

Opening Statement of  
**Chairman Paul Gosar**  
Wednesday May 17, 2017 at 10:00 a.m.  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Before the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee  
*Oversight Hearing on:*

***“Reviewing Recent State Successes with the Rigs to Reefs Program”***

Today the Subcommittee will discuss the performance of the Rigs To Reefs program, which transforms decommissioned oil and gas platforms into critical environmental assets. Shortly after platform construction, hundreds of marine species settle among the stationary platform legs and grow a vibrant habitat. Supporting all cycles of marine life, these decommissioned platforms remain in carefully designated coastal locations on the otherwise featureless Gulf floor. Since the program’s formal inception in 1984, over 500 platforms of artificial reef have been established and maintained, giving rise to a collection of marine species and supporting local commercial and recreational fishing industries.

Under federal law, offshore oil and gas operators are required to fully remove all equipment from the drill site upon termination of the lease. The Rigs to Reefs program, jointly

administered by the federal and state governments, provides an exception to this requirement, allowing operators to donate equipment to a state's artificial reef program. All aspects of decommissioning, inspection, and donation are carefully analyzed and permitted by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and the United States Coast Guard to ensure that the donated components are free of chemicals and structural deficiencies. Most often, platform jackets are cut into pieces, toppled, and towed to a designated reefing site. Operators then donate half of their savings from complete removal to the state program for reef maintenance. Finally, title and liability for the structure is then transferred to the state administration.

As offshore operators begin exploring and producing in deeper waters off the Continental Shelf, platforms on the shelf are nearing the end of their productive lives. With this impending wave of decommissioning, it is important that operators consider the Rigs to Reefs program as an alternative to scrapping the platform and the marine life it supports. The

purpose of the hearing today is to discuss the permitting process, and to identify regulatory and technical solutions to streamline the donation process.

We will hear from **Mr. Dale Shively**, Artificial Reef Program Leader at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, about how Texas accepts rigs and how the state determines artificial reef locations. **Dr. Greg Stunz**, a professor of Marine Biology at Texas A&M – Corpus Christi has joined us to share his detailed research on the ecological success of the artificial reef programs in the Gulf of Mexico. **Mr. David Bump**, Vice President of Drilling, Completions, and Facilities at W&T Offshore, Inc., is here to provide an industry perspective on the Rigs to Reefs program, and to explain how and why operators find the program valuable. These individuals will provide us with a comprehensive overview of the program, and will discuss ways to optimize the mutually beneficial program.

Before our witnesses provide their testimony, I would like to share with you a brief video depicting the lush marine life in the Gulf. Filmed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department,

these images depict the successes of the program along our treasured coasts. [PLAY VIDEO CLIP]