

Effects of Arctic Oil and Gas Activities Marine Mammals

NOAA, USA, is seeking comments on a supplemental draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for oil and gas activities in the Arctic Ocean. The draft, developed in collaboration with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), includes analysis of how a broader range of potential offshore oil and gas activities could affect the environment, with a specific focus on marine mammals and the Alaska Native communities that depend on the animals for food and cultural traditions.

The environmental review addresses potential effects from both exploratory drilling and geological and geophysical (G&G) surveys, such as seismic surveys, in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. After releasing the initial draft environmental impact statement for public comment in December 2011, NOAA and BOEM broadened the scope of analysis in light of comments from stakeholders. The initial EIS analysed the effects of up to two exploratory drilling programmes per year in both the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. The supplemental draft EIS analyses the effects of up to four drilling programmes per year in each area. The revised draft also expands discussion of mitigation measures designed to reduce the effects of offshore oil and gas activities on marine mammals and marine mammal subsistence users.

Effects of sound

The supplemental draft EIS looks at measures NOAA could adopt when issuing incidental take authorisations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The act provides for the incidental and unintentional take of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens, if these actions will have only a negligible effect on the species and will not reduce the availability of the marine mammals to the Alaska natives who rely on them. As part of its supplemental analysis, NOAA examined various measures to minimise potential harmful effects from sound, accidental discharge of pollutants including oil, and the presence of vessels that will be part of these oil and gas operations, such as closing areas to exploration during whale migration and feeding and during traditional whale and seal hunts.

The [supplemental draft](#), which builds on the earlier draft EIS, is available for comment for 60 days, until Tuesday 28 May 2013. NOAA will also host a series of public meetings during the week of 8 April 2013, to provide additional opportunities for comment.

Public comments can be submitted via the [Federal eRulemaking Portal](#) starting Friday, 29 March 2013 or by visiting the project page on the [Office of Protected Resources](#) website.

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