

An underwater scene with several large oil rigs or drilling platforms extending from the surface down into the water. Sunlight rays penetrate the water from the surface. In the foreground, three large whales are swimming, surrounded by smaller fish. The overall tone is somber and environmental.

OUR OCEAN: **TOTAL** DESTRUCTION

BLOOM & The Green Connection unite
against TotalEnergies' harmful offshore
oil & gas projects in South Africa





IN SOUTH AFRICA, the French oil & gas major TotalEnergies is about to ignite a new carbon bomb despite specific climate experts' recommendations to steer clear from new fossil fuel investments: on September 5, 2022, TotalEnergies applied for a production license to exploit two major gas fields, with up to one billion barrels of oil equivalent, off South Africa's southern coast¹.

“ *Investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure is moral and economic madness.”*

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, April 5, 2022

“ *So where are we going to fish? You come, you consult, you tick the box, you leave and it doesn't matter because we don't see you again. Yet the decisions you make have a huge impact.”*

Christian Adams, small-scale fisher residing at Steenberg's Cove, Saint Helena Bay, West Coast, South Africa

¹ In July 2022, TotalEnergies had already filed an environmental impact assessment application ahead of the drilling of up to five exploration wells on a virgin deep-water tract offshore South Africa, between Cape Town and Cape Agulhas. And, since March 2022, the company is also involved in multiple seismic surveys off the West Coast.

TotalEnergies plans to invest around \$3 billion to launch operations in South Africa's waters in areas of spectacular marine biodiversity, at the expense of wildlife and of small-scale fishers' livelihoods. The oil & gas French major is knowingly developing its exploitation project in an area of strong currents and extraordinary species richness, which serves as a "blue corridor" as well as feeding or nesting grounds for thousands of whales², fur seals, penguins, petrels, albatrosses, gannets and endangered leatherback turtles. South African waters are also home to a large population of snoek (a member of the mackerel family), which forms the heart of the west coast small-scale fishers' economy, while fishers on the south coast rely on a variety of species for their livelihoods.³

TotalEnergies' projects in South Africa are also a conceptual fraud as they try to portray a switch from coal to gas as a 'green energy transition', despite the fact that gas is also a fossil fuel. In July 2021, the International Energy Agency stressed that "beyond projects already committed as of 2021, there are no new oil and gas fields approved for development in our pathway".

Two Goldman Prize winners, Liziwe McDaid (The Green Connection – South Africa) and Claire Nouvian (BLOOM – France) have decided to unite against TotalEnergies' harmful offshore oil & gas projects in South Africa. As the climate breakdown and the mass extinction of animal species threaten humanity's survival, BLOOM and The Green Connection call on TotalEnergies to immediately cease its offshore exploration and exploitation projects off the rich and biodiverse South African coasts and call on citizens to make their voices heard by signing an [online petition](#)⁴ to protect our ocean and climate from TotalEnergies' destruction.

² Humpback-, southern right-, sperm-, and blue whales.

³ Species such as squid and kingklip.

⁴ BLOOM & The Green Connection (2022) <https://ocean-total-destruction.bloomassociation.org/en/>



Context: a race for fossil fuels despite climate change

In 2014, the government of South Africa launched ‘Operation Phakisa’ to boost investment in offshore oil & gas exploration, setting itself a target of 30 exploration wells by 2024.

According to the South African Oil & Gas Alliance, “*offshore exploration off South Africa’s coast was previously limited primarily by the depth of the potential resources and secondly by the ocean currents*”.⁵

South Africa’s National Climate Change Response White Paper,⁶ along with experts from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), recommend a shift towards renewable energy where fossil fuels, including gas, are excluded. However, in its 2022 report, the IISD stresses that “*there are strong indications that South Africa is potentially on the verge of a gas investment flurry that could prove to be a very expensive mistake for the South African people*”.⁷

Indeed, efforts to exploit South Africa’s offshore resources multiplied over the last decade, with some 300 exploration wells drilled, 233,000 km of 2D seismic data, and 10,200 km² of 3D seismic data acquired. Current estimates now consider South Africa to have the equivalent of around nine billion barrels of oil in its ground.

