

Report from the Alaska Subcommittee of the MMS OCS Scientific Committee

Planning Workshop: Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Area (COMIDA)

November 1-3, 2006, Anchorage, Alaska

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Overview

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and identify specific needs for monitoring of environmental effects of OCS Exploration and Development in the Chukchi Sea. The impetus for the workshop was the proposed Chukchi Sea Sale 193, scheduled for November 2007.

The final products of the workshop were descriptions of Monitoring Tasks that were developed by workshop participants in the following disciplines:

- (1) Physical Oceanography and Fates and Effects
- (2) Biology, including Benthos, Fish and Waterfowl
- (3) Protected Species
- (4) Socioeconomics and Subsistence

The organization of the workshop was as follows:

Day 1. Presentations by MMS representatives that introduced the COMIDA program and the Chukchi Sea Environmental Impact Statement in the context of ongoing Environmental Studies Program in Alaska.

Background on relevant industry monitoring studies.

Talks by invited speakers that provided background information in the topic areas of the workshop listed above.

Summation and charge to the four breakout groups.

Day 2. Full day of discussion and preparation of selected Monitoring Tasks by each of the four working groups.

Day 3. Presentations and discussions of the key tasks prepared by each of the four working groups.

Products of the Workshop

The final series of monitoring products includes about 3-4 tasks per group and encompasses many of the key data and monitoring needs for the Chukchi Sea. The complete task descriptions are available from the subcommittee. Titles for the various tasks are listed below.

- (1) Physical Oceanography and Fates and Effects
 - a. Data mining
 - b. Chemical and hydrocarbon monitoring
 - c. Supporting physical studies

- (2) Biology, including Benthos, Fish and Waterfowl
 - a. Quantitative benthic characterization
 - b. Effects of Onshore and Offshore Development on Birds
 - c. Sea Forage Fish
 - d. Characterize the Chukchi Sea Ecosystem

- (3) Protected Species
 - a. Seasonal distribution and abundance of marine mammals: acoustic assessments
 - b. Seasonal distribution and abundance of marine mammals: aerial
 - c. Seasonal distribution and abundance of marine mammals: tagging

- (4) Socioeconomics and Subsistence
 - a. Impact assessment for offshore subsistence hunting (2008-2011)
 - b. Impact assessment for near-shore subsistence hunting (2010-2013)
 - c. Impact assessment for offshore subsistence hunting (2012-2015)

Review of the Workshop by the Subcommittee

The three subcommittee members participated in part or all of the planning sessions. Overall, the Workshop was viewed as successful by most of the subcommittee members present, although some shortcomings were noticed by all three members (see below). Several potential monitoring tasks were developed and options for sharing resources (e.g., ship time) and partnering with other agencies were discussed in good detail. Nevertheless, the integration of projects, especially across disciplinary boundaries, remained sketchy. The discussion of options for ships and partnering was very good. Considerable detail was included by each of the four groups.

Several additional, specific comments are listed below.

1. The subcommittee noted that there was only a short lead time between the announcement of the sale and the workshop. Nevertheless, MMS should have been able to attract a broader (but not necessarily larger) audience by making use of existing electronic distribution systems. The workshop would have benefited from fresh faces and voices provided by investigators outside of MMS' present funding arena.
2. Participation by some stakeholders, especially Native Alaskans and commercial fishers, was viewed as being particularly weak. This was a result of the Alaska Region's decision to separate stakeholders' input from scientific deliberations. Stakeholders met with the Region in the weeks immediately before the workshop, but their participation in the workshop itself might have provided an interesting additional perspective.
3. Development of budgets for each task was viewed as a bit restrictive; still, we recognize that this might have been a consequence of the fact that the overall budget was far too small for the task at hand.
4. The format for presentations was somewhat restrictive, resulting in several instances in stifled discussions and artificially constructed hypotheses. Overall, however, the presentations were good.
5. MMS did a good job of facilitating the efforts of the participants in each of the four sub-groups without influencing the direction of the suggested research projects.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that the outcome of the COMIDA Workshop be distributed widely to other academic and private researchers, stakeholders, and selected government agencies for comment over a reasonable time period. This input may compensate in part for the restricted participation at the workshop.
2. We recommend that the initial discussion of coordination with other ongoing programs in the Chukchi Sea be continued and implemented for the benefit of shiptime and logistics.
3. The number and estimated costs of the potential projects defined far exceeds the funding that is likely to be available. We concur with MMS plans to use information from the Phase 1 effort, along with other feedback, and possible collaboration with other programs, to maximize the effort.
4. We recommend that the Alaska Region develop a list of relevant scientific organizations in the field; in addition, they should develop contact lists of scientists funded by Federal agencies active in environmental research. That way, MMS will be better prepared for disseminating information on short notice in the future.

