

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 15, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. Kenneth Stevens  
Principal Deputy Director  
Bureau of Safety and Environmental  
Enforcement  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum and Principal Deputy Director Stevens:

We write to inquire and express concern regarding the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's (BSEE) public statement and involvement in the Sable Offshore Corp.'s (Sable) Santa Ynez Unit (SYU) offshore oil project near the coast of Santa Barbara, California. Given BSEE's recent public statement, we request information on the agency's involvement with the Sable offshore project.

BSEE is the lead federal agency charged with improving safety and ensuring environmental protection related to the offshore energy industry on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).<sup>1</sup> The Bureau is supposed to protect Americans from the threat of offshore oil spills, and Californians in the Santa Barbara region are unfortunately all too familiar with the damage oil spills can cause. On January 28, 1969, an oil well blowout leaked 4.2 million gallons of crude oil into the ocean for an entire year. This oil spill completely closed commercial fishing in the area from February to April and caused damage to recreational and personal property, resulting in extensive economic losses for the region.<sup>2</sup>

Further, on May 19, 2015, the SYU (the same operation now owned by Sable) ruptured near Refugio State Beach, leaking 143,000 gallons of crude oil into storm drains and ultimately the ocean. Marine life, including fish, birds, and mammals, washed up on beaches coated in oil, and fisheries and beaches were forced to shut down.<sup>3,4</sup> The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Final Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan assessed \$22 million in damages to marine habitats, wildlife, and human uses due to the oil spill.<sup>5</sup> The SYU was shut down after the 2015 Refugio State Beach oil spill until recent efforts to resume production.<sup>6</sup>

In February 2024, ExxonMobil sold the SYU to Sable, a Texas-based company that seeks to extract mineral resources from California's coast. By late April 2025, Sable had accrued multiple

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bsee.gov/who-we-are/about-bsee>

<sup>2</sup> <https://incidentnews.noaa.gov/incident/6206>

<sup>3</sup> <https://darrp.noaa.gov/oil-spills/refugio-beach-oil-spill>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-santa-barbara-county-oil-spill-20160517-snap-story.html>

<sup>5</sup> [https://pub-data.diver.orr.noaa.gov/admin-record/6104/Refugio%20Beach%20Oil%20Spill%20Final%20Damage%20Assessment%20and%20Restoration%20Plan%202-03-2021Version\\_ADA\\_060821.pdf](https://pub-data.diver.orr.noaa.gov/admin-record/6104/Refugio%20Beach%20Oil%20Spill%20Final%20Damage%20Assessment%20and%20Restoration%20Plan%202-03-2021Version_ADA_060821.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eenews.net/articles/lawsuit-seeks-to-block-restart-of-offshore-california-oil-facility/>

lawsuits from environmental groups, three cease-and-desist orders from the California Coastal Commission (CCC), and a \$18 million fine from CCC for operating without the appropriate entitlements.<sup>7</sup> The CCC has argued that Sable violated the California Coastal Act for months by repairing and updating oil pipelines without permits. Because of its actions, Sable became subject to two court injunctions from the Santa Barbara County Superior Court ordering the company to stop repairs on the pipelines and to pause oil production.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of all this, on May 19, 2025—the 10-year anniversary of the Refugio State Beach oil spill—Sable announced the restart of oil production.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in a letter sent to Sable on May 23, 2025, the California State Lands Commission wrote that the company appeared to “mischaracterize” its activities: “Characterizing testing activities as a restart of operations is not only misleading but also highly inappropriate – particularly given that Sable has not obtained the necessary regulatory approvals to fully resume operations at SYU.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of Sable’s confusing public statement, the company is facing class action lawsuits alleging that it misled investors.