⁵ South African Oil & Gas Alliance (2022) [Upstream oil & gas in South Africa](#)

⁶ Republic of South Africa (2014) [National Climate Change Response White Paper](#)

⁷ IISD (2022) [Gas pressure: exploring the case for gas-fired power in South Africa](#)

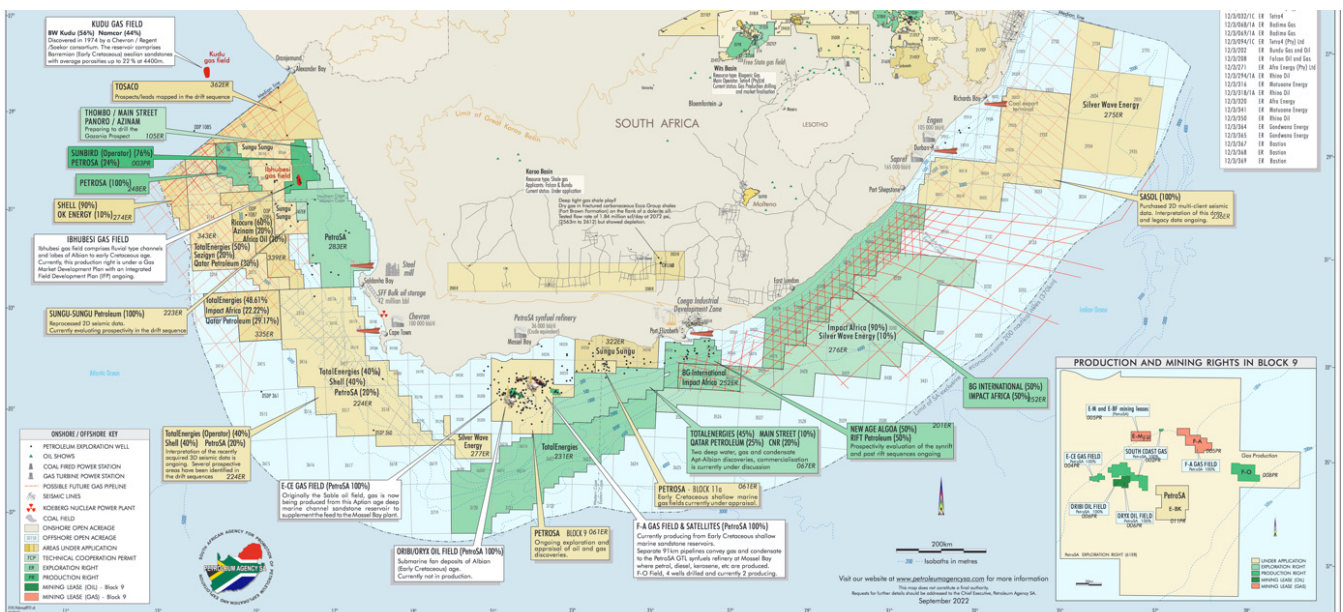
‘Operation Phakisa’ aims to tap into this enormous resource to produce about 370 000 barrels of oil & gas per day, at the expense of South Africa’s decarbonization and energy transition.

Today, the fossil fuel industry is putting all its weight in the balance to fast-track offshore oil & gas projects and secure its hold on South Africa’s carbon resources. With the support of the government of South Africa, Shell, TotalEnergies, Qatar petroleum, PetroSA, and other oil & gas majors set their eyes on numerous oil & gas offshore blocks off the coast of South Africa.

This quest for oil & gas occurs in waters that are home to rich and diverse marine ecosystems that literally constitute “blue corridors” for many large marine species such as humpback-, southern right-, sperm-, and blue whales, African penguins, petrels, albatross, dolphins, and sharks.

The climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity, the protection of a thriving small-scale fishing economy all call for an immediate moratorium on this rush for fossil fuels. Civil society and small-scale fishers across South Africa mobilize to make ‘Operation Phakisa’ stop.

TotalEnergies remains deaf to these calls and stands at the forefront of this onslaught against the ocean, the climate, and a sustainable future.



