

ENERGY AND RESOURCES

Questions on Notice

Question 1

Danny O'BRIEN: I have got industry complaining about the approval time lines for earth resources of 90 days. It is meant to be at 90 days, but they are more like 150 to 200 days in some cases. Can you take on notice perhaps how you are improving that?

Paul SMITH: Yes.

Answer:

It is assumed this question is primarily related to quarry approvals.

Gaining approval to break ground at a new site or make changes at an existing site is a complex process, with many stages and multiple stakeholders.

For quarries, statutory timeframes of 28 days - one month apply to various decision points along the approval pathway, which involves assessment, referral, endorsement and approval. A breakdown of the different stages, and the statutory timeframes for the different components of the process can be seen here - <https://earthresources.vic.gov.au/licensing-approvals/extractives-industry-work-authority/work-approval-process-for-extractive-industries>

The regulator has continued to reform and improve the approvals process with better guidance and early consultation to equip stakeholders with the right information to make a high-quality application. Most recently, a series of practice improvements have been implemented through the Better Approvals for Regulators (BAR) program. The scope of the BAR project was to find regulatory efficiencies in the extractive sector work plan approvals process and improve the current industry experience.

In September 2022, Earth Resources Regulation (ERR) implemented a new geotechnical consult process to support complex geotechnical designs at mines and quarries. Additionally, ERR updated new pre-application checklists and templates to provide clarity to industry about information that needs to be submitted for assessments, thereby minimising requests for additional information and associated time delays.

Question 2

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Budget paper 3, page 171, lists the percentage of mining and exploration licences that are active. How many of Victoria's active exploration and mining licences are for fossil fuels such as gas?

Lily D'AMBROSIO: How many of them?

Ellen SANDELL: Looking for a number, yes. How many of those projects, the active projects, are fossil fuel projects?

Lily D'AMBROSIO: I might take that on notice, I think, because I am not sure that I would have those figures with me.

Answer:

I note that page 171 of Budget Paper No. 3, references minerals licences only, which includes coal, however not gas.

There are currently 12 licences for coal within the State. These licences are a combination of exploration, retention and mining.

Of the 12 licences, three are actively mining (MIN5003 Energy Australia, MIN5189 AGL and MIN4701 Maddingley Brown Coal).

There are currently 29 licences for petroleum (oil and gas) within the State. These licences are a combination of exploration, retention, and production and include onshore and offshore licences.

Of the 29 licences only one licence, located offshore (Beach Energy), is currently producing fossil fuel (gas).

An offshore retention lease is about to commence further exploration activities.

Question 3

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. I would like to ask about a specific exploration licence. We understand that French geo surveying company CGG intends to map the gas reserves across the Otway Basin using a process called seismic blasting. Does the government consider seismic blasting safe for wildlife?

Lily D'AMBROSIO: Sorry. You have mentioned that they are seeking an application. Is that correct?

Ellen SANDELL: Yes.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: Yes. Well look, I do not have any information that I can share with you right now, so I am not going to prejudge its safety or otherwise, other than –

Ellen SANDELL: Well, what kinds of licences and approvals would they need?

Lily D'AMBROSIO: I would be very happy to come back to you and take that on notice so I can give you a full answer to that one.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. That would be wonderful. Yes, just the information about what kinds of licences and approvals they would need to undertake seismic blasting.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: Sure. I will do that. Thank you.

Answer:

The location of the proposed marine survey is in the license area P79(V) (held by 3D Oil and Conoco Phillips) which is in Commonwealth Waters, off the Victorian coast and is regulated by the applicable Commonwealth legislation (The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 and associated regulations). The identified geo surveying company will be undertaking the activity on behalf of those title holders.

The Commonwealth Minister for Resources is responsible for oil and gas in Commonwealth waters and has delegated powers to the following organisations regarding the appropriate licenses and permits for oil and gas activities.

The **National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA)** administers titles and data management for petroleum and greenhouse gas (GHG) titles in Australian Commonwealth waters.

The **National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA)** is Australia's independent expert regulator for health and safety, structural (well) integrity and environmental management for offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage activities in Commonwealth waters, and in coastal waters where regulatory powers and functions have been conferred.

Additional information relating to approvals for seismic blasting can be obtained from NOPSEMA.