



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 9, 2025

26

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**OPPOSING OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WATERS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

On November 20, 2025, the Trump Administration released its Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Program that would reopen Southern California's coastal waters to new oil and gas drilling for the first time in decades. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) proposal includes six large new leasing zones in federal waters off Southern California, reversing decades of bipartisan California opposition to offshore drilling and putting long-standing coastal protections, local economies, and energy affordability at immediate risk. At a time when clean energy is helping to stabilize long-term costs for families, this plan pushes us back toward the volatility of fossil-fuel markets.

This moment is both a warning and an opportunity. The draft plan shows how quickly existing safeguards can be undone, and it calls on California and its coastal counties to act early and draw a firm line. While drilling is planned in Federal waters, spills and pollution do not stay within jurisdictional lines, and our communities know firsthand the devastating and long-term impacts of such disasters. Past experiences shaped a lasting grassroots movement to defend our beaches, waterways, and coastal economies, and it is the foundation for the unified response required now.

A History of Devastating Oil Spills Catalyzing Grassroot Resistance

In 1969, an offshore well in the Santa Barbara Channel blew out and released roughly 4 million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific over nearly a month. The slick spread across more than 800 square miles. Oil contaminated 35 miles of beaches. Currents carried tar all the way down the coast, including into San Diego County, and even into Mexico. More than 3,500 seabirds and marine mammals were killed. The coastal economy collapsed, families lost work, and cleanup costs were enormous. That single disaster helped spark the first Earth Day and pushed Congress to create the EPA because Californians had lived through offshore drilling's worst-case scenario firsthand.

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More recently, a 2021 oil spill off Huntington Beach sent 25,000 gallons of oil into the ocean. Even though San Diego is nearly 100 miles south, we still saw tar balls polluting our beaches and coastal waters within days. Offshore drilling failures don't stay local; the damage moves, and every community down the coast pays the price. A recent report from the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force documented more than 1,100 oil spills releasing over 640,000 gallons, along with thousands of smaller spills, in a single yearⁱ.

San Diego's economy depends on clean water, open beaches, research institutions, tourism, and fishing — all of which take a hit the moment oil washes ashore. And drilling in California waters won't lower gas prices for families. California's oil reserves are less than three percent of U.S. supply and a fraction of global supply, and the state does not have the refinery capacity to turn additional local production into cheaper fuel. More drilling only increases the likelihood of another spill, not affordability for the families who would be left to deal with the fallout.

California has binding climate goals to cut greenhouse-gas emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels, reach net-zero by 2045, and transition the grid to clean energy. New offshore drilling moves against all of that. It extends fossil-fuel dependence, increases emissions from extraction and transport, and undermines the statewide shift toward clean power and coastal resilience.

California Leading an Affordable Clean-Energy Future

Strengthening our clean-energy economy is the clearest path to affordability for working families. Offshore drilling only adds volatility and risk.

Solar and wind are now the cheapest sources of new electricity in the United States, with utility-scale solar projects averaging 41% lower costs than the cheapest fossil-fuel alternatives, according to the International Renewable Energy Agencyⁱⁱ. Affordable clean energy also stabilizes prices by reducing our exposure to foreign fossil-fuel markets and the volatility that comes with them. California's clean-energy economy is a jobs powerhouse. More than 500,000 Californians work in clean-energy fields, seven times the number employed in the state's fossil-fuel sector, based on the latest Clean Jobs California reportⁱⁱⁱ.

San Diego is already a national leader in clean-tech research, battery innovation, and grid modernization. These industries bring private investment, skilled jobs, and new apprenticeship pathways, all while helping stabilize energy costs for households. New offshore drilling does the opposite. It exposes our coastline to risk, raises pollution burdens, and provides no relief at the pump, because California controls less than three percent of U.S. oil reserves and cannot refine enough local crude to lower prices.

Taking Action to Protect our Communities

Californians are preparing for this fight. Governor Gavin Newsom has already said the Trump plan is "dead on arrival," and Attorney General Rob Bonta has made clear the state is ready for the regulatory and legal battle ahead.

