

April 16, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
The Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As Members of the California Congressional delegation, we are writing to applaud your decision to review the Bush Administration's draft proposed Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program, and to reiterate our unwavering support for protection of our state's most sensitive coastal and marine areas.

We are also writing to express our strong opposition to portions of the draft OCS plan that would allow three new lease sales off our state, including areas off Humboldt and Mendocino counties and from San Luis Obispo County south to San Diego. There is no reason to reduce the protection our coastal communities have prospered under for 27 years. The potential risks of harming our state's coastal economy by opening these areas to new development are far too great, and we strongly urge you to eliminate these proposed lease sales.

Californians have repeatedly spoken out against new offshore drilling. Since 1969, twenty-four city and county governments have passed anti-drilling measures and the State has enacted a permanent ban on new offshore leasing in state waters. They realize that spills and leaks, air and water pollution, and the industrialization of the shoreline threatens public health, impairs marine resources, and wreaks havoc on our economy, especially the state's critically important tourism, fishing and recreation industries. These industries bring in over \$23 billion a year to the California economy.

Like you, we believe that we should take a more reasoned and responsible approach to managing energy resources on the OCS. First, the focus of the department should be on encouraging the development of oil and gas resources already open to drilling, not the expansion of leasing into areas that were previously protected. Energy companies are not producing oil and gas on the vast majority of land they already hold in offshore leases. In fact, less than 24 percent of the public land offshore held by energy companies is actually producing. Moreover, U.S. offshore drilling activity has slowed significantly since the Presidential and Congressional prohibitions on new OCS leasing were lifted last year. For example, the number of gas rigs in use peaked at 1,606 in September 2008. Last week, the number of operating gas rigs was 808, a nearly 50 percent reduction in just six months. With oil and gas companies failing to take full advantage of the areas already open to them, we object to opening additional pristine areas to leasing.

We appreciate the Department of the Interior's growing focus on renewable energy sources on the OCS, as opposed to fossil fuels. Clean energy solutions are absolutely essential to our country's national security, economic and environmental interests. As the Department considers decisions relating to offshore renewables it should ensure that any developments are properly sited, designed, and operated according to terms that fully protect the public interest, and are developed through ample public input.

In light of these considerations and the availability of other energy solutions, including conservation, energy efficiency and renewable resources, we strongly urge you to remove the three proposed lease sales off California from the draft OCS plan. It is imperative that we promote the use of clean technologies and protect the integrity of our state's coastline from new offshore oil and gas development for both current and future Californians. We look forward to working with you and President Obama on ways to protect our environmentally sensitive and economically valuable coastline and move our nation towards a clean energy future.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,