

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Platforms healthy digs for marine life

In the News-Press July 13 article, "Oil platforms nurture fish," a local environmental representative suggested that the sea creatures making homes under the offshore platforms are somehow contaminated.

This is not true. All the evidence indicates that the marine habitats on and around the platforms are healthy, thriving and unaffected by contaminants.

Dr. Milton Love's study gives us considerable insight and confirms what divers and fishermen have been reporting for years. It indicates that the platforms harbor bigger and more abundant rockfish and make better nurseries than natural reefs. This is not the description of a habitat under stress from contaminants.

Also, Dr. Love's pilot study on growth rates showed that, "Juvenile rockfishes at platforms are at least as healthy as those on natural outcrops."

There are other data that reinforces this. The state Lands Commission recently conducted mussel bag testing on the "4H Shell Mounds" sites, where four platforms were removed several years ago. These tests indicate no leaching or bio-availability of contaminants to the water column.

The commercial harvesting of shellfish from the platforms has been a successful enterprise for many years. The shellfish are tested by state Department of Fish and Game and are approved for human consumption.

The best available evidence indicates the platforms are healthy and valuable marine habitats. Ripping the platforms out and destroying this marine life is a step backward in restoring our depleted fisheries. It is hard to imagine anyone truly interested in the environment advocating such a drastic step.

George Steinbach, *Executive director California Artificial Reef Enhancement Program*