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Ahead of UN Oceans Conference, new research shows looming oil and gas expansion threats to coastlines and oceans

New mapping and analysis reveals that offshore oil and gas threatens ocean habitats, livelihood of coastal communities, and the climate

June 4, 2025 (Sacramento, California) — New research reveals that offshore oil and gas activities pose significant threats to marine biodiversity at every stage, from exploration and extraction to shipping and usage.

This [new mapping and analysis](#), published by Earth Insight and international and regional partners, visualizes the threats posed by future offshore fossil fuel projects to frontier biodiversity hotspots and coastal communities across the pantropics.

View detailed maps [here](#).

The key findings highlight that:

- **Oil and gas blocks** cover over 2.7 million km² in the case study frontier regions - an area about the size of Argentina.
- **Protected Area Threats:** 88,500 km² of oil and gas block overlap; 19% of coastal and Marine Protected Areas are at risk across the frontier regions
- **Important Marine Mammal Areas and KBA Threats:** 70,000 km², or 11%, of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and 49,000 km², or 14%, of marine and coastal Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are overlapping with oil and gas blocks
- **Coral Reef, Sea Grass, Mangrove Threats:** Approximately 21,000 km², or 15%, of coral reefs; 7,900 km², or 63%, of seagrass meadows; and 2,000 km², or 15%, of mangroves, in the frontier case studies are overlapped by oil and gas blocks, placing critical marine habitats at significant risk. These regions are vital for the conservation of marine mammals and ecosystems that provide habitat for, feeding, breeding, and migration activities .
- **LNG expansion threats:** There are 13 Important Marine Mammal Areas with 20 unique species at risk near LNG terminal offshore infrastructure across the LNG case study areas.

*“Fossil fuel expansion shouldn’t be happening anywhere, yet it’s happening in some of the most biodiverse marine ecosystems on the planet,” said **Tyson Miller, Executive Director, Earth Insight**. “This report offers both a sobering wake-up call and glimmers of hope given that many of the planned projects can still be stopped and there are incredible organizations and networks actively working towards this goal,”*

The findings also reveal stark climate risks - evidenced by the fact that projects like Papua LNG, in Papua New Guinea, will release greenhouse gases equivalent to Bangladesh’s annual emissions. Meanwhile, the Saya de Malha bank, the world’s largest seagrass meadow, remains unprotected despite its critical role in carbon sequestration. The Gulf of California in Mexico, a key marine biodiversity hotspot and whale sanctuary, could also soon emerge as a major global hub for LNG trade.

*“The Gulf of California has been coined the “World’s Aquarium” and hosts nearly 40 per cent of marine mammal species - including the iconic blue whale and whale sharks,” said **Cecilia Garcia, Communications Director, Defensa Ambiental Noroeste**. “300 meter long LNG tanker ships exporting US fossil energy to foreign markets are a major threat to this incredibly rare frontier region. It is also vital for Mexico’s fishing and tourism industries in the region.”*

This report comes just days before thousands of ocean experts, diplomats, heads of state, scientists and civil society leaders will be hosted by France for the 2025 Oceans Conference (UNOC), which “aims to support further and urgent action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and identify further ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14.” Meanwhile, the report identifies TotalEnergies, a French energy company, as also playing an outsized role in offshore and coastal expansion projects, with findings suggesting that the company is involved in 3 out of 11 proposed projects reviewed in the report’s case studies, notably in Namibia, Mozambique and Papua New Guinea.

*“While offshore fossil fuel extraction and combustion can contribute to biodiversity decline, it can also impact people’s livelihoods, and it may significantly contribute to the climate crisis and pollution,” said **Neville Van Rooy, Outreach Programme Head, Green Connection**. “This is why many frontline communities, Indigenous groups, and civil society organizations in South Africa are against such developments.”*

To address the environmental and social harm caused by offshore fossil fuel extraction, the report proposes the following solutions:

1. **Stop Fossil Fuel Expansion:** Halt the expansion of offshore and coastal fossil fuel activities, with a focus on safeguarding protected and environmentally sensitive regions.
2. **Remove Unassigned Blocks and Stop New Approvals:** Remove unassigned oil and gas blocks, and restrict new licenses, permits, or extensions for offshore and coastal fossil fuel projects.

3. **Cease Financial Support:** Terminate investments, insurance, and financing for proposed/planned offshore and coastal fossil fuel expansion.
4. **Invest in Renewables:** Shift financial resources to solar, wind, and other clean energy alternatives.
5. **Ensure a Just Transition:** Adopt policies that make oil & gas companies accountable for paying the full decommissioning of abandoned and idle offshore oil and gas operations and engage all affected stakeholders during the transition using a rights-based approach.
6. **Undertake Restoration:** Rehabilitate habitats harmed by fossil fuel operations through decommissioning, pollution remediation, and conservation efforts.
7. **Strengthen legal, financial, and policy frameworks** and implement international treaties or agreements, such as the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty, to prohibit new coastal and offshore oil and gas expansion.

*"The expansion of fossil fuels, especially through new offshore oil and gas projects, is a direct threat to our oceans, our climate, and the millions who depend on vital marine ecosystems like the Coral Triangle and the Verde Island Passage for their livelihoods. Despite global commitments to limit warming to below 1.5°C, financial institutions continue to recklessly invest billions in destructive energy sources, leading to pollution and habitat destruction," said **Gerry Arances, Executive Director of the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED).***

"The upcoming UN Oceans Conference must be a decisive turning point: Ten years ago, it was bold leadership from France and other decision-makers that crafted the Paris Agreement, and today, they must listen to voices of frontline communities and civil society demanding an end to support for new fossil fuel projects. We should invest instead in a just transition that protects people and communities," he added.

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About Earth Insight

Earth Insight builds critical transparency tools and momentum for restricting fossil fuel, mining, and other industrial expansion threats to key ecosystems and Indigenous and local communities. Our research, communications, and engagement work is central to supporting policy interventions that key political and financial actors can make to protect critical ecosystems as a vital step towards addressing both the biodiversity and climate crises.

Partners

[Waterkeeper Alliance](#), [Global Energy Monitor](#) (GEM), [Probios](#) (Suriname), Fossil Free Wider Caribbean, [Our Islands Our Future](#) (Waterkeepers Bahamas), [Defensa Ambiental del Noroeste](#) (DAN) (Mexico), [Instituto Internacional Arayara](#) (Brazil), [Coral Reefs for the High Seas Coalition](#)

(Saya de Malha), [Justiça Ambiental](#) (Stop Mozambique Gas campaign), [Center for Environmental Law and Community Rights Inc.](#) (CELCOR) (Papua New Guinea), [Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development](#) (CEED), [Sauver la Mer et la Pêche](#) (Waterkeepers Senegal), and [The Green Connection](#) (South Africa)