

Eskimo Walrus Commission News Release

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For Immediate Release

Eskimo Walrus Commission Opposes Oil and Gas Leasing in Bering Strait Region Walrus Habitat

NOME, Alaska - Today the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) released its Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program, potentially opening offshore Oil and Gas Leasing/Exploration in various parts of Alaska that were previously not included in previous lease sales, including the Hope, Navarin, St. Mathew Hall, and Norton Basins in the Norton Sound Region.

Increased oil and gas development, leases, and exploration are of great concern to the Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) as it threatens traditional subsistence lifestyles. Our coastal communities rely on a variety of natural resources found in the marine waters, and without these resources Alaska Native communities are even more vulnerable. The economic sustainability of these communities balances heavily on natural resources, and increased marine traffic activity alongside environmental changes only magnify economic stressors in the coastal indigenous communities.

With the proposed draft, these basins will be exposed and open to oil and gas leasing/exploration in 2023. These basins are vitally important to our survival and oil and gas activities pose a serious threat to marine life and safety in these areas.

The Eskimo Walrus Commission encourages individuals from the Bering Strait region to review and comment on BOEM's Draft Proposed Program. You may learn more about the draft proposed program and access links to submit comments at <https://www.boem.gov/National-Program/>. Online commenting at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) begins on Monday, January 8, 2018. There will be a public meeting in Anchorage at the Dena'ina Center on January 23rd from 7pm-10pm.

For additional questions and information please feel free to reach out to Vera Metcalf, vmetcalf@kawerak.org, 907-443-4380.

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The Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) is a federally recognized and tribally authorized organization. Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) represents 19 coastal communities from Utqiagvik to Bristol Bay by advocating and representing Alaska Native concerns regarding federal management of the Pacific walrus. EWC has the responsibility to carry out co-management activities through the Marine Mammal

Protection Act (MMPA) for the Pacific walrus pursuant to a management agreement with US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The **Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)** develops the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National OCS Program) for oil and gas development in accordance with the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCS Lands Act). This National OCS Program establishes a five-year schedule of oil and gas lease sales proposed for the U.S. **OCS**. The National OCS Program specifies the size, timing, and location of potential leasing activity that the Secretary of the Interior determines will best meet national energy needs for the five-year period under consideration.

Currently, BOEM is working under the approved 2017–2022 Program. However, as directed in **Executive Order 13795** (April 28, 2017) and **Secretary's Order 3350** (May 1, 2017), BOEM is initiating a process to develop a new National OCS Program for 2019–2024 that, if approved, will supersede the 2017–2022 Program. The first of three proposals for 2019–2024, the **Draft Proposed Program**, was released on January 4, 2018.