**MMS Alaska OCS Region Responses to:
Report from the Alaska Subcommittee, OCS Scientific Committee
Planning Workshop: Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Areas (COMIDA)
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1. We recommend that the outcome of the COMIDA Workshop be distributed widely to other academic and private researchers, stakeholders and selected government agencies for comment over a reasonable time period. This input may compensate in part for the restricted participation at the workshop.

Response:

The “Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Area (COMIDA)” planning workshop, November 1-3, 2006, held in Anchorage, Alaska was conducted to help initiate design of the proposed MMS COMIDA monitoring project.

The workshop was announced on the MMS website. Written invitations were sent to over 150 scientists and stakeholders, including local and regional governments, tribes, native associations, oil industry, and environmental groups on the Alaska OCS Region mailing list. In addition to written invitations to those to the Alaska OCS Region mailing list, invitations went to approximately 50-name-requested scientists. Over a hundred scientists and stakeholders attended with 77 registering.

The purpose of the meeting was to briefly review existing research; to identify information needs; and to recommend research monitoring concepts, experimental designs, and scope of field studies to address MMS needs for environmental monitoring of potential Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas exploration and development. Specifically, the workshop will provide input to a COMIDA Phase II environmental monitoring field program proposed for FY 2008. Thirteen monitoring study profiles were developed by four working groups, were presented to and discussed by the workshop on the third day and submitted to MMS for consideration.

The workshop results have undergone significant review and refinement. The workshop study profiles were provided to oil industry and multiple Federal agencies for information and comment immediately following the workshop. Interested participants were provided copies of profiles to take back to their organizations for review and revision. The *COMIDA: Chemical and Hydrocarbon Monitoring* study profile and its potential for collaboration/coordination was described and discussed during the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation AKMAP Workshop, and to a lesser extent at the North Pacific Research Board Contaminants Workshop, both in early winter 2007. The completed draft workshop report was peer-reviewed by non-participant scientists. The completed final workshop report will be posted on the MMS website, specifically flagged for comment. The workshop profiles, post-workshop profiles and other review comments have been, and will continue to be, used to revise and prioritize COMIDA study profiles for entry into the Alaska Annual Studies Plan process. The draft Alaska Annual Studies Plan will also be widely available for review.

2. We recommend the initial discussion of coordination with other ongoing programs in the Chukchi Sea be continued and implemented for the benefit of shiptime and logistics.

Response:

The MMS Alaska OCS Region has had preliminary discussions with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) regarding vessel sharing between MMS and the AKMAP program. Further discussions with ADEC, and other entities, will occur for those COMIDA study nominations which progress to the funding stage.

3. The number and estimated costs of the potential projects defined far exceeds the funding that is likely to be available. We concur with MMS plans to use information from the Phase 1 effort, along with other feedback, and possible collaboration with other programs, to maximize the effort.

Response:

The Alaska OCS Region will proceed along these lines.

4. We recommend that the Alaska Region develop a list of relevant scientific organizations in the field, in addition, they should develop contact lists of scientists funded by federal agencies active in environmental research. That way, MMS will be better prepared for disseminating information on short notice in the future.

We will continue to work on our list of relevant scientific organizations and continue to include all organizations expressing interest in the Alaska Region Studies Plan. For procurement information regarding potential environmental studies, MMS uses and is required to use, FedBizOpps for notification. We will also use other types of notices through such list-serves as ArcticInfo, administered by the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS).