



## The Green Line: One less LNG terminal threatens coasts

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Environmentalists are rejoicing over the cancellation of a liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal project that the federal government had licensed Chevron Texaco to undertake adjacent to the Coronado Islands proposed protected area near Ensenada on the Pacific Coast of Baja California state.

The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) announced March 26 that it would refrain from its investigation of a citizens' complaint over the megaproject after the Mexican Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat (Semarnat) revoked permission for the construction 11 miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border. The revocation was a response to Chevron Texaco's Feb. 15 notification to Semarnat that it would not pursue the proposal. The secretariat had approved the company's environmental impact statement on Sept. 15, 2004.

Some 25 environmental organizations had sued over the plant, which would have used sea water to heat super-cooled liquid gas from far-off lands to its natural state for transfer to the U.S. pipeline grid. They were unable to fetch a remedy in Mexican courts due to an exorbitant bond of US\$6.4 million set for appeals hearings. So activists demanded the CEC investigate Mexico's alleged law breaking in granting the permit.

They noted that Semarnat's National Biodiversity Commission (Conabio) has classified the Coronado Islands as an "Important Area for the Conservation of Birds" and a "Priority Maritime Region." On July 3, 2003, the Congress mandated federal agencies promote a decree to create a natural protected area for the Baja California Pacific islands, including the Coronado Islands.

Opponents say the LNG terminal would negatively impact the islands' species with light pollution; potential for a catastrophic explosion; disturbances from construction, operation, and supertanker supply routes; increased likelihood of spills and discharge of petroleum products; greater chances of rat introduction to the islands; as well as intake, chlorination, and discharge of 188,000,000 gallons of seawater per day. Of particular concern was the effect on the endangered Xantus's murrelet, a penguin-like seabird whose largest known breeding colony is on the Coronado Islands.

By locating the terminal in Mexico, Chevron Texaco would avoid stringent U.S. and California state laws. "In this respect, and in many others, the terminal is an energy maquiladora project reminiscent of the pre-NAFTA flight of environmentally destructive projects across borders to avoid environmental safeguards," petitioners' legal representatives at the University of Denver's Environmental Law Clinical Partnership stated. Their briefs were filed on behalf of [The Center for Biological Diversity](#), Greenpeace Mexico, Alfonso Aguirre of the Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, Shaye Wolf, American Bird Conservancy, Los Angeles Audubon Society, Pacific Environment and Resources Center, and Wildcoast.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was ratified on the condition that it be accompanied by an environmental side accord, which created the CEC. The commission is charged with overseeing comparable environmental laws and enforcement in the signatory countries of Mexico, the United States and Canada.

Former President Vicente Fox's administration tried to block the CEC's international inquiry and cover up the very existence of the investigation attempt. However, in the new administration of President Felipe Calderón, the CEC Secretariat announced Jan. 18 that it would go ahead with the review. It was shortly afterward that Chevron Texaco thought better of its plans and dropped them, nipping the environmental law query in the bud.

