

Dear OCR community and friends,

Richard Charter from the tireless and hard working "Outer Continental Shelf Coalition" sent us the following article on the Alaskan seafood industry's concern about seismic exploration used by the oil industry.

This area in Alaska is the most productive fishery in the world, producing 25% of all of the fish we eat in the US. It is also the best managed fishery in the US and a model for sustainable fisheries world wide. \

It would be an unconscionable shame if this fishery was compromised by seismic exploration - or even destroyed by an Exxon Valdez type spill just so that we Americans can continue our well-oiled life styles, or so that the oil men could get a few more bucks out of the earth before we are finally forced to turn to more sustainable energy practices.

The OCS coalition is an assembly of folks from various conservation groups, mostly in Washington, DC who are doing a yeoman's job in keeping the OCS drilling moratorium in place.

Regards,

Michael Stocker  
Director  
Ocean Conservation Research  
[www.OCR.org](http://www.OCR.org)

[http://www.alaskajournal.com/stories/083108/hom\\_20080831018.shtml](http://www.alaskajournal.com/stories/083108/hom_20080831018.shtml)

## **Seafood industry worries about offshore oil leases in Alaska**

By Laine Welch

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As Alaska gets primed for more oil and gas development on land and at sea, seafood industry stakeholders are warily eyeing exploration plans amid the world's most abundant fishing grounds.

The U.S. government has scheduled sales in 2011 of offshore oil and gas leases in Alaska's North Aleutian Basin, a 5.6-million-acre "fish basket" that encompasses most of the southeastern Bering Sea and Bristol Bay.

Ask any Alaskan what they fear most about oil exploration and they will say "oil spills." But you'll get a different response from Norwegian fishermen.

"We are not so frightened of the oil coming up, from a blow out. We are more frightened of the seismic. It is something that is out of sight, out of mind," said Nils Myklebust, a 40-year fisherman and spokesman for the Norwegian Fishermen's Association.

Long before the first drop of oil or gas is extracted from the ocean floor, seismic tests are used to gather information about where the fuels might be located. The tests use an array of air guns deployed from special vessels to send explosive shock waves into the sea bed, which can reverberate for thousands of miles. The shots are fired every 10 to 25 seconds, around the clock, for the lifetime of the drilling project.

Mykelbust says oil companies and the Norwegian government have done little research on long-term seismic impacts on fisheries, especially on small fish.

"They don't know anything about how seismic is hurting the babies," Mykelbust said in a phone interview from Norway. "Fishermen are very frightened because we see how the fishery has left a big area and we don't know what that means for the future. At the North Sea, the fish are down 39 percent from the oil coming to this day."

Norway's fishing and oil industries have co-existed since the late 1960s, but the feverish quest for new oil sources has sparked territorial clashes. Last year saw a record area covered by seismic surveys on behalf of 21 global petroleum companies, according to the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs.

The fishermen argue that the increased activity is driving fish away from traditional grounds. Catches of Atlantic pollock in some regions, for example, dropped from 800 tons in 2006 and 2007 to just 83 tons last year.

Mykelbust said Norwegian fishermen are not "anti-oil," but he urges Alaska to broaden discussions to include seismic testing and other impacts on the marine environment as the state moves toward offshore exploration.

At Energy and Fisheries workshops convened by Alaska Sea Grant earlier this year in Anchorage and Kodiak, Gregg Nady of Shell Oil said three dimensional seismic testing was the preferred method in its development scenarios for the North Aleutian Basin area.

Offshore energy quests come with other cautions that, like seismic testing, are often overlooked by an unknowing public.

"The interactions include other operational noise and pollutants, drilling muds and cuttings that come from the platforms," said Bubba Cook of the World Wildlife Fund in Anchorage. "What falls by the wayside is all the associated infrastructure that has to support oil and gas development. All of that needs to be part of the discussion."

*Laine Welch has been writing about Alaska's seafood industry since 1991 Her Fish Factor column appears each week in nearly 20 papers and Websites. Her daily Fish Radio programs air on 30 stations in Alaska. This article is protected by copyright and may not be reprinted or distributed without permission. Visit [www.alaskafishfactor.com](http://www.alaskafishfactor.com) or contact [msfish@alaska.com](mailto:msfish@alaska.com).*

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