Then, in an apparent amplification of the company’s misleading statement, BSEE released a public statement on July 25, 2025, celebrating “the restart of production at SYU” and claiming that the U.S. Department of the Interior “successfully resumed production in just five months.” The statement also claimed that BSEE “continues to work with Sable to bring additional production online.”<sup>11</sup> However, Sable has yet to receive all the appropriate permits from California state agencies that are required for offshore oil and pipeline operations in the state. Moreover, the company remains under multiple court injunctions that prevent the resumption of operations until certain conditions can be met.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, BSEE’s statements are confusing at best and deceptive at worst. It is unclear whether the Trump administration bought into the company’s inaccurate statements or whether BSEE’s July 25 statement references different information entirely. BSEE’s July 25 statement also calls into question whether the Bureau had received accurate information from the company when the Bureau decided to issue 10 approvals for well modification permits for Sable in July.<sup>13</sup>

Considering BSEE’s stated involvement with Sable and Sable’s blatant attempts to circumvent state agency directives, we request answers to the following questions by September 29, 2025:

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eenews.net/articles/california-coastal-commission-hits-texas-oil-company-with-18m-fine/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.eenews.net/articles/california-judge-blocks-sable-oil-pipeline-restart/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://sableoffshore.com/news/news-details/2025/Sable-Offshore-Corp--Reports-Restart-of-Oil-Production-at-the-Santa-Ynez-Unit-and-Anticipated-Oil-Sales-from-the-Las-Flores-Pipeline-System-in-July-2025/default.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Letter from California State Lands Commission to Sable Offshore Corp., May 23, 2025, *Sable’s Claims Regarding Resumption of Oil and Gas Operations*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bsee.gov/newsroom/latest-news/statements-and-releases/press-releases/interior-secures-win-for-american>

<sup>12</sup> Santa Barbara Superior Court, Cases 25CV02244 and 25CV02247

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bsee.gov/stats-facts/ocs-regions/pacific/pacific-region-completed-applications-for-permit-to-modify-apm#:~:text=In%20accordance%20with%20Title%2030%20Code%20of%20Federal,other%20operations%20that%20revise%20an%20approved%20drilling%20plan>

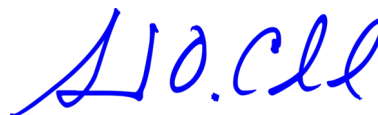
1. What is BSEE's role in efforts to restart the Sable project and what actions has BSEE taken to help Sable restart the project? Please provide a timeline of the communications between BSEE and Sable.
2. Please provide clarification on BSEE's July 25, 2025, statement that Sable has resumed oil production. How is this possible if Sable does not have the permits to do so and was merely conducting testing activities? On the basis of what information did BSEE decide to issue the July 25, 2025 statement?
3. Has BSEE made any determinations regarding whether Sable is in compliance with applicable state permits and related requirements? Why has BSEE failed to clearly communicate on these issues with California state agencies?
4. Has BSEE or DOI encouraged Sable to disregard California state agency directives in any way?
5. Why did BSEE provide 10 permit approvals (nine applications for permits to modify and one revised permit to modify) for Sable even though the company remains ensnarled in litigation and court injunctions? Is BSEE confident that the company provided accurate information to the agency when it submitted its well modification applications?

Ensuring safety and reducing the environmental impact of oil production in the OCS are BSEE responsibilities, and they require careful consideration. As America has experienced throughout its history—such as the Exxon Valdez, Deepwater Horizon, and California oil spills—the risk to the economy and the environment from oil spills is simply too great for hasty decisions that do not comprehensively take into account science or state and federal law. Thank you and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator



Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Laura Friedman  
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



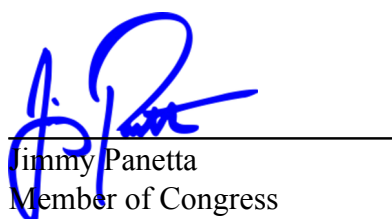
John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



Dave Min  
Member of Congress



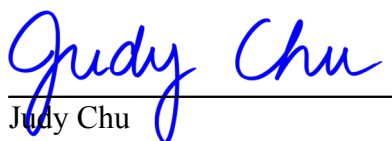
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



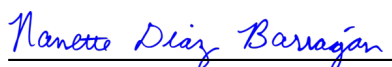
Derek T. Tran  
Member of Congress



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



Mike Levin  
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



Luz M. Rivas  
Member of Congress