of new OCS leasing and development. The MMS will concentrate its efforts on resolving disputes relating to those existing leases in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico offshore Florida rather than exacerbate an already contentious situation with additional leasing.

Pacific Region

There are no proposed lease sales offshore the west coast. There are outstanding scientific information needs that have not been fulfilled.

The MMS will continue working with interested and affected parties to resolve issues concerning existing leases in the Southern California Planning Area. In previous comments and in response to the November 1994 Federal Register Notice soliciting comments on the development of a new 5-year program, the State of California has opposed any leasing off its coast. Local government policies and ordinances have reflected this opposition as well. The MMS Pacific Regional Office and officials from Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties in Southern California and several State agencies have formed a Tri-County Forum to address issues related to exploration and development on existing leases. Because of the cooperative nature of this forum to date in resolving oil and gas issues, two of the local counties indicated they would not oppose limited leasing off their coasts provided that several conditions such as impact assistance and an enhanced local role in OCS leasing decisions were met. However, there are still several issues to resolve for the future development of significant oil reserves under existing leases. Rather than propose additional acreage for leasing consideration, the MMS will continue working with interested and affected parties on issues concerning the existing leases.

Atlantic Region

There are no proposed lease sales. The MMS will continue working with interested and affected parties to resolve issues concerning existing leases in the Mid- and South Atlantic Planning Areas. In keeping with the Administration's goal of encouraging the use of natural gas, the MMS examined gas-prone areas off the coast of North Carolina and another off the coast of New Jersey. The areas offshore North Carolina are currently leased and are subject to litigation relating to application of the Coastal Zone Management Act and the Outer Banks Protection Act. No new leasing is proposed in these areas at this time, but

the MMS will continue to pursue resolving disputes related to the existing leases outside of litigation. The area offshore New Jersey has been leased in the past. A significant natural gas discovery was made in the 1970's. Given the recent dormancy in this area, rather than proposing leasing during the 5-year program, the MMS will begin preliminary discussions with constituents in the area.

No leasing is proposed in the North Atlantic and Straits of Florida Planning Areas. No new information supports including these areas for leasing in the new program.

Configuration of Planning Areas

The Draft Proposed Program decision moves the boundary between the Beaufort Sea and Chukchi Sea Planning Areas to more accurately conform those areas with the bodies of water after which they were named. In addition, Official Protraction Diagrams were created and planning area boundaries revised to be consistent with the current projection of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone as depicted on official maps prepared by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Whole and partial Official Protraction Diagrams have been added to the Beaufort Sea; Aleutian Arc; Washington-Oregon; Northern, Central, and Southern California; and South Atlantic Planning Areas; none of the additions would be considered for leasing. The Official Protraction Diagrams beyond the OCS and Exclusive Economic Zone in the Gulf of Alaska have been deleted.

Assurance of Fair Market Value

The basic minimum bid level would be set at \$25 per acre, subject to sale-bysale reconsideration, and the current two-phased bid adequacy process is retained. As announced in the Call for Comment published in the **Federal Register** on April 20, 1995, both of these measures are under separate review to ensure that fair market value is obtained through the MMS's leasing policies. Relevant comments received in response to that Notice will be considered in developing the fair market value provisions of the new 5-year program. The existing measures will be maintained until the separate review is complete. The results of the analysis will be addressed in formulating the proposed program.

Information Requested

We request all interested and affected parties to comment on the size, timing, and location of leasing and the procedures for assuring fair market

value that are proposed in the Draft Proposed Program for 1997–2002. Information provided by commenters should relate to the principles and factors of section 18, and suggestions for revising the Draft Proposed Program should include rationale corresponding to those considerations and to the policy objectives identified by the MMS, as discussed in the background presented above. Respondents who submitted information in response to the April 20, 1995, Call for Comment discussed above may wish to reference that information, as appropriate, rather than repeating it in their comments on the Draft Proposed Program. We also invite comments and suggestions on how to proceed with the section 18 analysis for the next draft of the new program, the Proposed Program.

As the scoping process continues for the programmatic EIS that will be prepared, we again request comments on significant environmental issues attendant to OCS leasing and development and on alternative options for size, timing, and location of sales that should be evaluated.

Respondents who wish to provide illustrated information pertaining to the size and location of lease sales can obtain larger OCS block-specific maps by calling (703) 787–1216.

Section 18(g) authorizes confidential treatment of privileged or proprietary information that is submitted. In order to protect the confidentiality of such information respondents should include it as an attachment to other comments submitted and mark it appropriately. On request the MMS will treat such information as confidential from the time of its receipt until 5 years after approval of the new leasing program, subject to the standards of the Freedom of Information Act. The MMS will not treat as confidential any aggregate summaries of such information, the names of respondents, and comments not containing such information.

Next Steps in the Process

The Proposed Program and draft EIS are scheduled to be issued in January 1996 followed by a 90-day comment period. The Proposed Final Program and final EIS are scheduled to be issued in August 1996. The Secretary may approve the new 5-year program 60 days later.

Dated: August 7, 1995.

Cynthia Quarterman,

Director, Minerals Management Service.

BILLING CODE 4310-MR-M