

## OCS seismic surveying hearing underscores differences in scientific opinion

July 14, 2015

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources heard testimony from industry representatives and academics on the permitting process for seismic surveys to prospect for oil and gas. These surveys help geologists determine the exact location and accessibility of oil and gas prospects by towing a specialized air gun that releases sound waves through water and collects data from the reflections. The data can also inform dredging and hazard assessments and help in research.

Industry witnesses called attention to congressional action and executive orders delaying a seismic survey of the Atlantic outer continental shelf (OCS) for more than thirty years, despite advances in hydrocarbon extraction techniques.

Republican House members pointed out the difference in permit approval times. An academic non-harassing permit, where surveys are not in the range of marine life, can take four months to approve, whereas permits that could disrupt or harm marine life can take up to a year or more.

Dr. Douglas Nowacek, a professor at Duke University, informed the committee that the sound waves in water that define seismic surveys disrupt marine life. Alternatively, Dr. Bob Gisner, Director of Marine Environment at the International Association of Geophysical Contractors, argued that the strength of the sound was overstated, and that low levels did not greatly affect marine life. Nowacek advocated constraining the seismic surveys to only those areas that showed potential for oil and gas extraction in order to limit damage; however, Gisner advocated complete surveying of the OCS to determine the potential for new deposits using 3D seismic imaging, a technology unavailable during the last survey.

Sources: E&E News

*Updated August 17, 2015*

---