

## **Offshore energy panel on the mark**

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**This Old State**

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You never know how well special study commissions will perform in Raleigh, but at first look, the Offshore Energy Exploration Study Committee named by Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight and House Speaker Joe Hackney has good leadership for a difficult job.

The co-chairs will be Jim Leutze, former chancellor at UNC Wilmington and a frequent spokesman on coastal and other environmental issues, and Doug Rader, chief ocean scientist at Environmental Defense. Both hold PhDs, and there's brain power among the rest of the committee as well. It includes former state Rep. Ed Holmes of Chatham County, Jane Smith Patterson and Rob Young, head of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines at Western Carolina University way up in Cullowhee.

Their job will be to look at the "economic, environmental and other impacts" of energy exploration off the N.C. coastline, Basnight's and Hackney's offices said in a news release. The U.S. Minerals Management Service is eyeing granting exploratory leases off our coastline and somebody surely needs to take a hard look at what might happen.

But here's a caution: Remember that study commissions often turn up a lot of information but don't always come up with a firm conclusion on what to do. The 21st Century Transportation Committee came up with some interesting options for funding infrastructure and other transportation needs, but not a recommendation for prioritizing its solutions.

Similarly, a study commission pondering how to deal with the outcome of a hurricane catastrophe failed to come up with a consensus Wednesday on how to deal with a state insurance plan that might not fully cover the damage from a terrible storm. The panel, the N&O reported this morning, will leave it up to the General Assembly to decide what to do.

While the General Assembly doesn't always take the advice, or all the advice of study commissions when they do make cogent recommendations, legislators need the best information they can get and the best policy choices, too.

Posted by Jack Betts at 11:39 AM