Map of the Petroleum exploration and production activities in South Africa, as per the Petroleum Agency of South Africa, 1 September 2022.

TotalEnergies' South African ocean grab

TotalEnergies, France's flagship oil & gas major is - historically speaking - the 13th largest CO₂ and CH₄ emitter, accounting for some 0.82% of the world's cumulative emissions attributed to carbon major fossil fuels & cement producers over the 1751-2010 period.⁸

In 2014, TotalEnergies set its eyes on South Africa's deep-sea waters and started an exploration campaign off the coast of Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. On 4 November 2014, it announced it was putting its exploration campaign on hold since "offshore repairs on the rig" were considered impossible "in tough conditions at water depths of 1,500 meters in an area where strong winds and ocean currents were a challenge"⁹

Despite the challenge of drilling for oil & gas in one of the world's fastest ocean currents, the Agulhas current, TotalEnergies reverted to these deep waters a few years later.¹⁰ In February 2019, TotalEnergies' CEO Patrick Pouyanné announced a major discovery at the Brulpadda well: about 1 billion barrels worth in gas condensate. In October 2020, TotalEnergies made a second discovery in the same block, at the Luiperd well. The President of TotalEnergies' Exploration & Production considered this as proof of the "world-class nature of this offshore gas play".¹¹

A dangerous precedent

Beyond the prospects of drilling for gas in this block, TotalEnergies' announcement was considered in the fossil industry as a "game changer" insofar as it proved that "South Africa, though underexplored, does have exploration and production potential", but also because "if Brulpadda and Luiperd are determined to be commercially viable, these discoveries could launch the South African oil and gas industry to the next level and attract much needed investment".¹²

These two discoveries set the whole industry in motion, as well as TotalEnergies, who is now trying to put its grip on South Africa's resources in a rush that leaves South Africa's civil society running in a race against the clock to avoid a climatic, environmentally and socially destructive lock-in of the South African energy policy towards a gas-to-power trajectory.

⁸ Richard Heede (2014) [Tracing anthropogenic carbon dioxide and methane emissions to fossil fuel and cement producers, 1854-2010](#)

⁹ Reuters (November 4, 2014) [Total stops South Africa offshore drilling after mechanical failure](#)

¹⁰ Odfjell Drilling (2022) [Case study South Africa. Overcoming challenging natural conditions to deliver a well ahead of schedule, with no operational incidents](#)

¹¹ TotalEnergies (28 October 2020) [South Africa: Total makes second significant gas condensate discovery](#)

¹² CDH (10 February 2021) [The Brulpadda and Luiperd gas discoveries: A game changer for South Africa's petroleum offshore exploration](#)

“COUNTERING THE TIDE ON THE WEST COAST? SEARCHER, A MASSIVE SEISMIC SURVEY INTERDICTED”

On 4 April 2021, the company Searcher applied for a ‘Reconnaissance Permit’ to perform a 2D and 3D seismic survey programme over a number of petroleum license blocks extending over 297,087 km² from the South African-Namibian border down to Cape Agulhas. These include blocks leased by TotalEnergies.

Confronted with the perspective of a large-scale seismic survey lasting for six months and the prospect of a future massive ocean grabbing along the West Coast, coastal communities, small-scale fishers, and environmental justice NGO ‘The Green Connection’ went to Court to oppose this fast-paced and uncontrollable oil & gas exploration.

On 1 March 2022, the High Court put a stop on Searcher’s seismic survey, noticing that *“no attempt was made to meet with small-scale fishers of the West Coast”*. A decision that upholds coastal communities’ constitutional rights for public participation, but leaves room for a potential counter-offensive through the request of new Reconnaissance Permits.

TOTAL ENERGIES' ASSAULT ON SOUTH AFRICA'S WATERS: A CLIMATE BOMB IN THE MAKING?

As of late 2021, TotalEnergies made a series of requests to South African authorities for seismic surveys, exploration drilling, or for obtaining production licenses. A coordinated assault which leaves civil society overtaken by speed and unable to match such a fast-paced tentative legal lock on South African waters.

