

## **Actions speak louder than words: Shell's record versus Shell's promises**

I recently came across the *Compass* piece by Shell Oil's Alaska General Manager, Pete Slaiby, about the company's offshore drilling plans in Alaska. I work for a community organization in Sakhalin Island, Russia, home to the Shell-designed and constructed Sakhalin II--the world's largest integrated oil and gas project. Significant similarities between Alaska and Sakhalin make our experience incredibly relevant to Alaskans as they weigh Shell's drilling plans.

When Shell began building Sakhalin II over ten years ago, we heard promises very similar to those in Alaska. However, reality turned out to be quite different from the rhetoric. The project brought all the elements of offshore oil development: construction of platforms and pipelines, seismic testing, increased vessel traffic, and drilling. It also threatens a vulnerable whale population and brought air and water pollution, fish kills, unprecedented inflation, and increased violence. And, as Alaskans know all too well, the specter of an oil spill is always present.

The marine environment of both Sakhalin Island and Alaska's Arctic are critically important for whales. Since the health of whale populations is so important to Alaska Natives, the case of Shell on Sakhalin provides important lessons.

Our western Pacific gray whales have a population of only 130, which Shell has failed to shield from the pressures of oil development. Although Shell supposedly committed to follow all the recommendations of a panel of international whale scientists, Shell ignored findings that offshore drilling posed "potentially catastrophic threats to the population." Instead, Shell built an offshore platform adjacent to the critically endangered western gray whale's only feeding habitat. The panel's work is chronically hampered by Shell's resistance to provide complete and timely research data and information on their proposed activities. So much for Shell meeting legitimate concerns "head on," as represented by Slaiby.

This does not bode well in Alaska, where Shell offers similar vague promises of mitigation. Shell's approach already seems to be replaying in Alaska, where a court order was required to prevent Shell from drilling in an area where an estimated 40% of the bowhead whale population was resting.

Slaiby also presents a rosy and unrealistic picture of the risks of drilling and shipping in Alaska's fragile and remote waters. Slaiby claims an oil spill is "extremely unlikely." Yet the Minerals Management Service estimates there is a 26% chance of a large platform and pipeline spill in the Beaufort Sea, and a 40% chance of a large spill in the Chukchi Sea, under the government's proposed development plan. Here on Sakhalin Island we have already suffered the impacts of small and medium oil spills in northeastern Sakhalin and in the port of Kholmsk thanks to the Sakhalin-II project. And we know about Alaska's experience, where the Exxon Valdez spill underscored the reality that accidents can and do happen. In Sakhalin, we were promised natural gas for energy and employment for community members but the benefits of oil and gas extraction were channeled elsewhere. To this day our communities still rely on expensive coal and are overly burdened by the influx of imported workers. The people of Korsakov – the city impacted by construction of a Liquefied Natural Gas plant – only have *water* for 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the

evening. High inflation makes local housing unaffordable, violence and sexually transmitted diseases increased rapidly, and our community infrastructure is overburdened.

Shell resisted requests to re-settle a small community of local 'dacha' owners directly affected by the huge LNG plant. Shell promised people to re-settle them *before* getting all approvals and permissions but after receiving all the needed permissions, Shell has refused its commitments to the local people.

My community has already suffered losses because of Shell's broken promises but Alaskans still have time to protect their Arctic seas and their subsistence resources. Like many Alaska Natives on the North Slope, I fear for the future of the Arctic. The promises from Shell are too empty and the impacts from offshore drilling are just too high.

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