

NS: Exploration by Corridor Resources raises concerns

By Chris Hayes, Transcontinental Media

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[SYDNEY, NS] — A concerned resident of Iles-de-la-Madeleine is calling for a moratorium on oil and gas development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which would include an area called the Old Harry Prospect that is being explored by Corridor Resources Inc.

Marilyn Clark, who says her concerns are shared by inshore fishermen on the islands, says any oil and gas developments should be refused until there has been a more thorough and independent review of environment concerns as well as a review by ministers of the environment of Canadian practices and regulations.

Like the Georges Bank off Nova Scotia where a moratorium on oil and gas development has been extended to 2015, the Gulf of St. Lawrence is a sensitive fishing area, she said.

Clark said there should also be more consultation with fishermen and other stakeholders in all of the provinces surrounding the Gulf.

An environmental assessment of the project should have been more global considering how currents move the water in the Gulf, she said.

Halifax-based Corridor Resources is proposing to conduct up to nine geohazard surveys from 2010 to 2020 including 2-D seismic, sonar and other assessments of the Old Harry Prospect, according to an environment assessment. The prospect, which is located in the northeastern part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (95 kms northeast of Iles-de-la-Madeleine), includes areas that are under the jurisdiction of both the National Energy Board and the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board.

The environmental assessment concluded that no significant adverse environmental effects would occur as a result of the project.

Corridor Resources president Norman Miller said the company is still at the application stage but wants to start the geohazard survey, which will look at sea floor conditions, in September or October.

“It has all the ingredients of a potential discovery,” he said in an interview Wednesday. “It’s a pretty exciting structure, it’s very large.

“We have some companies that are quite interested in operating a well there.”

He estimated there could be a well in place next year but more likely in 2012.

Miller responded to the call for a moratorium by saying there are always opponents to oil and gas developments.

“I think if we do it properly, and that’s the only way to do it these days, then you can do it without adverse environmental effects.”

Miller said the proposed development in the Old Harry prospect would be very different physically from the Deepwater Horizon rig that has been spewing oil into the Gulf of Mexico for six weeks, and that Canada’s regulatory regime is much stricter.

Clarke hoped to raise her concerns when the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence Coalition on Sustainability holds its annual general meeting in Cheticamp (June 11-12).

Executive director Chantal Gagnon said the coalition is a non-profit organization consisting of about 400 members, including community groups, First Nations, governments and others who share the goal of having a sustainable southern Gulf of St. Lawrence from Cape Breton west to the Gaspé.

Gagnon said the coalition hasn’t yet established a stand on oil and gas exploration in the Gulf but has forwarded Clark’s concerns to members, making it one of the topics that may also be raised at the annual general meeting.

Although the Old Harry Prospect is not itself within the southern Gulf, any oil and gas developments could affect the southern region, she said.