Block 11B/12B	South-East Coast	September 5, 2022	TotalEnergies applies for a production license to exploit Brulpadda and Luiperd gas fields: a 'first' in South Africa's offshore sector. The 11B/12B Block covers 19,000km ² in water depths between 200m and 1,800m for an expected 1 billion barrels of oil equivalent. TotalEnergies is set to invest up to \$3 billion.
Block 5/6/7	South-West Coast	July 29, 2022	TotalEnergies files its scoping report to conduct an environmental impact assessment to drill up to five exploration wells on a virgin deep-water tract off South Africa, between Cape Town and Cape Agulhas. The Block is approximately 60km from the coast at its closest point and 170km at its furthest, in water depths between 700m and 3,200m.
Block 1	West Coast	March 3, 2022	TotalEnergies gets environmental approval to conduct, over a period of four months, 5,000km of 2D seismic survey, and 750 km ² of 3D seismic survey. The approval covers approximately 1,340 km ² .
Multiple blocks	West Coast	August 15, 2022	TGS* applies to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment for a seismic survey in a project area located 120km offshore of Saint Helena, extending northward to about 230km offshore, off Hondeklip Bay.
Multiple blocks	West Coast	July 13, 2022	'Searcher Seismic'* 2.0 applies to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment for a seismic survey in a project area located 256km offshore of Saint Helena Bay, extending northward to about 220km offshore of Hondeklip Bay.
Multiple blocks	South-East Coast	November 29, 2021	CCGG* applies for a Reconnaissance Permit to undertake multi-client 3D seismic survey.

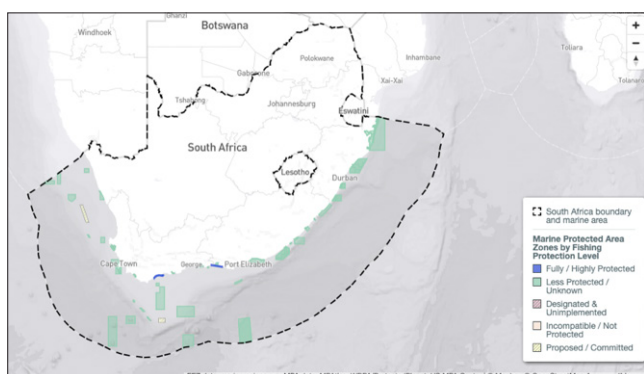
* TGS, Searcher Seismic and CCG provide services to the world's largest oil & gas majors such as the conduct of seismic surveys or geoscientific data. Total is involved in many of these blocks.

A 'TOTAL' destruction of the ocean and small-scale fishers at stake

In light of TotalEnergies' onslaught on South Africa's waters, BLOOM and The Green Connection decided to unite to protect the ocean, the climate, and small-scale fishing communities from 'TOTAL destruction'.

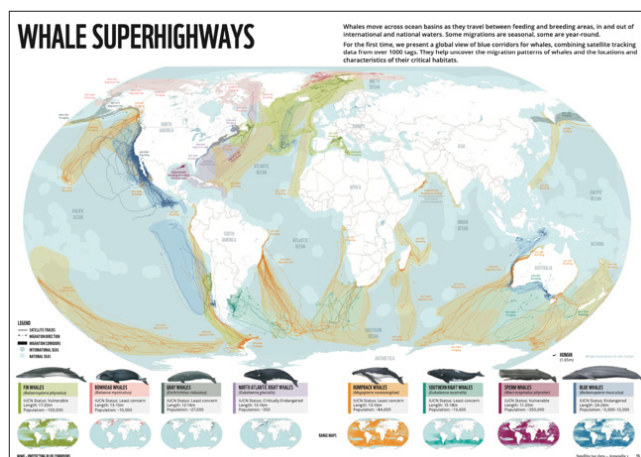
Threats on marine ecosystems

South Africa's waters are home to a rich biodiversity: African penguins, Cape fur seals, albatrosses, petrels, cormorants, Cape gannets, leatherback turtles, sharks, dolphins, whales and much more. The network of South Africa's Marine Protected Areas and Critical Biodiversity Areas reveals that these waters house a rich marine biodiversity both along the coast, as well as offshore, along the country's canyons, seamounts and deeper edges of the continental shelf. ¹³



