

**Testimony of Pete Stauffer  
Environmental Director  
Surfrider Foundation**

**Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee  
California State Senate**

Chair Stern and Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Pete Stauffer and I'm the Environmental Director of the Surfrider Foundation. The Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots environmental organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches for all people.

The Amplify Energy oil spill that occurred off Orange County, CA, also known as the ancestral homelands of the Acjachemen and Tongva peoples, resulted in a 13 square mile oil slick that continues to damage the marine and coastal environment, as well as communities, businesses and members of the public.

As the NGO Liaison to the Unified Command, Surfrider Foundation has been directly involved in supporting the cleanup effort. We express our sincere gratitude to the government agencies, trained professionals and volunteers whose quick and decisive response has prevented the disaster from being much worse.

The Southern California oil spill has presented a toxic hazard to marine wildlife and ocean health, while also penetrating Talbert Marsh, Bolsa Chica wetlands and other ecologically important habitats. Now, with oil deposits seen as far south as the Mexico border, there are concerns that San Diego wetlands, including Los Penasquitos Marsh and the Tijuana River Estuary, are also being impacted by oil.

Moreover, while birds, fish and marine mammals have been most visibly impacted in the short term, the full scale of the ecological damage will take some time to become clear. In the weeks since the spill event, the oil slick has transformed into an incalculable number of tarballs in the ocean. While tarballs typically float, they can also find their way into underwater sediment or nearshore habitats where their impacts on ecological health and wildlife may persist for years or even decades.

To assist with the tracking of tarballs, Surfrider launched a [smartphone app](#) to allow users to easily submit photos into a crowdsourced map. This data is being shared with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to inform the Unified Command's

response. The tool also provides a tangible way for thousands of interested volunteers to safely take action.

Yet the Southern California Oil Spill was not just an environmental catastrophe. It was a human one as well. The spill caused damaging impacts to the communities and economy in Orange County and beyond. In the immediate aftermath of the spill, the Pacific Air Show and the Huntington Beach Surf Contest, events that draw a combined 1.5 million people to the coast, were cancelled.

The spill also resulted in the immediate closure of beaches, harbors and fishing grounds in Orange County including Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, and Dana Point. These beaches remained closed for up to 9 days until officials could conduct sufficient water quality monitoring to determine if it was safe for public use and recreation.

The closing of miles of beaches and fishing grounds was a devastating blow to Orange County's ocean recreation and tourism economy, which is valued at more than [\\$2.6 billion](#) annually according to the National Ocean Economics Program. From restaurants and hotels to surf shops, local business owners have felt the immediate effects of beach closures and event cancellations.

Among the business leaders who have spoken out is Paul Naude, President of the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association (SIMA). SIMA members collectively employ over 5,000 people with nearly 90% of the surf industry's manufacturers based in Orange County, CA.

Said Naude following the oil spill, "Is the risk offshore drilling poses to the California beach lifestyle and the many people and many business sectors that rely on it, including tourism, really worth it? In my opinion, absolutely not."

The only good news was that the spill didn't happen in the height of summer tourism or during the recent U.S. Open of Surfing, an event of the World Surfing League which draws tens of thousands of people and generates \$21 million annually.

Meanwhile, the fisheries closure still remains in effect as the Seafood Safety unit continues to conduct fish sampling and analysis. The closure has negatively impacted fishing tour operators in Newport Harbor and Dana Point Harbor, along with gas docks that have seen large drops in fuel sales.

These harbor impacts have also extended to whale watch tour operators and other businesses that cater to both visitors and residents. According to Gisele Anderson from

Captain Dave's Dolphin and Whale Watching Safari, losses from trips and bookings into November could be down as much as 74% because of the oil spill.

Sadly, this devastating oil spill is part of a larger pattern of offshore drilling harming our coastal environment and the communities that depend on them. According to the federal government, there have been [at least 44 oil spills](#) that have each released more than 10,000 barrels (420,000 gallons) of oil into US waters since 1969.

It's no surprise that the practice is overwhelmingly opposed by citizens, businesses, and communities throughout California and beyond. The Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast ([BAPPC](#)) was founded in Orange County to oppose offshore drilling. BAPPC is joined by business alliances on the East Coast and Gulf Coast that collectively represent the economic interests of more than 55,000 businesses.

On Oct 19th, 17 days after the spill began, the City of Huntington Beach passed a local government resolution in opposition to offshore drilling, marking the 100th local resolution passed on the West Coast. This clear message from communities underscores that it's time for our federal leaders to pass legislation to ban new offshore drilling.

Leadership at the state level is also critical. Specifically, state leadership is needed to support the safe and swift decommissioning of existing offshore drilling rigs off California. State leadership is also needed to end oil and gas drilling on land as well, to protect frontline communities, public health and address climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.