

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM OF THE *Gulf of Mexico*

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July 16, 2008

Mr. Marshall Rose
Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Attention: Regulations and Standards Branch (RSB)
381 Elden Street, MS-4024
Herndon, Virginia 20170-4817

Re: Comments on the GOMESA regulations (“Allocation and Disbursement of Royalties, Rentals, and Bonuses – Oil and Gas, Offshore, 1010-AD46”)

Dear Mr. Rose:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed regulations for disbursement of revenues in accordance with the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act.

The National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico is a *high impact project* that city, county and state leaders have deemed worthy of significant investment. The Maritime Museum would like to submit the following comments in regard to the use of GOMESA funds by the State of Alabama and/or Mobile County to help underwrite this project.

Slated to open in 2010 on the waterfront in downtown Mobile, the National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico will be the premier maritime museum on the Gulf Coast – the first museum to address the rich maritime heritage and culture of the Gulf of Mexico and its environs, and only the third interactive maritime museum in the world.

The Maritime Museum is a public-private partnership between the City of Mobile and a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that is planning the museum’s exhibits and will operate the museum as an educational facility designed to, among other objectives, enhance public understanding and appreciation for the Gulf of Mexico’s environmental resources.

To date, over \$23 million in public and private funds have been secured to help underwrite this \$36 million project. The City of Mobile has on-hand over \$10.5 million in federal funds that will be applied toward the building’s \$24 million construction cost.

In addition, the non-profit organization has generated over \$7.5 million in private donations from individuals, corporations and foundations to support the museum’s exhibits and infrastructure. Also, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has provided grants totaling over \$4 million to help underwrite interactive exhibits that pertain to NOAA data, research and activities.

Included among the Maritime Museum’s offerings are interactive exhibits that address GOMESA’s stated purposes (i.e. – “coastal protection, including conservation, coastal restoration, hurricane protection, and infrastructure affected by coastal wetland losses”).

Maritime Museum exhibits with an environmental focus relevant to the purposes of GOMESA include the following:

- **The Great Gulf Challenge**, which asks visitors to consider how their personal decisions affect environmental issues including coastal protection, conservation and restoration;
- **The Storm Center**, which places visitors in the role of an emergency manager on the Gulf Coast, responsible for managing hurricane protection for the public as a large storm system enters the Gulf of Mexico;
- **Science on a Sphere**, which displays actual satellite images of the Earth captured from space, to show the long-term effects of hurricanes on the Gulf Coast, including coastal wetland losses.

The Maritime Museum's environmental role throughout the Gulf Coast continues to expand even beyond its own exhibits and programs. In mid-June 2008, Senator Richard Shelby announced the creation of two new NOAA environmental education programs in the FY 2009 federal budget, with both programs to be located in the Maritime Museum building:

- **A new Sea Grant program for the State of Alabama.** Currently, Alabama and Mississippi share a Sea Grant Program based in Ocean Springs, MS. The Alabama Sea Grant program, like other state programs, will fund critical research on topics including coastal conservation and restoration, work with K-12 teachers to bring environmental sciences into classrooms, provide assistance to environmental partners through outreach efforts, and deliver accurate scientific information to Alabama and Gulf Coast residents.
- **A new Sea Grant Extension/Outreach/Education (EOE) pilot program.** As proposed by NOAA's Science Advisory Board in October 2007, the EOE pilot program is designed to "strengthen, improve and organize" NOAA's ability to engage its constituents through EOE efforts. Slated to begin when the Maritime Museum opens to the public, this pilot program will serve as a national model for NOAA, which intends to replicate the pilot program in seven other regions of the U.S.

Combined, these two programs will create a significant NOAA presence within the Maritime Museum building – both physically in terms of space and staff, and programmatically in terms of environmental education in the region. These efforts will include programs that directly address the environmental purposes that are vital to GOMESA funding.

Given the focus of the Maritime Museum's exhibits and programs, and in light of its growing physical and programmatic relationship with NOAA, the City of Mobile, in partnership with the State of Alabama and Mobile County, fully intends to seek GOMESA funding to help underwrite construction of the Maritime Museum over a multi-year period.

In conjunction with these comments, the Maritime Museum would like to clarify the Minerals Management Service's position regarding use of GOMESA funds for capital projects. We urge the MMS to support the application of GOMESA funding for the Maritime Museum, provided that the necessary linkage is made to the authorized uses.

The Maritime Museum greatly appreciates this opportunity to provide comments on the proposed GOMESA regulations. Any guidance or direction that the Department of the Interior can provide in regard to this matter is most welcome. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or clarifications regarding these comments. Thank you.

Sincerely,



E. B. Peebles
Chairman, Board of Trustees



Anthony J. Zodrow
Executive Director

Enclosure