Resources Minister Kon Vatskalis must make a full public disclosure about the decisions made by the Territory Government leading to last year’s devastating Montara oil spill.

Shadow Resources Minister, Willem Westra van Holthe, said the Minister must end more than 6 months of silence and explain exactly what part the Territory Government played in the circumstances that led to the spill of millions of litres of oil off the northern Australian coast.

During the first day of hearings into the spill, Counsel Assisting the Inquiry, Andrew Berger, said publicly what Minister Vatskalis has steadfastly failed to acknowledge – that the Territory Government has oversight of the Montara field.

Mr Berger questioned whether the Department has followed good regulatory practice and also whether it was appropriate that a Departmental decision to use a pressure cap instead of a cement plug was received, assessed, reviewed and approved through levels of Government in just 30 minutes.

“The Minister’s silence on this terrible environmental incident has been deafening,” Mr Westra van Holthe said.

“Based on the evidence put before the Inquiry today, he should end his absurd silence and explain what role the Government played in the events leading up to the spill.”

Mr Vatskalis should begin by detailing exact staffing levels within the Department of Resources charged with oversight of off-shore regulation and whether a robust examination was conducted on the request to change the well operation plan.

“The off-shore petroleum industry is worth billions to the national economy and is responsible for thousands of direct and indirect jobs,” Mr Westra van Holthe said.

“The office charged with regulating the industry in the Northern Territory must be properly resourced in order to provide adequate back-up to this crucial sector of the national economy.

“At all cost, the Minister must ensure the Department’s resourcing is such that there is no repeat of the Montara disaster off northern Australian waters.”

Further comment: Willem Westra van Holthe 0414 778 430