

## California Back in Big Oil's Crosshairs as Feds Quietly OK Offshore Fracking

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Two federal agencies on Friday quietly finalized two reports, set for release next week, that found offshore fracking in California poses no “significant” risk to the environment—paving the way for oil and gas companies to resume the controversial extraction method in the Santa Barbara Channel and imperiling the region’s wildlife in the process, opponents said.

The announcement Friday from the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (OEM) and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement puts an end to a court-ordered ban on offshore fracking in federal waters off the coast of California. The moratorium was put into place in January as part of a settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), which challenged the Obama administration’s ‘rubber-stamping’ of offshore drilling activity without an environmental review.



Environmental activists warned on Friday that kicking off a new round of drilling in the area puts wildlife at risk from chemical-laden wastewater and said they would be willing to file another lawsuit to keep it from happening.

“The Obama administration is once again putting California’s beautiful coast in the oil industry’s crosshairs,” said Miyoko Sakashita, director of CBD’s Oceans program. “Our beaches and wildlife face a renewed threat from fracking chemicals and oil spills. New legal action may be the only way to get federal officials to do their jobs and protect our ocean from offshore fracking.”

Wenonah Hauter, executive director of the environmental advocacy group Food & Water Watch, criticized President Barack Obama for “doubling down on fracking, instead of

providing climate leadership and protecting our communities and our environment.”

“This move paves the way for offshore fracking permits that were previously frozen and the dumping of toxic wastewater directly into the Pacific Ocean where Californians swim, fish, and surf,” Hauter said.

The news comes a year after a pipeline rupture in Santa Barbara sent tens of thousands of gallons of crude spilling onto public beaches and into the Pacific Ocean. The operator of the pipeline, Plains All American, has a history of wreaking environmental havoc throughout Southern California and elsewhere.

And it also follows the recent signing of the historic deal reached in Paris last December to keep global temperature rise under 2°C, a goal that climate advocates say can only be reached by keeping fossil fuels in the ground and investing in renewal energy.

“It’s clear that Americans want an inspiring new vision for our energy system,” Hauter said. “The president continues to indicate that he is not the person to fulfill that vision. It’s a vision that can only be achieved by keeping fossil fuels in the ground and moving swiftly to a system driven by energy efficiency and renewables.”