

# Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean Environmental Impact Statement



February 2010

Newsletter #1

*This is the first in a series of newsletters concerning the Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean Environmental Impact Statement. It is being mailed to Federal, state, and local agencies; elected and appointed officials; Alaska Native groups; other interested organizations; and individual citizens to inform people about the EIS project and to solicit comments. This and subsequent newsletters can be found on the project website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.*

## Scoping Notice

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The project will analyze the impacts of issuing marine mammal Incidental Take Authorizations, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

The term “take” under the MMPA means “to harass, hunt, capture, kill or collect, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, kill or collect.” The MMPA defines “harassment” as:

*“any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which:*

- (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild; or*
- (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.”*

NMFS issues these authorizations to the oil and gas industry during offshore exploration activities (primarily seismic surveys and exploratory drilling). In order to issue authorizations, NMFS must determine that the taking:

- will have no more than a negligible impact on the species or stock(s)
- will not have an adverse impact that cannot be mitigated regarding the availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses (where relevant)
- the permissible methods of taking and requirements pertaining to the mitigation, monitoring, and reporting of such takings are identified.

This EIS will consider activities in Federal and state waters of the U.S. Beaufort and Chukchi Seas.

***The scoping period for the Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean EIS begins February 8, 2010 and ends April 9, 2010.***

Scoping is a formal process that requires the lead agency to reach out to all interested parties early in the development of an EIS. The intent is to identify areas of concern associated with the proposed action that should be fully addressed in the EIS, including cumulative impacts, and ask for guidance on alternatives to the proposed action that should be considered. The scoping process provides opportunities for people potentially affected by the proposed action to express their views and concerns, and offer suggestions.

The purposes of this newsletter are to:

- Provide background information on the proposed action to issue incidental take authorizations.
- Provide an overview of the EIS process, and invite you to participate!

### ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NMFS is serving as the lead agency for this EIS. The U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) joins the effort as a cooperating agency. The EIS will analyze the environmental impacts to the physical, biological, and social resources from seismic activities and exploratory drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas.

Previous issues and concerns associated with oil and gas related activities in the Arctic marine environment have been documented by the scientific community, government publications, at scientific symposia, through the scoping and public hearings/comments, and other National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses. In addition, public testimony and traditional knowledge from Alaska Natives has provided valuable information about the potential impacts to marine mammals and on subsistence hunting of such species from seismic surveying and drilling operations. This EIS will build upon these efforts.

The EIS will address long-term cumulative effects, consider a reasonable range of alternatives consistent with NMFS’ legal mandates, and analyze the range of practical mitigation and monitoring measures for protecting marine mammals and the availability of marine mammals for subsistence uses.

## PROJECT HISTORY

In 2006, the MMS prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for Arctic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) seismic surveys. Afterwards, in accord with the MMPA, NMFS conducted its own Environmental Assessments and issued annual Incidental Harassment Authorizations to oil and gas companies for the taking of marine mammals during seismic surveys.

In 2007, the MMS began a Draft Programmatic EIS (DPEIS). This project assessed the impacts of MMS' issuance of permits and authorizations under the OCS Lands Act for seismic surveys in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas near Alaska, and NMFS' authorizations to incidentally harass marine mammals while conducting those surveys. The intent of the DPEIS was to try to address the potential effects of concurrent offshore exploration activities and the potential for an increase in such activities.

The DPEIS was halted because new information became available, such as scientific study results and changes in projections of levels of offshore activity. This new information altered the scope of the study, range of possible alternatives, and analyses. This led to the need for a new NEPA process, and the start of the **Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean EIS**.



*Beluga whale pod (Source: National Marine Mammal Laboratory)*

## PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The EIS will identify potential impacts that seismic surveys and exploratory drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas could have on the physical, biological, and social environments. Methods to mitigate impacts will also be considered. In addition, the EIS will contain an analysis of secondary and cumulative effects of the alternatives.

As the lead agency, NMFS is responsible for the development of the EIS, in cooperation with the MMS.

