

Drilling pact for coastal states

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Five US states have banded together to push the federal government to consult them more on offshore drilling plans, Mississippi governor Haley Barbour announced at the OTC conference in Houston.

The governors of Texas, Virginia, Alaska, and Louisiana joined Barbour in throwing their support behind the Outer Continental Shelf Governor's Coalition (OCSGC) and invitations to join the group have been sent to the heads of the other 20 coastal states.

The core principle of OCSGC will be a call for greater coordination between the state and federal government, as well as calling for a better understanding how federal decisions impact state and local economies, Barbour said.

While producing coastal states have long-advocated for more say in federal leasing and development decisions, this is the first time that they have created a group to lobby for their interests.

Doug Domenech, who heads the Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, said his state joined to help move along Lease Sale 220, which would have opened up the first blocks offshore Virginia for natural gas development, but was pushed back 10 years after the Macondo disaster.

President Barack Obama often reaches out to countries like Brazil and Saudi Arabia to encourage them to increase production but does not put the same emphasis on developing US resources, he said.

"All I want him to do is call Ken Salazar and tell him to move ahead with Lease Sale 220," Domenech said. "It's a local call."

Besides pushing for the government to return to normal activity levels on the Outer Continental Shelf, representatives of the states spoke strongly in favour of the feds sharing more revenue from OCS development with states.

Western states get a 50% cut of revenue from development on federal lands within their boundaries so it is only fair that coastal states get a cut of development on federal waters off their coasts, Scott Angelle, secretary for the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources said.

Dan Sullivan, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, said he thinks the OCSGC can move beyond rhetoric and actually affect change.

"It's not going to change things overnight but there is absolutely, positively a lot of potential" to influence government policy, he said.

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