

ORAL TESTIMONY OF DR. CLIFF KAPONO  
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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES  
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Greetings.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the importance of protecting our coastlines from offshore oil and gas development. My name is Dr. Cliff Kaponono and I am a Native Hawaiian, professional surfer and marine scientist. I am honored to provide testimony on how new offshore drilling would threaten coastal and ocean recreation and the considerable benefits these activities provide to our nation.

My personal connection to ocean spans 90 generations.

I would like to share a little about the importance of the ocean and coast from an indigenous perspective.

Coastal and ocean recreation, including beach going, swimming, surfing, paddling, wildlife viewing and photography, is practiced by hundreds of millions of people across the U.S. each year.

These activities are an indelible part of the American experience and generate nearly \$130 billion dollars annually for coastal communities and the nation as a whole. During the last year of the pandemic while our cars sat idle in our drive ways, coastal recreation boomed. People flocked to our beaches and we saw millions of people take up surfing for the first time. Unlike oil and gas drilling, ocean and coastal tourism is an economic driver that provides a never ending source of jobs, income, and opportunities for small businesses on every coast.

These activities are dependent on healthy coasts, which are directly threatened by the prospect of oil and gas drilling.

Offshore oil and gas development negatively impacts the coast at every stage of the drilling process.

1. During the exploration phase, noise pollution from seismic surveys permeates the ocean with deafening noise that harms already threatened marine wildlife such as whales, dolphins, sea turtles and fish populations.
2. During routine drilling operations, thousands of gallons of polluted water are released by drilling rigs into the ocean polluting the coasts and ocean.
3. Finally, offshore drilling inevitably results in catastrophic oil spills, causing major environmental and socioeconomic damage to communities that can take generations to recover from.

New offshore drilling would also increase greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbate the climate emergency facing our planet. Climate change is already causing our ocean waters to become warmer and more acidic. These environmental changes present a fundamental threat to the future survival of marine ecosystems, including coral reefs which are a haven for biodiversity and are a popular attraction for divers, surfers and other recreational users.

Climate change is also accelerating sea level rise and the loss of beaches and natural shorelines. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, roughly 50% of the U.S. coastline is at a high or very high risk for beach loss due to coastal erosion. Such loss of natural shorelines severely affects coastal recreation by reducing beach area and access, and creates unsafe beach conditions for families, local residents and businesses.

As a Hawaiian, I identify with a culture of innovation. For thousands of years we found ways to live in harmony with nature on our islands. We also innovated oceanic travel and explored far away lands. For me, innovation is a way to make the world a better place. It's beyond time we leave behind oil and gas drilling and support innovation that is leading to clean sources of energy.

Having to choose between oil and gas drilling or a healthy coast and recreational economy is a false choice. Through the innovation of renewable energy, such as solar and wind, we can have both a constant source of energy and healthy and thriving coastal communities with abundant recreational opportunities.

For these and many other reasons, new offshore drilling is widely opposed by communities, businesses and citizens across the United States. This includes opposition from the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association and the multi-billion dollar surf and outdoor recreation industry. More broadly, this includes opposition from over 390 communities, 55,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families.

On behalf of the surfing community and millions of coastal enthusiasts, I thank Members of Congress who are working to protect our oceans and coasts from expanded offshore drilling through their leadership on the COAST Anti-Drilling Act, the Florida Coastal Protection Act, the West Coast Protection Act, the American Coasts and Oceans Protection Act and the North Pacific Ocean Protection Act and many other important bills.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.