

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Offshore fracking threatens California's coastal treasures: Guest commentary

### OPINION

By Miyoko Sakashita

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Below the surfers and the kayakers, beneath waters rich with blue whales and leatherback sea turtles, something disturbing is happening in California's oceans.

Just off our coast, from Seal Beach to the Santa Barbara Channel, petroleum companies are fracking offshore wells, blasting huge amounts of water mixed with dangerous chemicals into the earth at pressures high enough to crack geological formations beneath the ocean floor.

Oil companies, it turns out, have fracked hundreds of times in recent years in California's delicate coastal ecosystems. There's been almost no oversight of this dangerous practice by federal and state officials, who can't even say exactly where or how often fracking has been used off our coast.

Offshore fracking threatens to pollute our ocean with hazardous chemicals. And because of the dangerously high pressures involved, fracking also increases the risk of a catastrophic accident like the 1969 oil spill that contaminated beaches from Santa Barbara to Ventura County.

But now the California Coastal Commission has an opportunity to ratchet down the risks.

This state agency, which is charged with protecting our precious coastal environment, will consider offshore fracking's dangers at upcoming public meetings in Long Beach and Santa Barbara.

To safeguard our wildlife and coastal communities, the commission should halt fracking in state waters and push federal authorities to tighten regulation in federal waters.

The need for quick and decisive action gets clearer by the day. Media investigations have uncovered more and more instances of offshore fracking. My organization recently discovered four new frack jobs off of Long Beach in December.

We're also learning more and more about the chemicals at issue. Oil industry documents reveal that fracking in California waters has routinely employed chemicals that are suspected ecological hazards, as well as 2-Butoxyethanol and other cancer-causing substances.

The chemical X-Cide, used in at least 12 recent offshore frack jobs in state waters, is classified as a hazardous substance by the federal agency that manages cleanup at Superfund sites.

Disturbing questions are emerging about where such dangerous substances end up. Fracking fluid, after all, doesn't stay down a well. Much of it comes back up, mingled with produced water from beneath the earth.

About half the oil platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel discharge some or all of their wastewater into the sea. And the oil industry has federal permission to dump more than 9 billion gallons of wastewater directly into California's ocean each year.

Such wastewater may contain chemicals injected into the well, along with toxins gathered from the subsurface environment. Imagine the havoc fracking pollution could cause in the wildlife-rich Santa Barbara Channel, which hosts the world's densest summer congregation of blue whales.

The Environmental Protection Agency has finally announced plans to require companies to report the toxic fracking chemicals they're discharging into this fragile ecosystem — but this self-reporting system depends on oil companies being honest and transparent.

Meanwhile, at the state level, weak new fracking regulations recently put forward by California oil and gas officials do little to make the process safer on land, and they contain no provisions specific to offshore operations.

That's why the Coastal Commission must tackle this problem. And because the risks intrinsic to fracking can't be eliminated, a complete halt to fracking is the best way to protect human health and the environment.

But at a minimum, the commission — charged with protecting coastal resources — should use its authority to regulate the practice by, for example, requiring companies fracking in state waters to obtain a coastal development permit.

We must stop ignoring the dangerous problem building beneath one of California's greatest natural treasures — our magnificent ocean. It's time for the Coastal Commission to take bold action to protect our marine wildlife, our beautiful beaches, and our coastal communities from offshore fracking.

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