proposed for evaluation in an OCS 5year program. The OCS Policy Committee approved the continued existence of the task force to advise the Secretary throughout the remainder of the 5-year program.

The Draft Proposed Program provides for environmentally responsible oil and gas leasing in selected prospective areas of the OCS where it appears there is sufficient industry interest, where the laws and policies of adjacent States and localities are not a significant impediment to OCS program activity, and where there is agreement among interested and affected parties that further evaluation of leasing is reasonable. The program provides a framework for resolving concerns relating to new leasing and development of existing leases on a basis supported by sound science. In addition, to help assure that the new program and future leasing decisions are based on good science, the Director of the MMS has asked the OCS Policy and Scientific

Committees to form a subcommittee to provide an independent review and evaluation of specific information needs for areas where controversy has led to executive and/or legislative restrictions on leasing.

National Energy Needs

Analysis in the Proposed Final Program for 1992–1997 (April 1992) showed the economic dangers associated with the Nation's dependence on imported petroleum and how OCS production had helped reduce the need for even greater volumes of imported petroleum.

The growing need for imported petroleum remains a serious concern. In its December 1994 report to the President, The Effect of Imports of Crude Oil and Refined Petroleum Products on the National Security, the Department of Commerce concluded that petroleum imports threaten to impair U.S. national security.

Increasing imports will make the Nation more vulnerable to supply

disruptions and increase the Nation's balance of payments deficit. Environmentally responsible development of OCS oil and gas resources will have to play a role in any effort to slow or reverse the increase in imported energy.

The decisions on the new 5-year program will have a long-term effect on the contribution of OCS resources to meeting the Nation's energy needs and improving its trade balance. Most production resulting from lease sales held under the new 5-year program is likely to begin over the first decade of the next century and continue for another 25 years.

Maps 1 and 2 contain the areas proposed for leasing consideration in the new program. Table A is a summary of the proposed schedule of lease sales for the new program. Individual planning area maps are included in the Draft Proposed Program decision document.

TABLE A.—PROPOSED LEASE SALE SCHEDULE

Region and planning area	Year	Proposed activity
Alaska:		
Beaufort Sea	1998	Small sale, focusing on nearshore blocks in center of program area (Map 1). Sale in program area (Map 1).
Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait	1999	
Gulf of Alaska	2001	
Chukchi Sea/Hope Basin Gulf of Mexico:	2002	Combined sale in program area (Map 1).
Western Gulf of Mexico	Annual	Sale in program area (Map 2).
Central Gulf of Mexico		Sale in program area (Map 2).
Eastern Gulf of Mexico	2001	Sale in program area (Map 2) (offshore Alabama, 100 miles off Florida).

Draft Proposed Program Decision

Alaska Region

The Draft Proposed Program for 1997-2002 includes lease offerings in 5 of the 15 Alaska OCS planning areas-Beaufort Sea, Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait, Gulf of Alaska, Chukchi Sea, and Hope Basin. The lease offerings do not encompass the entire planning areas, rather they are focused on specific areas within the planning areas. These planning areas were recommended for further evaluation by the Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force, established by the OSC Policy Committee in November 1994 to make recommendations on the Alaska component of this 5-year program. The Task Force consists of representatives of Federal and State agencies, local governments and community organizations, Native/subsistence and development communities, oil and gas and commercial fishing industries, and environmental interests. Task Force

members met in Alaska as a group and conducted meetings in selected communities before preparing a report to the Secretary recommending areas to be considered in the new 5-year program.

The Draft Proposed Program for 1997– 2002 proposes no leasing for the remaining 10 Alaska OCS planning areas. St. George Basin has relatively low net social value and low industry interest, and consensus among interested parties including the Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force was that this area should be excluded from the new program. Norton Basin, Navarin Basin, St. Matthew-Hall, North Aleutian Basin, Aleutian Basin, Bowers Basin, Aleutian Arc, Shumagin, and Kodiak were excluded from the current 5-year program based on low net social value, low industry interest, and other section 18 considerations. No new information supports including these areas for leasing consideration in the new program, and the Alaska Regional

Stakeholders Task Force did not recommend that they be evaluated further.

Gulf of Mexico

Annual area wide sales for the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Areas are proposed to continue to provide industry and others with the flexibility and the reliable schedule so important to long-term planning. The proposed Eastern Gulf of Mexico lease sale would cover blocks offshore Alabama and in the deep-water areas along the boundary of the Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area. It recognizes the high potential for the development of natural gas in the areas of current development offshore Alabama and the potential for deepwater development along the Central Gulf of Mexico and Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning Areas' boundary line. It is also consistent with Florida's continued opposition to activity within 100 miles of its coast and Alabama's desire to share in the benefits