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Feds OK fracking off the California coast

by Rob Nikolewski
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An environmental assessment from two federal agencies has determined that fracking off the coast of California has no significant impact, lifting a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing that was instituted earlier this year.

“The comprehensive analysis shows that these practices, conducted according to permit requirements, have minimal impact,” Abigail Ross Hopper, director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, said Friday in a statement.

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement joined in the assessment, which analyzed well stimulation treatments on 23 oil and gas platforms off California’s coast between 1982 and 2014.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the environmental group that filed a lawsuit that resulted in the moratorium, said Friday that it is considering filing another suit in light of the agencies’ decision.

“Offshore fracking is just an incredibly dangerous activity and we certainly wish the federal government was taking stronger actions to protect our oceans and our coast,” said Miyoko Sakashita, director of the center’s oceans program.

The environmental assessment looked at fracking — in which high-pressured fluids are pumped into a well to break through rock formations to loosen oil and gas — as well as effects from wastewater that is disposed in the process.

Companies still need to go through the federal application and permitting processes to frack at individual sites.

Industry officials welcomed the Friday announcement.

“Offshore energy is a vital source of jobs and revenue for both California and the U.S., and the sooner operations offshore California can resume the better,” Randall Luthi, president of the National Ocean Industries Assn., said in a statement, calling the lawsuit that led to the assessment “hyperbole” from “extreme environmental groups.”

The agencies’ assessment looked into oil and gas platforms on the Outer Continental Shelf, in federal waters.

Waters within three miles of California’s coast are subject to state rules, which Sakashita said are stricter.