The process for the Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean EIS is summarized in ten broad steps:



## OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

All interested parties are invited to participate in the EIS process. This includes members of the general public, Alaska Native organizations, local and regional interest groups, the oil and gas industry, and state and Federal agencies are encouraged to participate. Objectives of the public involvement process include:

- Share information about NEPA requirements
- Obtain and analyze comments and suggestions from interested parties that will help determine issues and concerns
- Use comments and suggestions to help define a reasonable range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS, and to develop suitable mitigation and monitoring measures
- Incorporate relevant issues in the analysis process
- Respond to public comments and incorporate public comments into the document

## HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE EIS?

Your comments are very important to us, particularly at this early stage in the project. There are several ways to participate in the EIS process. In February and March, 2010 there will be public scoping meetings in several communities. Comments can be provided in-person at the meeting locations below:

### Scoping Meetings

Date	Time	Location
February 18	6:00-8:00pm	Kotzebue – Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly Chambers
February 19	5:00-7:00pm	Point Hope Community Center
February 22	7:00-9:00pm	Point Lay Community Center
March 9	7:00-9:00pm	Wainwright Community Center
March 10	7:30-9:30pm	Barrow – Inupiat Heritage Center
March 11	7:00-9:00pm	Nuiqsut Community Center
March 12	6:30-8:30pm	Kaktovik Community Center
March 23	7:00-9:00pm	Anchorage – Egan Center

To request accommodation of a disability or special need at a public meeting (e.g., sign language interpreter), please contact Sheyna Wisdom, seven (7) days prior to the meeting, via:

Fax: (907) 562-1297

Telephone: (907) 562-3366 or (800) 909-6787

Email: [sheyne\\_wisdom@urscorp.com](mailto:sheyne_wisdom@urscorp.com)

NMFS will make a reasonable effort to provide effective accommodations for all participants.

### OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Public involvement will continue throughout the EIS process. The goal is to receive public and agency comments, identify key issues of concern, and improve analysis. Additional newsletters will be distributed to provide updates.

Once the Draft EIS is complete, the document will be released to the public for an estimated review period of 45 days. During the review period, NMFS will conduct public hearings to accept comments on the Draft EIS. Public testimony, written comments, and electronic comments will be accepted during the review period. Future newsletters will provide information on how you can receive a copy of the Draft EIS, schedule public hearings, and opportunities for comment.

Visit the project website for on-going information updates: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>. We are all interested in ensuring that offshore development in the Arctic is conducted in a safe manner, and minimizes adverse impacts to stocks of marine mammals and their availability for subsistence harvest.

## HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

In addition to attending scoping meetings and providing verbal comments, there are several ways to submit written comments:

- Bring them to a scoping meeting
- Use the comment form on the project website, <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>
- Email us at [arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov)
- Fax comments to: (301) 713-0376
- Mail comments to:  
Mr. P. Michael Payne  
Chief – Permits, Conservation & Education Division  
Office of Protected Resources, NMFS  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20190-3225

Let us know what aspects of this EIS process are important to you!

*Written scoping comments can be submitted until April 9, 2010.*

Comments received after this time will be considered, but will not be included in the scoping report. Comments will be reviewed and incorporated into the Draft EIS. A summary of scoping comments will be provided in the next newsletter.

Mr. P. Michael Payne  
Chief – Permits, Conservation & Education Division  
Office of Protected Resources, NMFS  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20190-3225

Place a  
First Class  
Postage  
Stamp Here

Your input is an important element in the scoping phase of this EIS. To help us consider your views and suggestions, please submit your comments to the EIS team. If you wish to send your comments by mail, write them down on this sheet and mail to our address, which is preprinted on the back of this page. Please write legibly (printing is appreciated) and you may attach additional sheets if necessary. You can also submit comments by email to [arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov) or through the comment section of the website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.

**Name (PLEASE PRINT):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State, Zip Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone (Optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail (Optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

- Please retain or add my name to the project mailing list. I wish to receive information in the mail.
- Please add my name and e-mail address to the list. I wish to receive information by electronic mail.

**COMMENTS:**

*Note: To mail, fold page in thirds so that the address on the back of this sheet shows.  
Tape shut and affix a standard first class postage stamp. **Thank you for your participation!***

---

