

Plans to Build Oil Platform in Whale Feeding Ground Suspended

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 22, 2013



Sakhalin Energy already operates 3 platforms in the oil and natural gas fields offshore Sakhalin Island in the Okhotsk Sea, including Lun-A (above).

Sakhalin Energy has suspended construction of an oil drilling platform that environmentalists said would harm highly endangered gray whales off the coast of Russia's Far East, the World Wildlife Fund said in a [statement](#).

After years of protests by conservationists, who urged Western banks to block funding for the oil rig, Sakhalin Energy has postponed making any decisions on the project until 2017. The oil and gas venture is controlled by Gazprom with other top shareholders including Royal Dutch Shell, Mitsui and Mitsubishi.

"Sakhalin Energy has delayed until 2017 its decision about building an additional oil platform, meaning the whales are safe at least until 2020," Alexei Knizhnikov, head of the WWF-Russia's oil and gas campaigns, said in the statement, published Monday. "This gives us more

time to convince the company that the project should be stopped for good."

The platform was to be built near a key summer feeding ground for gray whales off the northeast coast of Sakhalin Island. Conservationists argued that noise from building and running the rig would drive away the whales, whose weak eyesight forces them to rely on highly sensitive hearing to find food.

"These extraordinary animals and their newborn calves must consume enough food during the summer to last them on their lengthy migration," Knizhnikov said. "This place that is so critical to the whales was put at even further risk by oil and gas prospectors, but the whales have won for now."

The population of western north Pacific gray whales stands at only 150, according to the WWF.

Potential oil spills from the rig would be difficult to clean up in the icy sub-Arctic waters and could be "catastrophic for wildlife," the WWF said.

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