

Make oil spill observers mandatory: Liberals

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The Hibernia offshore oil production platform is more than 300 kilometres east-southeast of St. John's.

Newfoundland and Labrador's Liberal party is calling on the provincial government to make independent oil spill observers mandatory on offshore platforms.

Since the massive oil spill began in the Gulf of Mexico April 20, Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones has been asking what is being done to prevent an offshore oil disaster in eastern Canada.

Thursday in the house of assembly, Jones asked Natural Resources Minister Kathy Dunderdale why the province doesn't require oil platforms to have independent monitors watching for spills.

"Why as a developer and an interest earner in the oil and gas industry are they not prepared to put independent monitors on these platforms, yet support putting independent observers on fishing vessels in this province?"

Minister not convinced

Dunderdale responded science has shown that having independent monitors on rigs is not effective.

She said self-reporting by oil companies and aerial surveillance are working just fine.

Dunderdale said it's not fair to compare the jobs of fisheries observation to oil industry surveillance, which requires the ability to spot oil slicks in large areas of the ocean.

She said it makes sense for fisheries monitors to be on the decks of boats but may not make sense to have oil industry monitors on oil platforms.

"[Fisheries monitors] are inspecting and counting fish and measuring fish coming on a vessel, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker it's hard to do that from 20,000 feet," said Dunderdale.

The province is reviewing what the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore industry is doing to prevent oil spills.

Dunderdale said the provincial government will consider any recommendation made by the review of

offshore regulations.

The body that regulates the offshore oil industry, the Canada Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, is scheduled to hold a technical briefing on Monday to explain what it's doing.