Congressman Mike Levin has introduced the Southern California Coast and Ocean Protection Act (H.R. 2862), to permanently ban new offshore oil and gas leasing from San Diego through San Luis Obispo Counties. His bill is part of a coordinated national effort led by coastal representatives

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who see the same pattern: offshore drilling destabilizes coastal economies and leaves local communities paying the price.

Today's item ensures the County takes regional leadership in protecting our coastline by opposing the Trump Administration's Draft Five-Year Oil and Gas Drilling Plan, supporting Congressman Mike Levin's Southern California Coast and Ocean Protection Act (H.R. 2862) in our legislative agenda, and directing the CAO to coordinate with Governor Newsom, Attorney General Rob Bonta, and Southern California counties to build the regional firewall needed to keep new oil drilling out of our waters.

Our coastline is central to our economy and to daily life in San Diego. We cannot allow Washington to put it at risk. With this action, the County joins the state and our coastal partners early in the fight and makes one thing clear: we're not handing our coastline over to Big Oil.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND CHAIR PRO-TEM PALOMA AGUIRRE

1. Adopt a Resolution entitled:
A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO OPPOSING OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS DRILLING.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for House of Representatives Bill H.R. 2862, the Southern California Coast and Ocean Protection Act, consistent with Board Policy M-2.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to advance interagency coordination, including but not limited to with Governor Gavin Newsom, Attorney General Rob Bonta, and Southern California counties to coordinate the unified, regional response needed to keep new oil drilling out of our coastal waters and protect our San Diego communities and local economy.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Protecting water quality and reducing the risk of coastal contamination supports more equitable health, economic, and environmental conditions for residents who depend on clean coastlines for work, subsistence fishing, and recreation and who already face rising sea-levels due to climate change resulting, in part, from the fossil fuel industry. This item helps prevent future harms that have historically fallen more heavily on these communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports the County's sustainability goals by reducing environmental risks associated with offshore oil and gas activities. Oil spills and related coastal contamination negatively affect marine ecosystems, water quality, and shoreline habitats. Opposing new offshore drilling is consistent with regional climate and coastal-protection objectives and helps safeguard natural resources that sustain local communities, fisheries, and coastal recreation.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for the actions requested are included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan based on existing staff time in the Chief Administrative Office, Office of Economic Development and

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Government Affairs funded by existing General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Oil spills and coastal contamination can disrupt tourism, recreation, research, and commercial fishing, which are significant contributors to San Diego's local economy. Opposing new offshore oil drilling supports the long-term stability of these coastal-dependent industries by reducing the risk of environmental events that lead to beach closures, lost revenue, and cleanup costs.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

On November 20, 2025, the Trump Administration released its draft Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Plan that would reopen Southern California's coastal waters to new oil and gas drilling for the first time in decades. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) proposal includes large new leasing zones in federal waters off Southern California, reversing decades of bipartisan California opposition to offshore drilling.

This moment is both a warning and an opening. The draft plan shows how quickly long-standing coastal protections can be put at risk, and it calls on California and its coastal counties to act early and draw a firm line. Our communities know firsthand the devastating impacts oil spills have caused and the long-term damage they leave behind. That history shaped a lasting grassroots movement to defend our beaches, waterways, and coastal economies, and it is the foundation for the unified response required now.

A History of Devastating Oil Spills Catalyzing Grassroot Resistance

In 1969, an offshore well in the Santa Barbara Channel blew out and released roughly 4 million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific over nearly a month. The slick spread across more than 800 square miles. Oil contaminated 35 miles of beaches. Currents carried tar all the way down the coast — including into San Diego County, and even into Mexico. More than 3,500 seabirds and marine mammals were killed. The coastal economy collapsed, families lost work, and cleanup costs were enormous. That single disaster helped spark the first Earth Day and pushed Congress to create the EPA because Californians had lived through offshore drilling's worst-case scenario firsthand.

More recently, a 2021 oil spill off Huntington Beach sent 25,000 gallons of oil into the ocean. Even though San Diego is nearly 100 miles south, we still saw tar balls polluting our beaches and coastal waters within days. Offshore oil drilling failures don't stay local, the damage moves, and everyone down the coast pays for it. This is the reality the Trump plan puts back on the table.

