

February 3, 2012

Tommy P. Beaudreau, Director
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
U.S. Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Beaudreau:

The Scientific Committee (SC) met last year in Hyannis, MA on May 17-19 and discussed the Environmental Studies Program (ESP) with a full complement of staff from headquarters and each of the regions. Of the 15 members appointed to the Committee, 10 members were in attendance for the meeting. We received excellent updates on programs from each region.

This Committee is particularly pleased to observe increases in the Environmental Studies Program (ESP) budget over past years, but we believe the budget needs to be further increased in light of the Bureau's expanded geographic scope of the leasing program and expanded scientific assessment required for development of renewable energy in the OCS. The mission of the agency has increased substantially during the past few years, with increased interest in exploring new areas in Alaska and new renewable energy projects in the Atlantic and Pacific regions. We are particularly pleased to see new Bureau personnel, especially in the renewable energy program.

We have been very impressed with the responsiveness of the ESP in developing new research ideas for studies that the SC has requested and for including studies funded through the Coastal Marine Institute (CMI) in with the study plans for our information. We are also grateful for your efforts to bring together staff from FERC, NOAA and DOE at our May meeting to discuss Renewable Energy Federal Partnerships in response to our request. We found this to be a very productive and informative discussion. The SC also benefited greatly from the ESP efforts to provide presentations by other Department of the Interior (DOI) staff and the USFWS Regional Director to provide a comprehensive overview of issues pertinent to our meeting goals.

Based on our discussions with BOEM staff and your Chief Environmental Officer, Dr. Alan Thornhill, and in our scientific advisory role, we offer the following recommendations to BOEM and the DOI:

1. We would like to reinforce our recommendation from last year that the SC meet two times per year. Prior to 1999, the Committee had met two to three times a year. Beginning in 2000, the Committee has met only once a year (with the exception of special introductory meetings for new members in 2008 and now in 2012), and that meeting has been devoted to a review of proposed studies. With increased interest in the ESP and the quality of science being produced by BOEM, the Committee recommends expanding its role to two meetings per year. We recommend that one spring meeting to be devoted to discussing proposed

study plans and making recommendations as to individual studies and overall priorities of the ESP. The second meeting in the fall should focus on results of ongoing studies which will be discussed in the context of future ESP needs so that the Committee can offer advice to improve the continuity of the ESP and future Bureau needs.

2. The SC would also like to receive information on the results of the studies it has recommended. We recommend that members of the committee be encouraged to attend one or more Information Transfer Meetings (ITMs) each year, with BOEM providing travel funds when needed. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity to receive information and to interact with studies investigators, where updates and results of ongoing studies are presented. Although the SC is an unpaid advisory committee, a commitment of time and effort is shared because members believe in the mission of this Bureau and want to provide services to make the program more successful.
3. The SC has discussed the critical need for peer review of proposed studies and completed work, and the need to publish the results of these studies in peer reviewed journals. We would like to compliment BOEM on the increased focus on external review panels for larger programs that was outlined at the 2011 SC meeting. It is very important that the scientific community as a whole has the highest confidence in BOEM data, and the SC recommends that the Bureau develop a system for independent review of proposals, including an applicant's publication of prior results as part of the review of all proposals. Contactors should be required to publish their results as a condition of funding and archive data in an available form.
4. The SC noted the difficulty it has in reconciling projects reviewed in earlier years with those actually implemented by the Bureau. Specifically, we request that BOEM prepare a follow-up spreadsheet indicating which of the projects proposed in the previous two annual meetings were funded, their start date, expected finish date, spending per year, whether they were deferred in funding, and whether there is a current priority for the deferred studies to be considered for future funding. Programs that are funded without ever being presented to the committee could also be added as this occurs. Such a spreadsheet would enable the committee to study trends in resource allocation over time and identify projects that are falling behind schedule, which is a possible indication of inadequate resourcing. We feel that this tool will also aid the SC in tracking the continuity of the ESP particularly at times of SC membership transition.
5. The SC recommended that BOEM consider an organizational improvement in the Gulf of Mexico Region by moving the BOEM social scientists into the ESP offices. The Social Sciences Discipline Breakout Group (DBG) felt that this relocation could add greater coherence to these studies by increasing interaction between discipline scientists. The Social Sciences DBG also has concerns about adequate resources and staffing in the Gulf of Mexico Region for planning and

carrying out vital socio-economic impact studies related to the Macondo oil spill and its aftermath.

6. The SC has noted the probable increase in alternative energy focus in the Pacific Region and has recommended enlarging the scope of the ESP in this region, acknowledging that this will likely require increased staffing and budget for the Pacific Region.

The Committee reviewed 50 study plans from 4 Regions at its May 17 – 19 meeting, including reviews of Bureau needs and priorities for future studies in support of leasing. These were divided into 6 Interdisciplinary, 6 Social Science, 12 Physical Oceanography, and 26 Biology and Ecology projects presented, reviewed and prioritized. In some areas the DBGs of the SC felt that priorities for some required studies for leasing should be ranked higher than the positions set by the Regions, and this could pose problems if the ESP budget were insufficient to cover all anticipated studies. The SC wants to insure that these studies supporting a specific lease sale are set at a high enough priority to guarantee funding. The Scientific Committee has outlined the following guidelines for setting priorities for studies:

1. The study is required for leasing;
2. The study provides the best environmental information for the ESP.
3. The study fills important data gaps; and
4. The study will provide long-term continuity and assessment of environmental or anthropogenic change in response to BOEM regulated activities.

Our specific recommendations have been identified in the specific DBG reports that were presented as PowerPoint presentations to Bureau staff on Day 3 of the SC meeting. Copies of the breakout report presentation have been attached to his letter. Electronic copies are available at your request.

With regard to specific study areas, the SC has the following additional recommendations:

1. The SC would also like to express our support of ongoing efforts of the BOEM ESP to be connected to the emerging regional Coastal Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) efforts and to be involved in its development so that BOEM science can be integrated effectively. We feel that this collaboration further strengthens the need to develop an improved ESPIS system with improved viewer capabilities.
2. We would like to commend BOEM for their effective partnering with other federal agencies to accomplish shared research goals and to leverage program resources. Although it was mentioned in individual DBG reports, the SC would also like to encourage an increase in international collaborations, particularly with Mexico, Canada and Russia, to expand the scope and relevance of projects through similar pooling of international resources.

3. The SC recommends scaling the number of SC members in each discipline to expected future trends in the focus of proposed studies. Although it would increase the fragmentation of information delivered to all SC members, perhaps in years with heavily skewed proportions a larger discipline could be divided into two breakout sessions if enough SC members of that discipline were available at the meeting. This would provide more adequate time for presentation of the individual study profiles. We found in the Biology and Ecology DBG that 4 minutes of presentation and one minute of questions per profile did not provide sufficient depth of discussion for larger projects.

We would be happy to discuss these committee recommendations with you and other BOEM and Departmental personnel at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorrie Rea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Lorrie D. Rea
Vice Chair, BOEM OCS Scientific Committee
Wildlife Physiologist, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Alaska Department of Fish and Game