

NDP Leader questions offshore environmental safety

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NDP Leader Lorraine Michael (MHA, Signal Hill-Quidi Vidi) has renewed her call for a truly independent offshore safety authority in the wake of the most recent report of a spill into the ocean off Newfoundland and Labrador.

Last Thursday, the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board (CNLOPB) announced that Husky Energy reported a spill of about 600 litres of drilling fluid from its GSF Grand Banks rig early Thursday morning.

“Justice Robert Wells recommended that there be an independent safety authority in his report on the Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry,” Michael noted today. “I would only add that such an authority should also have a responsibility for environmental safety.

“As it stands, we rely on oil companies to self-report and tell us what their spills are and what damage may result. I do not think that is good enough protection for our valuable ocean resources.”

Thursday’s spill was the second in a matter of weeks from the Grand Banks rig; about 5000 litres was spilled by the same rig last month. Earlier this year, the same rig experienced a 4000-litre spill that the company reported was confined to its deck.

Environmental Impact Studies prepared before oil drilling operations start must include predictions of the number of relatively small spills of oil and fluids, known as “batch spills” in the industry, that will occur during the life of the project.

“Just a few years ago we heard that the batch spills were six times over their predicted levels,” said Michael. “Has anything improved since then?”

“Scientists are telling us that the CNLOPB relies on the oil companies to tell them what is going on,” she added. “We need actual external independent monitoring of the number, composition and size of spills, and to determine how harmful the cumulative spills are to our marine environment.”