can remember, their daily lives, tikanga (customs) and whakapapa (ancestry) have been connected to the sea. "The sea is forever in our lives" says coastal community member Ora Barlow of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui.

PETROBRAS THE GIANT

Petrobras has recently become the third biggest petroleum company in the world after implementing the largest share offer in the history of capitalism, specifically to raise funds for offshore oil exploration at a time when the world stands on the brink of runaway climate change and global oil reserves are peaking. Increasingly dangerous extraction projects are becoming more commonplace. As a result, communities most directly affected by the exploitation of fossil fuel reserves are facing unprecedented levels of risk as these companies target what they call 'unconventional' fossil fuel reserves.

Brazilian government is counting on revenue from Petrobras to finance its 'Growth Acceleration Plan' (PAC). As a part of this plan, the Brazilian government is investing in massive infrastructure projects including the controversial Belo Monte Dam on the Xingu river in the Brazilian Amazon. Original plans to dam the Xingu have been greenwashed through multiple public relations programs over the course of two decades in the face of intense national and international protest. If constructed, Belo Monte will be the third largest dam in the world forcing more than 20,000 people from their homes in the municipalities of Altamira and Vitoria do Xingu and directly affect the Paquiçamba and Arara territories of the Juruna and Arara indigenous peoples.

The New Zealand government has given a foreign company, with an abhorrent social and environmental record the permission to threaten these coastal communities without any prior consultation whatsoever. An oil spill will mean nothing less than cultural genocide for a region that has managed to maintain a great deal of its traditionally cared for land and traditional knowledge of environmental management against all odds. Toka Tū Moana is their renowned phrase that declares steadfastness and resilience, standing firm and unshakeable, despite adversity. A great deal of effort is made within these communities to maintain knowledge of traditional environmental management and many programmes are underway to transition these communities back towards states of true community resilience. "Our tipuna (ancestors) practised sustainable living, we can do it too, they relied on whanaungatanga (collective living), and so do we." - Ani Pahuru-Huriwai, Ngati Porou

An oil spill, and climate change itself may well wipe out the entire coastal community's ability to maintain whatever level of traditional food sovereignty and self sufficiency they have left.



COMMUNITY REACTION

When the government announced their awarding of this permit to Petrobras, local Maori symbolised their opposition to the plans of Petrobras and the New Zealand government by lighting fires along their coastline. Ms Pahuru-Huriwai of Ngati Porou (one of the closest communities to the permit area) said. "This is the way we all informed each other, signalled each other way back -

through fire. In this case we're saying that it's Petrobras that we're all against." "It's a serious threat to us and our kapata kai (food cupboard). It's not just a Maori thing either - we think every Kiwi (New Zealander) has an issue with it. Everyone who is scared of what's happening, they need to be here."

Several months later and with no sign of Petrobras or the New Zealand government changing their plans, a music festival under the banner of 'Stop The Drilling!' was held in Te Kaha, a region adjacent to the permit area. One and a half thousand people showed up to show their support, dwarfing the resident population of that particular tribal area. Crowds shouted 'Stop the Drilling!!' and spoke of defending their community from attack by sea.

Petrobras have approached local runanga (tribal leaders) and have entered into a process of communication with them. The runanga have communicated to Petrobras the position of the communities that no consent will be given to Petrobras to follow through with the project. Preparations have been made by Iwi leadership to apply for a judicial review of the decision made to grant the permit, and for communication with the United Nations. Local Maori have, with

support from environmentalists, fishermen and others, established the Ahi Ka Action Group to campaign for a revocation of the permit and a decision not to explore the area.

The Ahi Ka Action Group have distributed 20,000 flyers to raise public awareness of the situation, they have established a basic website and have lobbied local authorities to throw their weight behind efforts to prevent exploration and extraction activities in the permit area. The group has been linking up with individuals and groups in other parts of Aotearoa and overseas who are under threat from mining in their area.

A MOVEMENT IS FORMING

With such a massive proportion of land and sea being opened up to mining companies, communities across the country are getting ready to defend themselves.

On the West coast of the North Island communities of Taranaki are also under attack from land and sea with 13 new onshore/coastal permits and 15 new offshore permits being handed out by the government. Parihaka, a settlement of huge cultural and historical significance which in the 1870s and 1880s became the centre of a major campaign of non-violent resistance to European occupation of confiscated land in the area is already surrounded by oil and gas exploration projects and is now facing even more. The company Greymouth Petroleum is focusing on northern to central Taranaki while companies Kea Petroleum, TAG Oil, Green Gate, L&M Energy and Todd Energy are targeting the rest of inland eastern and southern Taranaki. There is a great deal of concern surrounding the increased use of hydraulic fracturing to access oil and gas reserves in this area, a highly dangerous extraction process recently banned in some places in of the United States.

Down South, government-owned Solid Energy and other coal companies want to mine massive quantities of lignite, a low-quality brown coal, that lies under Southland farmland. They plan to turn it into briquettes, urea fertiliser, and synthetic diesel. At least 6.2 billion tonnes of lignite is technically and economically recoverable in 10 major deposits in Otago and Southland. The in-ground lignite resource is approximately 11 billion tonnes. A wide range of local and national groups are gearing up to stop these developments.

Up North, permits for a wide range of minerals, including gold are spurring communities into defensive action and communities are linking up with one another and a national level movement is coalescing to stop the drilling across the country.



CLIMATE JUSTICE

Of course, this isn't exactly a new phenomenon, Petrobras and the fossil fuel industry in general has a long and bloody history of threatening the very existence of communities in order to access fossil fuel reserves globally. "it's an international issue and we have to make sure our local support is strong and then globalise" - Ora Barlow, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui

As the case of the BP oil spill and those lower income communities hit hardest by hurricane Katrina illustrates, the communities most vulnerable to environmental destruction are also those

most susceptible to the climate crises. Those hit first and worst are most often the least responsible for the crisis yet are actively leading the fight against major climate polluters. They require globalised support and solidarity in defending *their* answers to an ecological crisis which they have not caused or reaped untold profits from.

While politicians fiddle around in flailing international negotiations to halt runaway climate change, their hands tied behind their backs by the most powerful consortium of companies the world has ever known, these

communities, and others directly impacted by the root causes and impacts of the climate crisis are successfully standing together and defeating them in their own back yards.

“We must stand united with other hapu, other iwi, other New Zealanders who care about the environment. We must keep pressure on our government to wake up and show some long-term leadership, make Aotearoa a Renewable Energy Country, no longer reliant on Fossil Fuels like oil & gas, that the human race is quickly exhausting. We are a nuclear free country; we need to be a fossil fuel free country too!” - Ani Pahuru-Huriwai, Ngati Porou

“We must support those who carry this kaupapa (cause) for us to the international stage. We must unite with other indigenous peoples and learn from their experiences.” - Ani Pahuru-Huriwai, Ngati Porou

Links

[Flotilla Heeds Iwi's Call to Stop Deep Sea Oil](https://stopdeepseaoil.org.nz)
stopdeepseaoil.org.nz
nodrilling.wordpress.com
[climate justice taranaki](https://climatejustice.taranaki.govt.nz)

