The state’s ability to review and influence federal decisions on offshore oil development in federal waters were designed to prevent these “failures,” the judges wrote.

Gov. Gray Davis called the decision a victory for state’s rights and likened it-to “a big stop sign” to leaders in Washington. “They should take the hint and halt further attempts to exploit California’s spectacular coastal resources,” he said.

The U.S. Department of Interior said its lawyers were reviewing the ruling.

The main way drilling could go forward in that case is if President Bush invokes an obscure section of federal law stating the drilling “is in the paramount interest of the United States.”

Most U.S. offshore oil drilling now occurs in the Gulf of Mexico.

In California waters, nearly the entire coastline is already off-limits to new offshore oil and gas drilling. Four national marine sanctuaries bar oil drilling permanently.

On the rest of the coast, new oil drilling was banned until 2012. The only drilling now occurring takes place on about 30 oil platforms, mostly around the Santa Barbara Channel. Over time, they are scheduled to go out of service as oil fields are tapped out.

At issue in Monday’s case were 36 lease areas in federal waters more than three miles off the coastlines of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

Nuevo Energy of Houston, one of the leaseholders, met with Department of Interior officials last year asking for a buyout of the leases. They noted that in 2000, federal courts ruled the Interior Department had to pay Mobil and Marathon oil $158 million after Congress banned new drilling off North Carolina and they could not drill on leases where they had paid rent.

But environmental groups say the government should entertain no such buyout now because circumstances are different.

“We are simply asking the oil companies to comply with a pre-existing law and let the leases expire,” said Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center.
The act passed in 1972, never in 72, was the first to address offshore drilling. It was a response to the OPEC oil embargo and the resulting energy crisis. The act was intended to provide a framework for the safe and responsible development of offshore energy resources. It established a process for leasing offshore areas for oil and gas exploration and production, and it established a royalty program to provide revenue to the states that were impacted by the drilling.

Many of the issues that are being discussed today about offshore drilling were first raised in 1972. Since then, the technology has improved, but the issues have not gone away. The environmental and economic impacts of offshore drilling are complex and multifaceted, and they continue to be debated and studied.

Status quo woes

The Congress has been unable to pass any meaningful offshore drilling legislation in recent years. The most recent major effort was the proposed Deepwater Horizon Oil Pollution Response and Emergency Preparedness Act of 2010, which was designed to address the problems that led to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The act was introduced in December 2010, but it never came to a vote in Congress.

The problem is that the interests of the oil and gas industry, the environmental groups, and the coastal states all want different things. The oil and gas industry wants to be able to drill as much as possible, while environmental groups want to protect the environment and prevent spills. The coastal states want to be able to control the development of offshore drilling in their areas, but they also want to be able to benefit from the revenue that comes from leasing offshore lands.

The result is a stalemate that has prevented any meaningful legislation from being passed. As a result, the act passed in 1972 remains the law of the land.

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Oil-drilling push hits choppy seas

USA Today 3/14/02

Administration's push to drill off shore

in several states

is under attack

offshore output plan to boost

production of oil and gas

Federal government proposes to increase offshore drilling by expanding exploration in federal seas. President Bush announced energy policy designed to increase the supply of energy products and diversify the nation's energy sources. Critics of the proposal charge it would lead to more oil spills and damage the environment.