

Locals weigh in on proposed offshore drilling

Kathryn Watson, Santa Barbara News-Press, 1-20-12

Residents were anything but apathetic as they packed the Carpinteria City Council Chambers on Thursday to speak about a local oil company's plan to redevelop the state portion of an oil and gas field from an existing, federal platform offshore.

In the first opportunity for concerned citizens to publicly comment on the Carpinteria Offshore Redevelopment Project, two sets of meetings on Thursday had state and federal representatives outlining the process of the environmental impact report, as well as the project itself.

Residents were candid about the project, which involves Carpinteria-based Pacific Operators Offshore LLC using Platform Hogan about 3.7 miles off the Carpinteria shore, according to a report from the California State Lands Commission.

Public input will be used to form the draft EIR, which is expected to be out by early 2013. The proposed project, which has been under discussion for around a decade, is expected to have a life span through 2040.

Perhaps the greatest concern for those who showed up for the beginning of the scoping process was the possibility of an oil spill, harkening back to the great oil spill in the Santa Barbara Channel four decades ago.

"We have not forgotten the 1969 oil spill in the channel," said Carpinteria resident Dave Moore, calling the Gulf Coast oil spill of 2010 "nightmarishly deja vu-ish locally," and questioning the company's track record.

Proposed by the related Carone Petroleum Corp., the project would entail drilling as many as 25 new production or injection wells to develop resources in existing state oil and gas leases, a lands commission report says.

No new platforms, pipelines or onshore facilities would be built, according to the lands commission. Changes would include replacing Platform Hogan's diesel drill with an all-electric one, along with some additions to Platform Hogan.

Drilling would be horizontal.

Oil and gas would be sent via existing pipelines to the La Conchita Processing Facility in Ventura County. Current oil production is approximately 219 barrels per day, according to the lands commission, or 300, according to the company.

The proposed project would produce an estimated maximum of 3,500 barrels per day.

Fears of oil spills weren't the only concerns brought up at Thursday's afternoon meeting, which was conducted by representatives of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, as well as the lands commission.

Vera Bensen of Carpinteria, who numbered off her slew of concerns over the project, worried also about earthquake faults being affected.

"Horizontal drilling could affect those faults," she said.

Speakers also raised concerns about the age of Platform Hogan and the pipes, wondering if the pipes can handle roughly more than 10 times their current flow.

"Can it stand additional drilling without risk?" inquired Amrita Salm, who said she has "too many concerns to read them all off today."

Carla Frisk, a representative of Get Oil Out, has similar concerns about capacity and age.

"I think you have to look at this in a very fresh way," she said, questioning if the studies and reports on the facilities have been sufficient and recent enough.

Mid-afternoon, a representative of Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Santa Barbara, said the assemblyman opposes the project.

Concerns were also raised over whether the project would involve "fracking," a highly criticized method for extracting oil and natural gas.

Lance Ignon, a spokesman for Signal Hill a corporate affiliate of Pacific Operators Offshore addressed some of the concerns raised Thursday.

Mr. Ignon assured those concerned that an oil spill is virtually impossible, if for no other reason than the depletion in oil levels from previous drilling means the possibility for that much pressure no longer exists.

"Physically speaking, you could not repeat the oil spill of 1969," he said.

Furthermore, he said, the company has practiced safe policies, and workers who live locally are as eager to avoid spillage and other problems as the residents who turned out on Thursday.

As to fracking, his answer was definite.

"There's no fracking involved," Mr. Ignon told the News-Press.

Mr. Ignon argued that more drilling would lead to more jobs, and bring in about \$270 million in royalties to the state. He argued, too, that the proposed conversion of diesel to electric drilling would decrease company-created diesel emissions by half.

Regarding questions raised over Platform Hogan's integrity, he said the platform as well as the pipes - are examined regularly.

Mr. Ignon said that, by rejecting drilling locally, citizens would essentially be condoning drilling in other, less-regulated, less-careful developing nations.

"You're saying, 'Go ahead, give it to the developing world,'" he said.

The state has the ultimate power to veto or approve the project. If approved, the project would have both state

and federal oversight, according to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

The draft EIR is expected to be completed by 2013. The public will have numerous opportunities to weigh in.

Written comments can be submitted by mail to Carpinteria EIS Coordinator, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Pacific OCS Region, 770 Paseo Camarillo, Camarillo, CA 93010-6064, or by email to carpinteriadevelopment@mrsenv.com.

For the current public input period, all letters must be received or postmarked by Feb.21.

Further information on the environmental impact statement and the development and production plan are available online at <http://www.boem.gov/Carpinteria.aspx>.

