



U.S. Department of the Interior

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar's Statement on Offshore Energy Strategy Tuesday, February 10, 2009 Main Interior Building, Washington DC

Thank you all for joining me today.

Today, I am once again taking steps to change the way the Interior Department does business so that we can fulfill President Obama's commitment to a government that is open and inclusive and that makes decisions based on sound science and the public interest.

On Friday, January 16, its last business day in office, the Bush Administration proposed a new five year plan for offshore oil and gas leasing. It was actually published in the Federal Register on January 21, the day after the new Administration took office.

The current five year plan is in effect between 2007 and 2012. Under the regular process, a new plan for oil and gas development would have been proposed by 2012. However, the Bush Administration's midnight action accelerated by two years the regular process for creating a new plan for the outer continental shelf. It opened up the possibility for oil and gas leasing along the entire eastern seaboard, portions of offshore California, and the far eastern Gulf of Mexico - with almost no consideration of state, industry, and community input and, in the case of the Atlantic coast, with very limited information about the nature of offshore resources.

Despite the enormous sweep of the proposal to open up as many as 300 million acres to new offshore oil and gas leasing, the Bush Administration's notice called for the completion of scoping meetings and public hearings on the new OCS plan by March 23 – less than 45 days from today.

It was a headlong rush of the worst kind. It was a process rigged to force hurried decisions based on bad information. It was a process tilted toward the usual energy players while renewable energy companies and the interests of American consumers and taxpayers were overlooked.

But the time for reform has arrived.

To those of you from the oil and gas industry, I pledge that you will have a seat at the table in this Administration. I assure you that you will play an important role in helping us meet our nation's energy needs.

But President Obama and I believe that we need to be honest about our energy future. A "drill only" approach – onshore or offshore – is not enough.

We need a new, comprehensive energy plan that takes us to the new energy frontier and secures our energy independence. We must embrace President Obama's vision of energy independence for the sake of our national, economic, and environmental security.

Today, I am announcing a new way forward for our offshore energy resources. It will restore order to a broken process, so that we can make decisions about the OCS based on sound information.

First, I am adding 180 days to the time period for public comment.

Second, I am directing MMS and USGS to assemble a report, within 45 days from today, of all the information we have about our offshore resources.

Third, in the thirty days that follow the report, I will hold four regional meetings around the country to gather the best ideas for how we move forward.

Fourth, I am committed to issuing a final rulemaking on offshore renewable energy resources in the next few months.

I want to spend a little more time on each of these steps.

1. An Added 180 Day Comment Period on OCS Plan

We must establish an orderly process that allows us to make wise decisions based on sound information. Therefore, we need to set aside the Bush Administration's midnight timetable for its OCS drilling plan and create our own timeline.

March 23rd – the deadline for public comment that the Bush Administration established - by no means provides enough time for public review or for wise decisions concerning the future of the outer continental shelf.

I am therefore extending the public comment period on the OCS draft proposed plan by 180 days.

This additional time will give states, stakeholders, and affected communities the opportunity to provide input on the future of our offshore areas. The additional time will allow us to restore an orderly process to our offshore energy planning.

2. USGS and MMS Report on Offshore Resources Required Within 45 Days

We will begin this orderly process by gathering better information about what resources may be available in the offshore areas we are examining.

In the biggest area that the Bush Administration's draft OCS plan proposes for oil and gas drilling - the Atlantic seaboard, from Maine to Florida - our data on available resources is very thin, and what little we have is twenty to thirty years old.

We shouldn't make decisions to sell off taxpayer resources based on old information.

We need to shine light on the path ahead.

So, today I am directing the United States Geological Survey, the Minerals Management Service, and other departmental scientists to assemble all the information we have about our offshore resources – conventional and renewable – along with information we have about potential impacts.

I am directing our scientists to provide me with that report within 45 days.

3. Public and Stakeholder Input

Third, based on that report, we will determine in what areas we need more information and we will create a plan for gathering that information.

That is no easy task: the Department of the Interior oversees 1.7 billion offshore acres – an area roughly three fourths of the size of the entire United States.

To gather the best ideas for how we move forward, I will convene four regional meetings in the thirty days after MMS and USGS publish their report.

I will host one meeting in Alaska, one on the Pacific Coast, one on the Atlantic Coast, and one on the Gulf Coast.

I will be asking all interested parties – including all of the stakeholders in this room – a simple question: what are your recommendations on how we define the future of the OCS through appropriate changes in the 5 year plan?

I expect that many of you will have good ideas for doing it affordably and efficiently that we should consider.

4. Offshore Renewable Energy Rulemaking

Fourth, I intend to do what the Bush Administration refused to do: build a framework for offshore renewable energy development, so that we incorporate the great potential for wind, wave, and ocean current energy into our offshore energy strategy.

The Bush Administration was so intent on opening new areas for oil and gas offshore that it torpedoed offshore renewable energy efforts.

In the Senate, I helped craft and pass the Energy Policy Act of 2005. That bill, which President Bush signed on August 8, 2005, required the Department of the Interior to move quickly and issue, within 9 months, rules and regulations to guide the development of offshore energy resources like wind, wave, and tidal power.

Yet it took three years for the Bush Administration to prepare a *proposed* rule for offshore renewable energy development. They left office without putting *any* final regulations in place because it was not their priority, notwithstanding the requirement of the law.

For them, it was oil and gas or nothing.

I intend to issue a final rulemaking for offshore renewables in the coming months, so that potential developers know the rules of the road.

This rulemaking will allow us to move from the “oil and gas only” approach of the previous Administration to the comprehensive energy plan that we need.

We will move, step by step:

- to assemble the information we have,
- to determine how we gather the information we do not have,
- to lay the groundwork for our wind, wave, and tidal power offshore,
- to get the input of states and affected communities,
- to build a comprehensive energy plan,
- and to make wise decisions on behalf of the American people and American taxpayers.

We are changing how this Department does business.

We are inviting everyone to the table.

We will give all good ideas fair consideration.

And as we move through this process, I believe we will find that our shared values for our oceans and offshore resources are greater than our differences.

These should not be partisan issues, but issues that we approach with balance and careful planning.

With that, I would be happy to take your questions.

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