

## **Update: Draft Programmatic EIS concerning Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean**

In December 2011, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), in cooperation with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), issued a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) concerning Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean. The Draft EIS analyzes the potential impacts of Geological and Geophysical (G&G) surveys and ancillary activities, as well as exploratory drilling activities in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, and presents a range of management alternatives to assist BOEM and NOAA Fisheries in carrying out their statutory responsibilities to permit these activities and to authorize the incidental take of marine mammals from the conduct of these activities, respectively. Following public meetings in Anchorage and across the North Slope, the comment period on the Draft EIS closed on February 28, 2012.

While evaluation of written comments and public input is ongoing, NOAA Fisheries and BOEM have concluded that, consistent with comments on the Draft EIS as well as both agencies' ongoing review, the Final Programmatic EIS (Final EIS) would benefit from the inclusion of additional alternatives for analysis that cover a broader range of potential levels of exploratory drilling – including scenarios in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas that are consistent with the levels of activity that oil and gas companies have indicated may be pursued in the region within the coming years. The alternatives will be based upon the agencies' analysis of additional information, including the comments and information submitted by stakeholders. Incorporating these alternatives is intended to facilitate consideration of a broader range of possible future offshore activity, thus addressing comments on the Draft EIS and extending the applicability of the document. Revisions to the document will also incorporate comments received from the public regarding other issues, such as analysis of potential mitigation measures.

Given the extent of new analysis relative to the Draft EIS, NOAA Fisheries and BOEM intend to release a Notice of Intent to publish a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental Draft EIS). The Supplemental Draft EIS will be available for public comment before the document is finalized. NOAA Fisheries and BOEM intend to complete the Final EIS by early 2014. Until the Final EIS is complete, NEPA analysis of our respective actions will need to be completed with Environmental Assessments (provided a Finding of No Significant Impact can be made), as was done for the 2012 season.