Network of Marine Protected Areas of the Republic of South Africa, as per the Marine Protection Atlas¹⁴

Since 2011, South Africa has witnessed “super-pods” of up to 200 humpback whales feeding in South and West coast waters.¹⁵ This testifies to the critical nature of South African waters for marine biodiversity. As “umbrella species” which represent the complex systems they inhabit, the migration and presence of various large whale species in South African waters is a testament to the importance of diversity in the region. Yet, oil & gas exploitation disturbs whales and their prey *“through underwater noise pollution, construction of supporting infrastructure, oil leaks, associated shipping and the potential for large, catastrophic oil spills”*.¹⁶



Migration patterns of whales and location of their critical habitats, as per the “Protecting Blue corridors” report¹⁷

13 République d'Afrique du Sud (2022) [Marine Protected Areas](#)

14 Marine Protection Atlas (10 Octobre 2022) <https://mpatlas.org/countries/ZAF/map>

15 Université de Cape Town (22 octobre 2021) [Explaining the super-groups of humpback whales on the west coast of South Africa](#)

16 WWF, UC Santa Cruz, Oregon State University, University of Southampton (2022) [Protecting blue corridors. Challenges and solutions for migratory whales navigating national and international seas](#)

17 *ibid*

Threats on small-scale fishers

Seismic surveys and oil & gas exploration, in deep waters or close to shore in areas which are subject to some of the world's strongest ocean currents, represent a major threat to the small-scale fishers who rely on a healthy marine ecosystem to sustain their livelihoods.

Christian Adams, residing at Steenberg's Cove, Saint Helena Bay, West Coast, stressed on 21 January 2022 in his testimony against the Searcher 2D and 3D survey along the West and South-West Coast the importance to protect small-scale fishers from an ocean grabbing that would replicate and open the wounds of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history anew:

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Small-scale traditional, artisanal fishers in the Western Cape have played a critical role in the struggle against apartheid and in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. The fishing industry in this country is synonymous with the dispossession of the rights of the peoples of the West Coast. Many of the communities of the West Coast were dispossessed of their land and their livelihoods were controlled by racially based spatial planning and fishing laws. Prior to 1994, small-scale and subsistence were not legally recognized in the fishing laws of this country. Many of the traditional fishers had to work for white-owned fishing companies.

Many of the traditional fishers provided the labour that enabled the fishing industry in this country, based on the West Coast, to become the world famous fishing industry that it has become (...) I also warned the drivers of Operation Phakisa and the Ocean Economy Master Plan at a meeting on 7 July 2021 'Where will we end up? Are we going to be murals for people to look at and to say there was once a thriving small scale fishing sector, but due to the Ocean Economy Spatial Planning Bill, due to Operation Phakisa, it no longer exists? Is this what we want to be left with? (...) I want us to stop there and to take stock of what is happening and how fast and how far you have gone without the fishers'".



Small-scale fishers and members of The Green Connection protest against TotalEnergies' projects in South Africa, September 26, 2022.



TotalEnergies: an oil & gas major immune to climate change

Opening South African waters for oil & gas exploration, with the perspective of extracting nine billion barrels of oil and gas over the next decades constitutes a risk for South African citizens and for humanity that cannot be ignored.

As the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed on 24 May 2022 while addressing graduate students at Seton Hall University, investing in fossil fuels is “a dead end, economically and environmentally. No amount of greenwashing or spin can change that. So, we must put them on notice:

