

# *Call for Comments for Issues to be Evaluated in the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Environmental Impact Statement*

**DUE: March 30, 2015**

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is getting ready to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to examine the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of oil and gas activities off the N.C. coast. Offshore areas are parceled into “blocks” that are categorized and sold to oil and gas companies. Your comments influence what is evaluated in the EIS, and whether or not sections of our offshore waters may ultimately be included in BOEM’s 2017-2022 leasing program.

The N.C. Coastal Federation encourages you to provide comments on these proposed leases. Here are some concerns that the federation wants to be sure that BOEM addresses in its draft EIS.

## **More scientific study is needed to evaluate the impact of oil and gas exploration and development off the N.C. coast:**

An expert panel appointed at the direction of the U.S. Congress identified numerous gaps in data and scientific studies that it concluded needed to be filled BEFORE it would be possible to evaluate the potential effects of oil and gas activities off the N.C. coast. This panel was required by the Outer Banks Protection Act enacted by Congress in 1990. Unfortunately, the studies recommended by the Environmental Sciences Review Panel were never funded and done. The panel recommended:

- (1) **Modeling of the movement of Gulf Stream and nearby currents so that an Oil Spill Risk Analysis model (OSRA) could be developed and calibrated.** Lacking this model, it is impossible to evaluate the potential risks associated with both minor and major accidents at rigs as well as a result of transportation accidents.
- (2) **Environmental Assessment of the impacts of an oil spill on N.C. beaches and estuaries.** The state’s more than 12,000 miles of coastline and 2.2 million acre estuarine system is very fragile and the nursery for the vast majority of fish caught commercially and recreationally in N.C.
- (3) **Assessment of the marine ecology of N.C.’s Outer Continental Shelf.** We don’t yet fully understand what species of fish and wildlife live within potential drilling areas and how they should be protected. Of particular concern to the committee was species associated with *Sargassum* habitat including seabirds and sea turtles. Chronic and acute impacts of discharges from drilling operations needed to be studied.
- (4) **Examination of the socioeconomics of N.C. coastal communities that would be affected by offshore oil and gas development.** Lots of claims have been made about the revenues generated by oil and gas, but there is little documentation about the costs associated providing public infrastructure and services for large population growth that oil companies are projecting will occur if drilling is allowed. These economic costs need to be fully evaluated. In addition, the aftermath and consequences on communities from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the Gulf Coast needs to be fully evaluated now that five years has passed since the spill. The long-term impact on communities that are very similar to N.C. coastal towns and counties need to be determined.

The panel said these studies were necessary before an adequate evaluation (or EIS) could be developed that accurately predicts the consequences of offshore oil and gas drilling.

**Please remind BOEM of the panel’s findings, and that these gaps of scientific data and information have not been filled.**

Here’s how you can submit your comments:

**1. Hand written and sent via snail mail**

- a) Label envelope: “Scoping Comments for the 2017-2022 Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing Program Programmatic EIS”
- b) Address to: Mr. Geoffrey L. Wikel  
Acting Chief, Division of Environmental Assessment  
Office of Environment Program (HM 3107)  
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management  
381 Elden Street  
Herndon, VA 20170-4817

**2. Online**

- a) Go to <http://regulations.gov>
- b) In the search tab, type in Docket ID: Boem-2014-0085
- c) Click on the “Comment Now!” button

**3. Attend BOEM’s Outer Banks scoping meeting**

**March 16, 3-7 p.m.**

Ramada Plaza Nags Head Oceanfront  
1701 S. Virginia Dare Trail  
Kill Devil Hills