## IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA

RANDALL L. LITTLE and ) JOEL F. ARNOLD, Bringing this Action On Behalf of the United States Government, Plaintiff,
-v-
CIV
)

Complaint and Jury Demand
) Complaint Originally Sealed
) Under 31 U.S.C. §3730(b)(2) and
) (3)


Case No. $\qquad$ FILED
FEB 152006

## COMPLAINT AND JURY DEMAND

Relators RANDALL L. LITTLE and JOEL F. ARNOLD, bring this qui tam action in the name of the United States Government, complaining of Defendants ROYAL DUTCH SHELL, P.L.C., SHELL EXPLORATION \& PRODUCTION COMPANY, SHELL DEEPWATER DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS, INC., and SHELL OFFSHORE, INC., and allege as follows:

## I. INTRODUCTION

## (PARTIES)

1. Relator RANDALL L. LITTLE is an individual citizen of the State of Oklahoma and the United States of America and resides within Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.
2. Relator JOEL F. ARNOLD is an individual citizen of the State of Oklahoma and the United States of America and resides within Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.
3. Relator RANDALL L. LITTLE is a Senior/Staff Auditor employed by the Minerals Management Service ("MMS") of the United States Department of the Interior ("DOI"), and has been so employed for in excess of six (6) years. Relator maintains his principal place of business in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
4. Relator JOEL F. ARNOLD is a Supervisory Auditor employed by the MMS of the United States DOI, and has been so employed for in excess of ten (10) years. Relator maintains his principal place of business in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
5. Through Relators' personal and direct participation in the audit/review of Defendants, the wrongful acts complained of herein were discovered.
6. Defendants ROYAL DUTCH SHELL, P.L.C., SHELL EXPLORATION \& PRODUCTION COMPANY, SHELL DEEPWATER DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS, INC., and SHELL OFFSHORE, INC. are related and/or integrated business entities engaged, inter alia, in the exploration and production of oil and natural gas, petrochemicals and petroleum related construction.

## (JURISDICTION)

7. Relators bring this civil action for violations of the False Claims Act (hereinafter "FCA"),' to recover monies due and owing to the United States arising from Defendants' obligation(s) to properly pay federal oil royalties. Specifically, Relators bring suit under Title 31 U.S.C. $\S 3730$ (b) to recover for false claims made by Defendants wherein Defendants fraudulently obtained deduction of costs of transportation of petroleum products, which is, and has been, done in violation of Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(a)(1), (2) and (7) and in contemporaneous violation of Defendants' lease contracts with the United States Government.

[^0]8. There are no other related actions based on the facts underlying this action. Thus, this action is properly brought in accord with Title 31 U.S.C. $\S 3730(\mathrm{~b})(5)$.
9. There are no other related pending government civil suits or administrative civil money penalty proceedings. Thus, this action is properly brought in accord with Title 31
U.S.C. §3730(e)(3).
10. There has been no "public disclosure" of the allegations and transactions referenced herein. Accordingly, this action is properly brought in accord with Title 31 U.S.C. §3730(3)(4)(A). See also United States ex rel. Holmes v. Consumer Insurance Group, 318 F.3d 1199 (10th Cir. 2003).
11. Relators qualify as the "original source" of these allegations inasmuch as they have direct and independent knowledge of the information on which the allegations herein are based, because they solely and personally conducted the audit/review of Defendants wherein the false claims made were discovered. Relators initiated the communications that first placed this matter at issue. Further, Relators voluntarily provided the information that is the subject of this suit to the United States Government before filing this action, but were dissuaded from taking any action regarding the false claims made by Defendants. Accordingly, Relators are the "original source" within the meaning of Title 31 U.S.C. $\S 3730(\mathrm{e})(4)(\mathrm{B})$.
12. Jurisdiction over this action is conferred on this Court by Title 31 U.S.C. §3732(a) and Title 28 U.S.C. $\S 1331$ because this civil action arises under the laws of the United States.
13. In personam jurisdiction is appropriate in this District because the False Claims Act provides for nation- and worldwide service of process. See Title 31 U.S.C. §3732(a).

In such circumstances, the relevant inquiry is whether a given defendant has sufficient contacts with the United States as a whole. Appl. To Enforce Admin. Subp. of S.E.C. v. Knowles, 87 F.3d 413, 417-419 (10th Cir. 1996). Moreover, Title 28 U.S.C. §1391(d) provides that foreign defendants may be sued in any district. Defendants have abundant national contacts.
(VENUE)
14. Defendants conduct business throughout the United States of America and are subject to audit/review by Minerals Management Service employees who are located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
15. The false statements complained of herein concern Defendants' monthly submission of Form MMS-2014, Report of Sales and Royalty Remittance (hereinafter "2014"). Defendants' 2014s were evaluated and audit/reviewed at the MMS facility located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The 2014s include Defendants' certification that their royalty reporting and payments complied with applicable federal law and regulations. Thus, one or more acts proscribed by the FCA occurred within the Western District of Oklahoma.
16. From their Oklahoma City, Oklahoma office location, Relators personally and directly audit/reviewed Defendants and discovered the wrongdoing that is alleged herein. 17. Venue lies herein under Title 28 U.S.C. $\S 1391$ (c) and 31 U.S.C. §3732(a) because Defendants conduct business in this district and because the claims alleged arose and were discovered in this district, in Oklahoma County, State of Oklahoma.

