

Frequently Asked Questions about the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) Oil and Gas Platform Decommissioning Study

Q1: Who commissioned the report and why?

A1: The California Natural Resources Agency instituted a three-phase process to learn about various options in decommissioning offshore oil and gas platforms. The report represents the second phase of this process.

The first phase involved working with stakeholders and members of the Interagency Decommissioning Working Group (a group of state and federal agency representatives with expertise in oil and gas platform decommissioning) to identify relevant questions and concerns related to decommissioning alternatives. These questions and concerns formed the basis for the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a “Study to Provide Information Related to Oil and Gas Platform Decommissioning Alternatives in California.” The Resources Agency asked the OST to coordinate the second phase of the Agency’s efforts on decommissioning. This has included: peer review and dissemination of the RFP; selection and oversight of the study team; and convening a committee of experts to review the study process and products. (See also Question 5 and Question 6.) In the third phase, the State of California will evaluate policy issues related to decommissioning. The report produced from phase two will provide technical background for phase three.

Q2: What is in the report?

A2: The report presents a synthesis of scientific, financial, and legal information that will inform the state and stakeholders on alternatives for the decommissioning of California’s 27 offshore oil and gas platforms. It is important to note that the report is not about offshore oil drilling or oil exploration. Rather, it identifies and analyzes the impacts of a variety of decommissioning options that could be implemented once an oil and gas platform reaches the end of its design life. While the report does not provide any policy recommendations, by addressing a broad range of issues – from air quality to liability concerns to ecological impacts – the report identifies tradeoffs among decommissioning options.

The report is compilation of existing relevant information that was thoroughly reviewed by a committee of experts. It will provide policy makers and stakeholders with a central source of information from which informed decommissioning decisions can be made. Among other things, the report demonstrates that although a number of decommissioning options have been proposed (e.g., repurposing platforms as wave energy or other facilities), the most feasible options are either full removal or partial removal to 85ft below the surface, with the remainder of the platform left in place as an “artificial reef.” Both options will impact air quality, water quality, and marine organisms associated with the



platform, though in varying degrees. Legislation, liability and costs are discussed for both options.

Q3: Why should the State of California care about platform decommissioning?

A3: Twenty-seven offshore oil and gas platforms exist off the California coast in state and federal waters, many of which may reach the end of their useful production lifetimes within the coming decades. Under the current regulatory framework, federal and state leases require complete removal of the facility upon decommissioning; consideration of any option other than full removal would require changes in permit requirements and in state legislation. For years discussions have occurred between government, academic, industry, environmental groups, and fishing organizations about the potential environmental and economic pros and cons of various decommissioning options, ranging from total removal to partial decommissioning for artificial reefs. This study is the first of its kind to pull together information in one place and assess the status of knowledge on the technical, legal, environmental, and economic factors that should be considered in evaluating decommissioning options.

Q4: Who paid for this report and how were they involved in developing the report?

A4: The report was jointly funded with public and private money, specifically from Chevron, the California Ocean Protection Council, the Ocean Conservancy, the Sportfishing Conservancy, and United Anglers. By design and to eliminate any real or perceived bias, the funders were not directly involved in developing or reviewing the report contents.

Q5: What was the role of the California Ocean Science Trust?

A5: The OST is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit corporation whose mission is to support ocean and coastal resource management decisions with the best available science. The OST was established under the California Ocean Resources Stewardship Act of 2000 and helps connect California state agencies and coordinating bodies such as the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to relevant scientific research and information. The Natural Resources Agency requested that the OST coordinate and manage this study. OST's process encompassed extensive expert technical review of the RFP, revision and release of the RFP, selection and oversight of a qualified project team, and coordination and management of an Expert Advisory Committee.

Q6: What steps were taken to ensure the report provides a thorough, credible, and authoritative technical summary?

A6: Drawing from respected and well-established models for science and technology assessment, such as that of the National Research Council, the OST designed a comprehensive, deliberative study process. The goal was to ensure a thorough, balanced, and unbiased final report that would be a useful reference for decision-makers, stakeholders, and other interested parties. The OST's process included extensive expert technical review of the RFP and selection and oversight of a qualified project team through a competitive process. A key part of the study was the assembly, through a public nomination process, of an Expert Advisory Committee (EAC). This multidisciplinary, 15-member body included academics, industry experts, and agency representatives. The

EAC's charge was to work with the OST and the project team to ensure that the state received authoritative, credible, and unbiased information about this important issue. The EAC reviewed the proposals and informed the OST's selection of the project team, reviewed and submitted detailed comments to the OST on the team's interim products and report drafts, provided general advice on the study process and approach, and deepened the expertise that shaped project findings. In addition to the guidance provided by the EAC, the California Attorney General's Office advised the OST, the project team, and the EAC on issues regarding the legal components of the study.

Q7: Why weren't public stakeholders asked to comment on drafts of the report as they have been on OPC studies?

A7: The report is a scientific and technical analysis compiled by a qualified project team and reviewed by experts. It is not a policy position report and provides no advice to the State of California on developing policy. To maintain the objectivity and the robustness of the analysis and final study products, it is the OST's policy to not release draft technical reports.

Q8: Does the OST guarantee the accuracy of all information in the report?

A8: The report is a consultant's product that has been produced using best practices for iterative peer and technical review. While the OST cannot guarantee the accuracy of every detail of the report, we do guarantee the integrity of the process. Every effort was made to ensure that the process was fair, thorough, and honored the intent to provide a document that comprehensively summarized the facts of the issue without bias.

Q9: What is the OST's advice about what should happen to offshore platforms?

A9: The OST takes no position in policy decisions; our role is to provide scientific and technical information to decision-makers. The mission of the OST and this role is based on the assumption that access to the best available science will result in better policy decisions.

Q10: What happens next?

A10: The State of California will take the information synthesized by the report into consideration during an evaluation of options regarding platform decommissioning. The OPC will also host a public meeting on June 25 in Santa Barbara that will provide an opportunity for the public to learn about and comment on this important issue.