These are hardly isolated incidents. A recent report by the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force identified over 1,115 oil spills releasing a combined 640,000 gallons, and another 7,011 small spills just during 2021.

San Diego's economy depends on clean water, open beaches, research institutions, tourism, and fishing, all of which take a hit the moment oil washes ashore. Further, offshore oil drilling in

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California waters is not likely to have a meaningfully impact gas prices at the pump. California's oil reserves are less than three percent of U.S. oil and a fraction of a percent of global supply. Even a major expansion of drilling here wouldn't move prices for families, because we don't control crude prices and we don't have the refinery capacity to turn extra local supply into cheaper fuel. More oil drilling only raises the chance of another oil spill, not affordability.

California Leading an Affordable Clean-Energy Future

Solar and wind are now the cheapest sources of new electricity in the United States, with utility-scale solar projects averaging 41% lower costs than the cheapest fossil-fuel alternatives, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency. Affordable clean energy also stabilizes prices by reducing our exposure to foreign oil markets and the volatility that comes with them. California's clean-energy economy is a jobs powerhouse as well. More than 500,000 Californians work in clean-energy fields, seven times the number employed in the state's fossil-fuel sector, based on the latest Clean Jobs California report.

San Diego is already a national leader in clean-tech research, battery innovation, and grid modernization. These industries bring private investment, skilled jobs, and new apprenticeship pathways, all while helping stabilize energy costs for households. New offshore drilling does the opposite. It exposes our coastline to risk, raises pollution burdens, and provides no relief at the pump, because California controls less than three percent of U.S. oil reserves and cannot refine enough local crude to lower prices.

Strengthening our clean-energy economy is the clearest path to affordability for working families. Offshore drilling only adds volatility and risk with no real benefit.

Taking Action to Protect Our Communities

Californians are preparing for this fight. Governor Gavin Newsom has already said the Trump plan is "dead on arrival," and Attorney General Rob Bonta has made clear the state is ready for the regulatory and legal battle ahead. Several coastal counties are beginning to align their efforts because early, coordinated action — not last-minute objections — is what determines whether federal leasing plans succeed or fail.

Congressman Mike Levin has introduced the Southern California Coast and Ocean Protection Act (H.R. 2862), which would permanently ban new offshore oil and gas leasing in Southern California from San Diego through San Luis Obispo County. His bill is part of a coordinated national effort led by coastal representatives who see the same pattern: offshore drilling destabilizes coastal economies and leaves local communities paying the price.

Environmental organizations, scientists, and community members across the region are already mobilizing in response, recognizing the real risks this plan poses to our beaches, coastal wildlife, and local jobs.

Today's item ensures the County takes regional leadership in protect our coastline by opposing the Trump Administration's Draft Five-Year Oil and Gas Drilling Plan, supporting Congressman Mike Levin's Southern California Coast and Ocean Protection Act (H.R. 2862) to our legislative agenda, and directing the CAO to spearhead interagency coordination, including with Governor

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Gavin Newsom, Attorney General Rob Bonta, and Southern California counties to build the regional firewall needed to keep new oil drilling out of our waters.

Our coastline is central to our economy and to daily life in San Diego. We cannot allow Washington to put it at risk. With this action, the County joins the state and our coastal partners early in the fight and makes one thing clear: we're not handing our coastline over to Big Oil corporations.

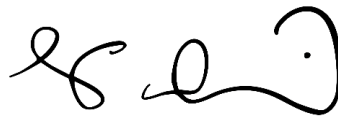
LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

This item supports the County of San Diego's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan by advancing the goal of protecting community health, safety, and environmental quality. Opposing new offshore oil drilling aligns with the Plan's commitment to safeguard natural resources, reduce environmental hazards, and promote a sustainable regional economy. This action helps prevent coastal contamination that disproportionately affects vulnerable communities and supports a cleaner, safer environment for all residents.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District



PALOMA AGUIRRE
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)
Resolution

ⁱ https://oilspilltaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/summary_2020_FINAL.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.irena.org/News/pressreleases/2025/Jul/91-Percent-of-New-Renewable-Projects-Now-Cheaper-Than-Fossil-Fuels-Alternatives>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://e2.org/reports/clean-jobs-california-2025/>