

Bruce Allen, Co-founder, SOS California,  
Testimony before the House Committee on Natural Resources “Offshore Drilling:  
Environmental and Commercial Perspectives”  
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I would like to thank Chairman Rahall and the Committee for the invitation to speak here today. I am Bruce Allen, a co-founder of SOS California, a non-profit dedicated to educating the public how offshore oil and gas production can actually improve the marine environment and provide a bridge to our renewable energy future. Due to advances in subsea wellhead, platform and pipeline technology, according to the National Academy of Sciences less than 1% of hydrocarbon pollution in all U.S. waters now comes from drilling and extraction, while natural oil seeps contribute 63%.

Published studies document that in the Gulf of Mexico natural hydrocarbon seepage may far exceed the environmental significance of the production and transportation of oil and natural gas.

Surprising to many is the fact that California offshore oil and gas production has been drying up seepage pollution. Similar seepage reductions also appear to be occurring in other oil and gas resource basins.

Natural oil and gas seeps off the California coast are the second most active in the world, seeping 70,000 barrels of oil into coastal waters and 3 billion cubic feet of methane into the air every year. This annual oil seepage volume equals the entire 1969 oil spill and equals the Exxon Valdez oil spill amount every 4 years. Local beaches are washed with oil seepage from state and OCS waters for 100 miles of central California coastline. These seeps pollute the ocean and beaches, sicken surfers, and are a significant source of air pollution in Santa Barbara County.

For example, in January 2005 an increase in this seepage killed or oiled as many as 5000 seabirds that washed ashore from Santa Barbara to Huntington Beach, creating a 25 square mile oil slick, which went largely unreported.

These seeps are being reduced by offshore oil and gas production. It is well known to long time Santa Barbara residents that over the last 40 years the amount of oil washing up on their beaches has been declining, and it is commonly assumed offshore oil production is the reason. These observations are supported by research documenting a 50% reduction in seepage near an offshore platform studied for over 20 years.

If, after the 1969 spill, all California offshore oil production had been stopped, these long term seepage reductions would never have occurred.

In the last 40 years there have only been 872 barrels of oil spilled offshore California due to offshore production with no lasting long term environmental impact compared to the 2 million barrels of oil seepage into the same coastal waters. A 2008 opinion poll shows by 62% to 29% Santa Barbara County residents support more offshore production in California, a population that follows this subject more closely than any other.

Gulf of Mexico offshore production also has an excellent safety and environmental record, even in the face of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Modern technology and 3-D seismic allows reserves to be accurately targeted, including seep zones and resources at risk from earthquakes. For example, the 1925 Santa Barbara earthquake caused a massive flood of crude oil from seabed fissures to pour into coastal waters and onto California beaches.

Pacific OCS resources estimated by MMS are at least 13 billion barrels of oil equivalent. Discovered, but not allowed to be produced resources in California OCS and state waters are about 1.8 billion barrels, near existing infrastructure producible within 18 months given permitting approvals. 11 of 13 reservoirs are overlaid by active seeps in state and OCS waters, seepage which could be permanently reduced by offshore extraction. Royalties from these resources could fund conversion of electricity usage by 20 million Americans to solar electricity and cut California oil imports in half. This would reduce the risk of a large spill in coastal waters, since studies show risks from large oil tanker spills are greater than from offshore platform or pipeline spills.

Total 2006 MMS estimated OCS resources are 160 billion barrels of oil equivalent. Royalties from these resources could exceed 3 trillion dollars, which in terms of renewable energy, could buy one thousand gigawatts of solar electric generating power, an amount equal to all U.S. electric generating capacity.

Assertions that new offshore oil production will slow conversion to renewable energy are not correct; more OCS production can actually accelerate the conversion. SOS California believes new offshore production royalties should be tied directly to funding renewable energy infrastructure to accelerate the transition to solar, electric vehicles and other renewables.

The U.S. will not be able to borrow overseas money for 30 years to pay for building a renewable energy infrastructure while running a 600 billion dollar a year trade deficit due primarily to imported oil.

I urge Congress not to re-impose an OCS moratorium. New OCS production will allow Americans to benefit from safe extraction of domestic energy resources with royalty revenues accelerating the transition to renewable energy. For central coast Californians, intelligently expanded production in OCS and state waters would further reduce coastal seepage pollution for future generations. I would be pleased to answer questions. Thank you.