

Shell moves Sakhalin pipeline but faces new destruction row

Shell is facing yet more environmental protests over its controversial \$12 billion oil and gas pipeline off the east coast of Russia.

The oil giant last week caved into campaigners' pressure and moved the route of its Sakhalin pipeline, which previously went through the feeding ground of a near-extinct breed of grey whales.

But as that decision was announced, Sakhalin islanders discovered a huge amount of debris that appeared to have been dumped by sub-contractors in a shallow bay crucial to the island's vital fishing industry. Shell yesterday organised a dive to find out how the mountain of debris came to be dumped there.

The decision to move the pipeline was hailed as a victory by campaigners, but they remain concerned that an off shore production platform is still too close to the whales' feeding ground.

James Leaton, the World Wildlife Fund's extractive industries policy officer, said: 'Shell has recognised there were flaws in their original design, which takes courage. However, location alternatives have only been considered for the offshore pipeline, not for the platform. The majority of the whale panel's concerns remain outstanding regarding location, oil spill response, ship-whale collisions, sedimentation, noise and cumulative impacts.'

The Sakhalin-2 project will generate \$45 billion worth of oil and liquefied natural gas and is vital for the future of the embattled firm.

In an exclusive interview with The Observer, Sakhalin Energy's chief executive, Ian Craig, said whale experts will be invited to oversee revised plans for the project and that the company had been open and transparent in all its dealings, having spent millions of pounds researching the behaviour of the western grey whale to minimise any impact on its survival. The Observer was first to reveal how Shell's pipeline threatened the whales with extinction in January last year. Meanwhile, Shell has reiterated that it is holding talks with a number of companies eager to enter into the Sakhalin consortium.

By Nick Mathiason, The Guardian, April 3rd, 2005