

9th Circuit Court blocks permits for fracking off California coast

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The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday blocked fracking off the California coast, ruling that the federal government must complete a full environmental review before approving permits for such offshore oil

drilling platforms.

The decision prevents the Interior Department and other [federal agencies](#) from issuing permits for "well stimulation" through hydraulic fracturing until a complete environmental impact statement is issued "rather than the inadequate [environmental assessment] on which they had relied."

"Today's decision is a win for our communities, our environment, and the rule of law," California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a news release. "Offshore drilling—particularly fracking—pollutes our waterways, damages our environment, and exacerbates climate change. We saw the risks of offshore drilling firsthand with the Huntington Beach oil spill last year, and we see it every day in the form of the climate crisis."

Kristen Monsell, oceans program legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity, called the ruling an "amazing victory for California's coast and marine life."

"This decision will prevent more toxic chemicals from poisoning fish, sea otters and other marine life. And it brings us a step closer to ending offshore drilling once and for all," Monsell said.

The decision stems from a 2016 lawsuit brought by the state, the California Coastal Commission and [environmental groups](#) alleging that "federal agencies violated environmental laws when they authorized unconventional oil drilling methods on offshore platforms in the Pacific Outer Continental Shelf off the coast of California," according to court records.

The plaintiffs argued that the environmental assessments of fracking done by federal agencies, including the Interior Department, were inadequate and incomplete.

"Environmental groups learned through Freedom of Information Act requests that agencies within the U.S. Department of the Interior had authorized permits for offshore well stimulation treatments without first conducting the normally-required environmental review," the judgment said.

Federal agencies "failed to take the hard look required" by the National Environmental Policy Act when issuing their [environmental assessment](#), the 9th Circuit panel wrote.

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