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Rigs-to-Reefs Policy, Progress, and Perspective

OCS Report MMS 2000-073

Beginning with the enactment of the National Fishing Enhancement Act in 1984 which, among other things, recognized the value of artificial reefs, established standards for them, and created the National Artificial Reef Plan, the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf Region, has actively promoted the use of selected obsolete oil and gas production platforms as artificial reefs in the Gulf. The Region's latest contribution to the ongoing study and evaluation of platforms turned into artificial reefs is a new report, Rigs-to-Reefs Policy, Progress, and Perspective (MMS OCS Report 2000-073), by Les Dauterive. The brief report reviews the past 16 years of this artificial reef (that is, Rigs-to-Reefs) development in the Gulf.

The results, says the report, are encouraging, and not just for obsolete platforms converted into reefs. Researchers report fish densities are 20 to 50 times higher around active platforms, which also serve as de facto reefs, than in nearby open water. One author estimates that seven out of ten offshore fishing trips have oil and gas platforms as their destination, and Avanti Corporation estimated in 1991 that 30 percent of all recreational fisheries catch was caught at or near oil and gas platforms off Louisiana and Texas.

Offshore production platforms have been situated off the central Gulf Coast for a half-century now, and many of the older platforms are becoming obsolete as the reservoirs over which they sit become depleted. Encouraged by MMS, a number of oil and gas companies have begun dedicating their platforms as artificial reefs, either towing them to a location indicated by local and state governments, toppling them in place, or removing the top part of the structure and leaving some of the substructure, called the jacket, in place. There are 151 obsolete platforms converted into artificial reefs off all five Gulf Coast States. Each of the coastal States has an artificial reef program. The companies are asked not only to donate the obsolete platform, but also to donate half of the savings effected by not having to dismantle the platform and bring it to shore. Many companies have done both; so far they have contributed nearly \$20 million into the State funds, which are used for fisheries conservation, research and management.

The report concludes with several questions about artificial reefs that need addressing, among them, the need to detail the contributions of these artificial reefs to ecological productivity and diversity.

Copies of the report are available at a cost of \$2 from the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Public Information Office, at 1201 Elmwood Park Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70123. Credit card orders may be placed by calling 1-800-200-GULF. The text is also available at the Region website, www.gomr.mms.gov. The publication will also be available from NTIS in the near future.

MMS is the Federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf. The agency also collects, accounts for, and disburses over \$5 billion per year in revenues from Federal offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

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