



U.S. Department of the Interior

# News Release

## Office of Natural Resources Revenue

[www.onrr.gov](http://www.onrr.gov)

### Office of Public Affairs

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## **Interior's ONRR, Justice Department announce \$14.6 million False Claims settlement with Total**

**WASHINGTON** — Total Fina S.A. and its affiliates have agreed to pay the United States \$14.6 million plus interest to resolve claims that the companies violated the False Claims Act by knowingly under-reporting and under-paying royalties owed on natural gas produced from Federal and American Indian leases.

The announcement was made today by the Department of the Interior's Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) and the U.S. Justice Department.

"The Department of the Interior and ONRR remain committed to ensuring that energy companies accurately report production and pay the required royalties," said Greg Gould, Interior's Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources Revenue. "We will continue to pursue every dollar due to taxpayers, Indian landowners, and the Federal Government from extracting these precious natural resources from Federal and American Indian lands."

His sentiments were shared by Tony West, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division of the Department of Justice. "When companies are permitted to remove natural gas and other non-renewable resources from public lands, we must require them to keep their end of the bargain and pay their fair share of royalties," West said. "Through this case and others like it, we are demonstrating our commitment to protect natural resources and support important federal programs from which we all benefit."

The settlement announced today is between the United States and Total Fina S.A., Total Oil and Chemical Company, Total Minatome Corporation, Total Exploration Production U.S.A. Inc., Fina Oil & Chemical Company, Elf Exploration Inc., and Total E&P USA Inc. The agreement covers the time period from August 1986 through the present.

The settlement also resolves numerous administrative matters from the associated time period, including previous ONRR administrative orders and issue letters.

The settlement arises from a lawsuit filed by Harrold E. ("Gene") Wright under the Federal False Claims Act. Under the *qui tam*, or whistleblower, provisions of the Act, private citizens may file actions on behalf of the United States Government and share in any recovery. Because Mr. Wright is deceased, his heirs will receive \$23,000 as part of their share of the settlement.

The settlement agreement was reached among the Total Defendants, the Department of the Interior through ONRR, and the Justice Department's Civil Division and the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Texas, with assistance from the DOI's Office of Inspector General and the Office of the Solicitor.

According to Gould, the Total settlement follows numerous agreements with other energy companies in recent years that – including the Total settlement – have returned approximately \$280 million to the Federal Government and Indian lessors.

The Office of Natural Resources Revenue, part of the DOI's Office of Policy, Management and Budget, is responsible for collecting and disbursing revenues from energy production that occurs onshore on Federal and American Indian lands, and offshore in the Outer Continental Shelf. During Fiscal Year 2011, the agency disbursed more than \$11.2 billion to states, American Indian Tribes and individual Indian mineral owners, and to various Federal accounts, including the U.S. Treasury, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Reclamation Fund.

## **ONRR**