



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Board of Supervisors - Third District and Second District

Subject: Resolution Opposing New and Existing Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling

Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

Formal Title: Adopt resolution opposing new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Adopt resolution opposing new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling; and
2. Direct the Chair to submit a public comment on behalf of the Board to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) strongly opposing the inclusion of any areas off the California coast—particularly the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary—in the 11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Executive Summary

The National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program has initiated a public comment period open through June 16, 2025. While no specific lease areas have been proposed, the RFI includes all 27 OCS planning areas—including those currently protected from leasing, such as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Though Monterey Bay remains protected under a 2008 presidential order, the inclusion of currently off-limits areas signals a potential policy shift and warrants a clear and unified response from California communities. The County should oppose any offshore oil and gas development and advocate for the continued protection of vital marine ecosystems.

Discussion

Historical Context: Widespread Opposition to Offshore Oil Drilling

The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and the 2015 Refugio pipeline rupture caused devastating ecological, recreational, and economic harm. These events galvanized public opposition to offshore oil drilling, particularly along the California coast. Santa Cruz County has often been at the forefront of these efforts. Notably, in the late 1970s, when the Carter Administration proposed opening new oil and gas leases, Santa Cruz—under the leadership of Supervisor Gary Patton—helped launch a coastwide community campaign that ultimately contributed to a national moratorium on offshore drilling.

Over the years, sustained public education and advocacy have built broad support for ocean protection. These efforts have led to the creation of federal marine sanctuaries, state marine reserves, and other protective designations. Alongside these protections, voters and elected officials have repeatedly acted to prohibit oil and gas development in coastal waters. Examples include:

- In 2014 and 2017, West Coast governors issued formal statements opposing the

inclusion of any offshore oil and gas lease sales.

- In May 2025, a coalition of 15 Democratic state attorney generals, including California's, filed suit against President Trump's declaration of a national energy emergency, which sought to fast-track oil and gas projects by bypassing environmental reviews.
- At least 65 California cities and counties, representing over 21 million residents—more than half the state's population—have taken formal action opposing new offshore fossil fuel leasing.
- 27 of these jurisdictions, including Santa Cruz County, have enacted measures prohibiting onshore support facilities for offshore drilling without voter approval. Santa Cruz County voters passed such a measure in 1985 with 82% support.

These actions reflect not only the leadership of state and local governments but also the consistent will of the people. A 2022 poll by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation found that 80% of Americans support protecting marine areas with environmental, cultural, or educational significance.

Recent Federal Action on Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration

Section 388 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 prohibits oil and gas leasing in areas protected by a moratorium, including federally designated marine sanctuaries. Despite this, the Trump Administration is attempting to reopen federal waters for offshore oil and gas development. The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has issued a Request for Information (RFI) that includes areas adjacent to or within marine sanctuaries such as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS). Spanning 6,094 square miles, the MBNMS protects iconic ecosystems including the Monterey Canyon and kelp forests—critical habitats for species like the California sea otter.

While the RFI does not propose specific lease sales, it seeks public input on all Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) areas, including currently off-limits regions like the MBNMS. By signaling that such protected areas may be reconsidered for leasing, the RFI departs from long-standing practice and threatens to erode hard-won environmental protections.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Offshore drilling poses significant risks to marine life, increases the likelihood of oil spills, and undermines California's climate goals and transition to renewable energy. Oceans play a vital role in regulating climate, producing oxygen, and sustaining global biodiversity. Marine sanctuaries like the MBNMS are essential for conservation, public education, and climate resilience.

The proposed 11th OCS Leasing Program, as currently outlined, threatens the future of

our coastal ecosystems, local economies, and climate leadership. The inclusion of protected areas in the planning process is deeply concerning.

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors submit public comments to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management:

- Opposing any new offshore oil and gas development in California;
- Defending the integrity of marine sanctuaries from rollback efforts; and
- Affirming strong support for transitioning away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable energy alternatives.

Financial Impact

The recommended actions do not have a financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Sustainable Environment

Submitted By:

Justin Cummings, Third District Supervisor and Kimberly De Serpa, Second District Supervisor

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.