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Congress of the United States  
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Washington, DC 20515-4327

May 10, 2012

COMMITTEES:  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE

OVERSIGHT AND  
GOVERNMENT REFORM

HOMELAND SECURITY

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street N.W., Mailstop 7314  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

The U.S. Department of Interior's directive issued in October of 2010 ordered that all non-producing rigs be plugged and any remaining structures be removed within five years. Today, almost 2 years later, the crippling impacts of this program are already being felt, as several artificial habitats off the Gulf Coast are being destroyed, resulting in fish kills, reduced recreational diving, and damages to sport fishing areas.

These structures provide habitat to dozens of species of fish, coral, and other marine life, many of which are structure-dependent. Not only are fishermen, the oil industry, and recreational users aware of the positive impact these rigs have, but our schools are now incorporating artificial reefs into their curriculum, using charts and diagrams to illustrate their environmental benefits, including one published by the Department of the Interior. Even our children recognize the importance of these artificial habitats. Removing these rigs and disrupting decades of environmental progress is in direct conflict with what our children are being taught.

I believe this directive is merely a knee-jerk response to the Gulf oil spill and creates more problems than it solves. While legislative and scientific efforts are being made to preserve these valuable habitats, rigs are being pulled up left and right, leaving no time for finding a way to salvage these ecosystems. Instead of pre-emptively removing the rigs, the Department of Interior, specifically the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), should work to quicken the approval of these rigs for artificial reefing purposes and allow for additional time to determine a safe and environmentally sound method to reef the structure in place. There is virtually no risk that these depleted wells, plugged well under the ocean floor will cause any spillage or environmental damage.

The Department of Interior should also address the economic and environmental implications of this directive that affects recreation, fishing and diving along the Gulf Coast.

My colleagues on the Federal and State level have repeatedly stressed the importance of this issue, and I ask you to reconsider this directive until further research has been done on its implications.

Sincerely,



BLAKE FARENTHOLD  
Member of Congress