

Exxon Denied



“That day is not today” Santa Barbara Supervisor Das Williams noted that the County would likely approve an energy project from Exxon if it consisted of clean, renewable energy. But....

The momentous March 8 decision of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to deny Exxon’s plan to restart several of its shuttered offshore platforms and truck the oil through Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Kern Counties continues to reverberate.

It is worth noting several take-aways from that meeting which didn’t get as much attention as they should have in the immediate media coverage. [Among the environmental arguments that won the day:](#)

- The Board essentially based its ruling on the principle that the value of tourism on California’s Central Coast was worth far more money than the project, a catastrophic threat to that industry, would bring in.
- In response to the idea that the “environmental baseline” of the projects should default to 2014, prior to the Refugio Beach oil spill, when all the offshore platforms were up and

running and feeding Exxon's onshore processing unit, Board Chair Joan Hartmann countered: "The baseline is we are in a climate crisis and this facility is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the county."

- The late-breaking Ukraine-based arguments that Exxon and its supporters brought into the hearing room in an attempt to stampede the board and win the day -- *Russia's invasion means we must frantically increase drilling to achieve energy independence* -- were turned back against them. Rather than accepting that frame, Supervisor Gregg Hart pushed back against irrelevant Ukraine war arguments. Increased drilling would have zero impact on either domestic or global gas prices. And if we really want to achieve energy independence, we must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.
- The board wasn't buying the idea that the likelihood of oil truck accidents along the route was statistically remote. Chair Hartmann pointed out that there have been 14 trucking accidents in 15 years in the county, eight of them along the proposed route, which includes the "extremely dangerous" Highway 166. "We've heard from quite a few people in Cuyama who see this every day."
- Supervisor Bob Nelson got no traction for his argument that it was basically unfair that Exxon had to go through the permit process only to get denied at the end, but rather should receive a permit as a reward for all their hard work. It was explained to him that county planners had found that the significant impacts described in the Environmental Impact Report could not be mitigated or overridden.