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MINERALS MANAGEMENT SERVICE COMMENTS ON EFFECTS OF LIFTING OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF MORATORIA

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) will continue to observe the current moratorium on leasing in areas offshore the United States, despite a Congressional vote removing the prohibition, MMS officials announced today.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior voted today to remove moratoria provisions from the Interior Appropriations Act.

"The Minerals Management Service has been working with affected parties to resolve longstanding conflicts over OCS natural gas and oil leasing and development. We have made great strides in moving toward consensus concerning the development of known reserves of natural gas and oil in some of the most contentious areas of the OCS," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman.

"I believe that the current moratoria has provided the affected parties with a safety net that enabled the consensus-building process to move forward. We believe it is critical for the Nation's offshore development plans to be in sync with local communities and states and not to get ahead of the public will," she declared.

No offshore leasing is planned in the areas previously under moratoria through June 1997, when the current 5-Year Program for OCS Oil and Gas Leasing expires. The Department has begun preparation of the next 5-Year Program for July 1997 through June 2002, and next month will be releasing its draft proposed plan for public comment. "That plan will define this Administration's movement away from the conflict we inherited towards consensus, which is based on sound science and input from affected parties," she said.

MMS is the federal agency that manages the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore

federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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