

Hon Mike Rann MP
Premier
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Dear Premier Rann,

I am deeply concerned about BHP Billiton's plans to build an enormous desalination plant at Point Lowly in the Upper Spencer Gulf.

This poorly considered proposal has the potential to irreparably damage the Spencer Gulf marine environment, a unique ecosystem noteworthy for its ecological and fisheries importance. Whilst, BHP insists there will be no adverse impact, a multitude of local and international scientists disagree.

The Olympic Dam Expansion EIS itself demonstrates that the proposed outfall design will breach the EPA's Water Quality Policy. The 'safe' dilution level of brine discharge required to protect 99% of species from experiencing inhibitory effects is in the vicinity of 1:45. During low tides, BHP is proposing a target dilution level of 1:11, well above the safe level.

BHP also claims the 'zone of ecological effect' and the cuttlefish breeding grounds will never overlap but alternative models have shown that upwellings of toxic brine are entirely possible. Cuttlefish eggs are extremely sensitive to changes in salinity. A single bad reproductive year could devastate the population, putting the species at risk of extinction.

It is unacceptable for BHP to place this internationally significant ecosystem at risk in order to satisfy the massive water requirements of its expanded operations, simply because Point Lowly is the cheapest option. The risk of irreversible damage being caused to this fragile marine environment is much too great.

The globally unique cuttlefish aggregation at Point Lowly is one of South Australia's greatest eco-tourism experiences. The State Government should be encouraging the sustainable diversification of regional economies not putting a burgeoning tourism industry at risk of collapse. The cuttlefish breeding grounds must be protected within a marine park sanctuary zone not opened up to industrial development.

I urge you to apply the precautionary principle in assessing this proposal. BHP must be required to assess genuine alternative locations outside of the Upper Spencer Gulf, with the oceanographic characteristics necessary to quickly disperse the brine discharge.

I look forward to your reply on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Signature:

Name:

Address: