

## **18.72 Mineral, including Oil, Exploration in or adjacent to Marine Parks and World Heritage Areas in Australia**

RECOGNIZING the outstanding natural values of much of the Australian marine environment, including areas such as the Great Barrier Reef, Lord Howe Island Group and (proposed) Shark Bay World Heritage Sites;

APPLAUDING the statement of the Prime Minister of Australia during the opening ceremony of the 18th Session of the IUCN General Assembly that he was "pleased to announce that the Australian Government has decided to work towards the ... establishment of a national, representative system of marine protected areas for Australia that will protect these areas...";

NOTING an earlier statement by the Prime Minister on 19 July 1990, that he "will not countenance any drilling which would in any way endanger sensitive marine environments" including "not just the Great Barrier Reef area, but also Lord Howe Island as well as the Shark Bay area" and that the Government has commissioned a preliminary environmental assessment by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority of the likely impacts of oil exploration adjacent to the Marine Park;

RECOGNIZING the potentially devastating impact that oil spills associated with exploration, production and transport can have on the marine environment as exemplified by the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska;

BEARING IN MIND the vulnerability of marine ecosystems to both acute impacts of oil spills and the longer term chronic impacts of offshore oil and gas exploitation;

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the Australian Government's recent proposal to open up much of the continental shelf of Australia to offshore oil and gas exploration, including areas adjacent to existing and proposed marine World Heritage Sites;

RECOGNIZING that under Australian law an oil exploration permit automatically confers the right to exploit the resource if oil is discovered;

ACKNOWLEDGING that oil spilled in the marine environment fails to recognize or respect boundaries of World Heritage Sites or marine parks;

The General Assembly of IUCN—The World Conservation Union, at its 18th Session in Perth, Australia, 28 November-5 December 1990:

URGES the Government of Australia:

- a. to move expeditiously to establish a comprehensive system of marine protected areas around Australia;
- b. in light of the Prime Minister's commitment to a marine protected area system, to immediately defer and review the implementation of the government's current offshore oil exploration programme until the comprehensive system of marine protected areas has been established;
- c. to ensure that no mineral, including oil or gas, exploration or development activities will occur in waters adjacent to Australia which could cause damage to World Heritage Sites and other marine protected areas from blow-out or other events associated with exploration, production and transport.

*Note: This recommendation was adopted by consensus. The Australian State member delegation indicated that they could not support the words "immediately defer" in operative sub-paragraph (b), and so, had there been a vote, the delegation would have abstained.*