



# COOK • INLET • KEEPER

Protecting Alaska's Cook Inlet watershed and the life it sustains

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## **Cook Inlet Keeper Denounces EPA Draft Discharge Permit at Anchorage Public Hearing on 4/6 Offshore Drilling Discharges of Oil, Grease and Metals Would Increase Substantially**

ANCHORAGE, AK – At the Anchorage public hearing on a draft Clean Water Act permit renewal covering 15 Cook Inlet oil and gas platforms, Cook Inlet Keeper stated that the draft permit was based on outdated industry economics and bad science. EPA and the state held a joint hearing on the draft permit in Homer on April 4 and in Kenai on April 5.

Keeper also predicted that the adverse impacts of allowing these polluting discharges to continue include potential harm to the marketing of “Kenai Wild” salmon, and contributing to the possible extinction of the Cook Inlet beluga whale, now a federally-recognized “depleted” species.

In 1996, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency created an exemption for Cook Inlet offshore platform discharges, making Cook Inlet the only near-shore (or coastal) area in the country without “zero discharge” for “produced water” and drilling waste materials. Produced water is briny water which comes to the surface during oil and gas production and contains pollutants such as oil, grease and metals. Drilling wastes are the contaminated lubricants and rocks from well drilling. Instead of zero discharge and contrary to the Clean Water Act, however, EPA’s draft permit allows Cook Inlet’s aging oil and gas fields to increase their level of polluting discharges substantially, allowing over 100,000 gallons of oil and grease and over 835,000 lbs. of toxic metals to be discharged annually.

According to Cook Inlet Keeper Senior Engineer and Oil and Gas Industry Specialist Lois Epstein, “things have changed in Cook Inlet since the 1990s and zero discharge is now far more affordable. Several Cook Inlet platforms and operators now practice zero discharge by injecting their produced water and sending their drilling wastes to onshore facilities that did not exist in the 1990s. Instead of building on these promising trends, EPA is caving in to the oil and gas industry at a time of record industry profits and at the expense of fishing and subsistence interests.”

Epstein also expressed concern about the science behind EPA’s draft permit. “While EPA minimizes the environmental impacts from offshore platform discharges throughout the country by establishing mixing zones of 100 meters, the Cook Inlet mixing zones – which are in a coastal area and nearer to shore so mixing is more difficult – are 18-27 times longer and up to 25 times larger. EPA also is not taking into account recent science from the National Marine Fisheries Service showing that lower levels of hydrocarbons than previously thought can adversely impact fish in estuaries.”

In recent years, Cook Inlet’s remaining beluga whales – which number less than 300 – have moved away from the area’s oil and gas operations. The National Marine Fisheries Service has just begun a process to determine whether Cook Inlet beluga whales should be listed as an endangered or threatened species.

The Anchorage public hearing was held at the Hilton Garden Inn and began at 6:30 pm following an open house. EPA is accepting public comments through May 1, and is considering extending this deadline.

Cook Inlet Keeper is a citizen-based organization that combines advocacy, research, education and water quality monitoring to protect Alaska’s Cook Inlet watershed and the life it sustains.