

House subcommittee holds hearing on offshore energy policies at BOEM and BSEE

March 6, 2019

On March 6, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing to discuss the policies and priorities of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Walter Cruickshank, acting director of BOEM, and Doug Morris, chief at the Office of Offshore Regulatory Programs at BSEE, both spoke on the progress that their agencies are making in collaboration with USGS.

Both agencies have been prioritizing the advancement of offshore energy, with BOEM's National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program serving as the focal point of Cruickshank's testimony. Cruickshank said that BOEM's regular collaboration and coordination with BSEE, as well as other federal and state agencies, is crucial in ensuring the effective management of offshore energy activities and the continued assessment of their environmental impacts.

Cruickshank touted the benefits of offshore drilling in contributing to U.S. energy production, noting that in fiscal year 2017, outer continental shelf (OCS) leases provided about 18 percent of domestic oil production and 4 percent of domestic natural gas production. As of February 2019, BOEM manages over 2,600 active oil and gas leases on about 14 million OCS acres. Offshore energy production reached a 10-year high in 2018, and as BOEM looks to the future, Morris emphasized the potential for offshore wind to revolutionize the U.S. energy portfolio as the technology continues to be advanced and deployed in U.S. waters.

Both organizations have worked towards satisfying Executive Order (E.O.) 13795 "Implementing an America-First Offshore Energy Strategy." Issued on April 28, 2017 with the aim of reducing burdens on the offshore drilling industry, the E.O. requires BSEE to review and revise the Well Control rule, and BOEM and BSEE to review the Arctic rule, both of which were published in 2016 to meet the need for more stringent safety requirements in extreme operating conditions. The Well Control rule includes requirements for offshore well design, equipment, and operation, while the Arctic rule sets specific requirements for offshore drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas off the coast of Alaska. Both measures were introduced to update regulations to reflect the continuing advance of offshore drilling into increasingly extreme conditions, thus helping to prevent large-scale incidents like the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* disaster.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-3) has long opposed attempts to further open up the OCS to offshore drilling, and has recently praised a group of House Democrats for introducing a collection of bills to prevent offshore drilling in different parts of the OCS, such as the Stop Arctic Ocean Drilling Act of 2019 (H.R. 309). The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources is likely to hold hearings on these bills in the coming months.

Sources: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management; Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement; E&E News; Government Publishing Office; The Washington Post; U.S. House, Committee on Natural Resources.