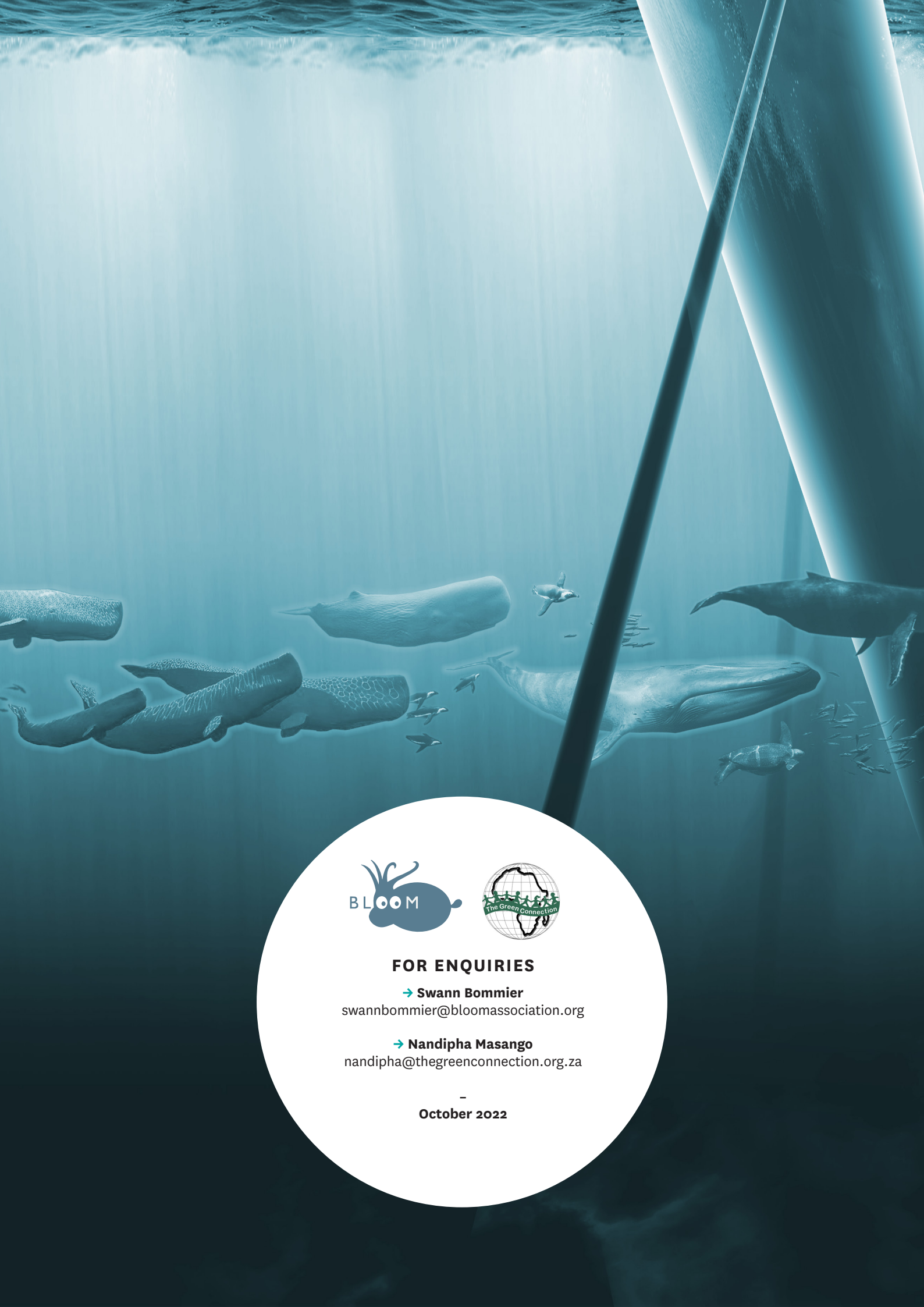
*accountability is coming for those who liquidate our future”.*¹⁸

The recommendations of the International Energy Agency and of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are unequivocal. The dire consequences of climate change, which we witness daily, remind us that a gas-to-power energy transition encouraged by the greed of fossil companies diverts resources away from a much-needed transition to renewables. It is pure madness. It needs to be stopped. By all means.



BLOOM et The Green Connection call on TotalEnergies to stop developing new fossil fuel activities and to immediately cease its harmful South African projects.

¹⁸ United Nations (May 24, 2022) [‘Don’t work for climate wreckers’ UN chief tells graduates, in push to a renewable energy future](#)



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