

## Effort to reach California offshore oil drilling deal revived

*Environmental groups say a previous failed pact with a Texas firm has been retooled to make it more acceptable, allowing new platforms but setting an end date for drilling. Not everyone is convinced.*

**Jill Leovy, Los Angeles Times, 4-8-10**

SANTA BARBARA -- An effort by a coalition of Santa Barbara environmental groups to strike a deal with a Texas oil company was revived Wednesday, kicking off another round in the battle over how to confront pressure to drill for oil off the California coast.

Activists with the Environmental Defense Center, a Central Coast advocacy group, announced that they have reworked some of the most controversial elements of a 2008 agreement struck with Houston-based Plains Exploration & Production Co.

They said they hope the move will defuse opposition that has so far stymied the deal, which would permit new drilling off the Santa Barbara coast in exchange for limits on future oil operations.

"Without this agreement, these platforms can and will continue to operate indefinitely," Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center, said at a news conference on a Santa Barbara bluff overlooking platforms. She was accompanied by other environmental activists, at least two local officials and Rep. Lois Capps (D-Santa Barbara).

At least one opponent remained unconvinced.

"Under this proposal, Santa Barbara, Calif., would be the only location on the entire Western seaboard that would permit new drilling in state waters, and that's nothing to be proud of," said Assemblyman Pedro Nava (D-Santa Barbara), a longtime critic of the plan. "What they have done is they have added more pages to the document and a bit more elegant language, but it's still a flawed proposal."

The agreement would allow the first new oil wells off the California coast in 40 years in exchange for the company's pledge to stop drilling for good within 14 years, close down processing plants and turn over about 4,000 acres of land for public use. The first version triggered a fiery political battle and was rejected by the state Lands Commission. Later, a similar proposal was defeated in the Legislature after becoming entangled with budget issues.

Supporters argued Wednesday that the new version of the agreement addresses the chief criticisms of the old. Opponents had called that deal excessively secretive, unenforceable and potentially precedent-setting, ending what has effectively been a moratorium on new drilling off the California coast after the disastrous Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969.

Opponents also argued that the deal contained a fatal flaw: that the federal government could torpedo its goals, no matter what the oil company agreed to. The ensuing fight split environmental interests and drew national attention.

The deal still aims to limit oil drilling long term -- at the price of expanding it meanwhile. But it would allow the state of California to enforce the terms of the agreement, and includes extra measures that supporters

contend will prevent federal agencies from circumventing it.

Under the new terms, California would become a third-party beneficiary to the deal, allowing the state attorney general to enforce its provisions, and Plains Exploration would be required not only to cease production by the appointed dates but also to surrender its federal leases. It provides for the company to resubmit its application to the state Lands Commission for new drilling.

Michael Endicott of Sierra Club California, which opposed the earlier plan, said Wednesday his group would reevaluate its stance but needed time to analyze the new agreement.