

Chairman Rahall, Ranking Member Hastings, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you.

Today, you are taking up the issue of drilling on the outer continental shelf (OCS), as the moratorium was allowed to expire in September of last year. I would first like to voice my opinion strongly in favor of reinstating the moratorium. I will then expand on several other corollary issues that this drilling debate has raised. The state waters of my district, California's 17th, are entirely protected by the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and thus my presence here today is not motivated by my desire to protect my own coastline from fossil fuel exploitation. Rather, I am here to advocate on behalf the oceans: perhaps the greatest natural resource on earth and one which we all share.

First, on the issue of expanded drilling operations in the OCS, it is clear that these activities are not without risk. The OCS fossil fuel extraction process offers numerous opportunities for environmental risk, from exploration, to extraction, to transport. True, the oil spilled from these sources represents a small contribution to the total oil spilled into the oceans, but that fact does not negate its impacts. My own district on California's central coast may not be subjected to drilling, but we are not immune from the effects of oil exploitation. A recent small spill within San Francisco Bay injured birds from my district and in some cases prevented our fishermen from working their normal waters. On a larger scale, the 1969 spill from Platform A in Santa Barbara is precisely the type of environmental disaster that must be prevented. A repeat of this event would represent an enormous insult to coastal economies, industries and ecosystems. Granted, such spills are rare, but the potential threat they pose is intolerable. The proposed minimal benefits of new drilling operations do not outweigh the potential risks.

Further, the debate on fossil fuel extraction seems almost archaic given our understanding of the adverse effects of their consumption on our atmosphere. Granted, our economy is still oil-addicted, but if alternative, renewable energy sources received the same level of investment as fossil-fuel based sources, surely we could make more substantial strides in weaning our oil dependency? If the U.S. goal of reducing carbon emissions is to be realized, we might as well acquaint ourselves with the idea that drilling is not the solution, especially when clean, renewable energy sources are within our grasp. Re-opening the OCS for fossil fuel exploitation is simply illogical given present concerns over the use of fossil fuels and emission reduction targets.

There was concern in last week's hearing that decreasing US fossil fuel exploitation would result in increased foreign fossil fuel exploitation with an associated greater environmental cost. I disagree with this logic for two reasons. First, as the number one energy consuming nation, if the US can reduce its own demand, there will be less production incentive in other nations. Second, as a global leader, US progress towards independence from non-renewable fuels will certainly have a positive, long term, global effect.

As you know, I have long been an advocate for ocean conservation. I am not alone in holding the view that healthy oceans mean healthy economies and healthy people. The debate we are having at present brings to the forefront several other key issues that warrant further discussion: marine spatial planning and ocean conservation funding.

Unlike terrestrial regions opened for development, there is no comprehensive spatial planning system for the oceans. This is problematic because, like terrestrial regions, the oceans are comprised by a staggering diversity of different habitats and resources. It is imperative that a system is developed whereby the layout of these different resources can be assessed and their uses coordinated. The OCS is host to many regions, some of which will be ideally suited for fishing, or aquaculture, or wind farming, or wave energy generation. There will be other regions that are unique or critical habitats, which must be conserved. In some cases, these multiple uses can occur simultaneously, but in other cases, they are mutually exclusive. A process must be put in place to first assess and then allocate areas of the OCS so that the ocean, industries and economies all benefit.

This process is termed marine spatial planning and should begin with a comprehensive review of resources in the OCS conducted in coordination by appropriate state and federal agencies. Then, determinations can be made based on the best available science as to which resources can be utilized in which places. I believe that we are on the brink of large-scale development of alternative, renewable energy resources, and it is essential that this development occurs in the most scientific, orderly and effective way possible.

Finally, in their assessments of the state of ocean policy in the U.S., both the Pew Ocean Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy underscored the urgent need for a permanent ocean conservation trust fund. In its 2006 Ocean Policy Report Card, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative gave the U.S. an F in the “new funding for ocean policy and programs” category. In 2007, the grade was a D+. Clearly, more effort and investment is necessary to address this deficiency.

Given the expected utilization of OCS resources for renewable energy and other uses, I would urge you to consider the following fact: the oceans are a common resource, they belong to everyone. It is incumbent upon current OCS users, who are extracting billions in revenues from the oceans, as well as future users, to reinvest a portion of their revenue back into its source, the oceans themselves. I have personally proposed the creation of such an Ocean Trust fund in my bill, HR21, which has been introduced and referred to your committee. This fund would satisfy the recommendations of the Ocean Commissions. Reinvestment of OCS resource revenue into this fund would represent a durable source of funding for state and federal ocean conservation programs and is a logical reinvestment of revenues generated from the ocean back to the ocean. This fund would support the focused efforts of coastal states, territories and agencies in addressing the critical ocean and coastal science, management and protection needs of our nation and is essential to implement the many other recommendations of the national ocean commissions.

For too long, we have reaped the fullness of the oceans' bounty. This bounty, however, is neither inexhaustible nor unlimited and we cannot expect to take forever without giving back. I urge you to move to reinstate the moratorium on drilling lease expansion. I further urge you to consider any resource exploitation activities conducted in the oceans over the Outer Continental Shelf as conditional on both the merits of good planning and the establishment of an ocean trust fund and reinvestment in it.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you today.