



Environmental Impact Statement Process

General Overview

The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) directs that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared for any major Federal activity having the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human, marine, and coastal environments. An EIS serves as an information document for government decisionmakers and the public. The purpose of an EIS is:

1. To help public officials make decisions that are based on an understanding of environmental consequences and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment;
2. To identify ways that environmental effects can be avoided or significantly reduced;
3. To prevent significant, avoidable effects to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when the governmental agency finds the changes to be feasible; and
4. To disclose to the public the environmental information and analyses upon which Federal decisions will be based.

The EIS describes the proposed activity and the natural and human environments, presents an analysis of potential adverse effects on these environments, describes potential mitigation measures to reduce adverse environmental effects, describes alternatives to the proposal, and presents a record of consultation and coordination with others during EIS preparation. The following text briefly describes the EIS process. The first step of the analysis is the identification of significant environmental and socioeconomic resources through the scoping process.

Scoping

Scoping is the process used to determine the appropriate content of an EIS. Scoping begins before any analysis of impacts is done, and it continues until the EIS is finished. Public participation is an integral part of scoping. The first scoping step is to announce to the public, by a *Federal Register* notice and press release, that an EIS will be prepared and to ask for comments about what should be included. Typically, the lead Federal agency holds one or more public meetings in communities that might be affected by the proposed activities. The purpose of soliciting input is to properly identify as many relevant issues, alternatives, mitigation measures, and analytical tools as possible so they can be incorporated into the EIS. The scoping comments assist in determining the breadth and depth of the analysis.

Getting input from as many affected and interested parties as possible is an important part of preparing an EIS. This usually includes:

- Citizens who live, work, or recreate in the area where OCS-related activity may occur;
- Public interest groups and native communities that have concerns about possible impacts to environmental, social, or economic resources;
- Federal, State, and local government agencies that have responsibilities for managing public resources or services;
- Oil industry and oil industry support businesses that might conduct oil and gas development activities;
- Scientists and other technical experts with knowledge of the area's natural resources and the possible impacts of oil and gas development.

An important objective of scoping is to identify specific elements of the environment that might be affected if the proposal is carried out. For OCS activities, environmental concerns that commonly arise include:

- Impacts to air quality;
- Ecological concerns such as the possible impacts of oil and gas activities on marine mammals, birds, fish and shellfish, and the natural habitats that support these resources;
- Sociological concerns such as development-related changes in population or demands for public transportation, education, or health care services. Other social factors involved may include possible changes in the cultural, religious, or recreational traditions of affected communities;
- Economic concerns often center about marine-related employment like commercial fishing and tourism.

Based on the information received during the initial scoping effort and other information, such as the location of sensitive natural resources, estimates of oil and gas resources, or projected oil and gas activity, alternatives to the proposal are identified that might reduce possible impacts. In addition, any reasonable measures suggested to mitigate possible impacts are considered for analysis in the EIS.

Analytical Scenarios

Scenarios for proposed OCS oil and gas delineation drilling activity were developed by MMS based on proposals submitted by industry. The EIS identifies and assesses potential impacts and mitigation measures associated with the proposals. Two cumulative analyses are included in the draft EIS. The cumulative analysis most directly associated with the delineation drilling proposals covers other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities in the area of proposed exploration drilling. This analysis covers 2002-2006. The EIS also includes a discussion of potential impacts associated with the build-out of production facilities as part of the cumulative analysis. This second cumulative impact analysis, covering 2002-2030, was developed in response to requests received from the Governor of California and the Chair of the California Coastal Commission in 1999. If operators decide to pursue future development of the subject leases subsequent to the proposed delineation drilling, detailed Development and Production Plans (DPP's) will be prepared by operators and submitted to the MMS. The DPP's would be subjected to separate NEPA analyses.

Impact Analysis

The EIS analyzes the particular environmental concerns identified through scoping. A separate analysis is prepared for the proposal and each alternative. The objective of the analysis is to estimate the nature, severity, and duration of impacts that might occur and to compare the impacts of the proposal and alternatives. Numerous technical aids are used in making the assessment including ecological and socioeconomic studies sponsored by MMS and others and computer models that simulate the movements of accidental oil spills or air emissions from operations.

Draft EIS and Public Review

The draft EIS is made available to the public for review and comment. The availability of the draft EIS is announced in a *Federal Register* notice and in press releases. Copies of the document are made available to the public through individual mailings and through repositories such as [public libraries](#). The public may either comment in writing, by email, or by making oral comments at a public hearing held in the region by the agency. [A table of contents for the Adobe pdf files is available.](#)

Final EIS

The principal concern in developing the final EIS is to address public comments on the draft EIS in a responsive fashion. After the comments are reviewed, the document is revised to correct technical errors and to add any relevant new information that became available since the draft EIS was published. On occasion, a new alternative or mitigation measure will be added and evaluated. A summary of the comments received on the draft EIS and responses to those comments is also included in the document. Availability of the final EIS is announced in a *Federal Register* notice and press release.