## II. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS AND BACKGROUND

## A. Overview of federal oil and gas leases and regulations:

18. Under various statutes, including the Mineral Lands Leasing Act of 1920, Title 30
U.S.C. §181, et seq., the Acquired Lands Leasing Act, 30 U.S.C. §351, et seq., the Right-of-Way Leasing Act of 1930, Title 30 U.S.C. §301, et seq., and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1953, Title 43 U.S.C. §1331, et seq., (as those Acts have been amended over time), the United States is authorized to lease federally-owned properties for mineral and oil and gas exploration, development, and production.
19. Pursuant to these and other sources of authority, the United States has entered, and continues to enter, into many oil and gas leases affecting federal lands located onshore and offshore.
20. The Department of the Interior ("DOI") is an agency and instrumentality of the United States, and the MMS is a component agency of DOI which has responsibility, among other duties, to timely and accurately collect, distribute, account and audit revenues owed to the United States because of the production of minerals from leases on federal land.
21. The MMS requires each lessee to file a monthly report (Form MMS-2014; "Report of Sales and Royalty Remittance") of oil sale remittances for the preceding production month. Form MMS-2014 requires the lessee to report accurately and in compliance with the terms of the lease at issue, and in conformity with applicable regulations.
22. Form MMS-2014 requires a signatory to affirm that all statements in the report are accurate and complete, thereby constituting a prerequisite to obtaining the benefit(s) requested.
23. The applicable federal oil and gas regulations, as well as the case law interpreting and enforcing these regulations placed an affirmative duty upon Defendants to prudently and accurately report royalties due and/or deductions taken for the mutual benefit of the lessee and lessor. ARCO Oil \& Gas Corp., 112 IBLA 8, 11 (November 9, 1989). See also California v. Udall, 296 F.2d 384 (D.C. Cir. 1961).
24. All persons dealing with the United States Government are presumed to have knowledge of relevant regulations. Walter Oil and Gas Corp., 111 IBLA 260 (October 25, 1989). In this case, Defendants are presumed to have knowledge, inter alia, of the following regulation, 30 CFR 206.106:

> 30 CFR §206.106. You must place oil in marketable condition and market the oil for the mutual benefit of the lessee and the lessor at no cost to the Federal
> Government. If you use gross proceeds under an arm'slength contract in determining value, you must increase those gross proceeds to the extent that the purchaser, or any other person, provides certain services that the seller normally would be responsible to perform to place the oil in marketable condition or to market the oil. [emphasis added]
25. Defendants likewise are deemed to have knowledge of the following definition of "gathering," as set forth in 30 CFR §206.101:

Gathering means the movement of lease production to a central accumulation or treatment point on the lease, unit, or communitized area, or to a central accumulation or treatment point off the lease, unit or communitized area that BLM or MMS approves for onshore and offshore leases, respectively.

## 

26. Gathering activities are considered part of bringing lease production into marketable condition. Transportation, in the sense that "transportation" costs can be deducted from royalties, occurs after the product has been made into marketable condition. Gathering does not constitute transportation, but is an antecedent activity thereto. In IBLA 97-0016 (147 IBLA 277), the MMS specifically ruled that gathering activities do not fall within ambit of "transportation" and stated:
. . . further handling of . . . production was necessary, after its arrival at those (accumulating) platforms, to place it into marketable condition prior to delivery to the purchaser . . . . the pipelines by which it arrived there are properly considered "gathering" lines."

## B. The Leases:

27. There are six (6) leases between Defendants and the MMS that are at issue: Lease Nos. 054-007944-0, 054-005868-0, 054-005871-0, 054-009883-0, 054-012166-0, and 054-014653-0.
28. Lease No. 054-007944-0 falls within Unit Agreement Number 754-396016A and will be referred to herein as "Shell No. 1."
29. Lease Nos. 054-005868-0, 054-005871-0, 054-009883-0, 054-012166-0, and 054-014653-0 are leases within Unit Agreement Number 754-393012A and will be referred to herein as "Shell No. 2."
30. Royalties due and/or deductions taken under Shell No. 1 and Shell No. 2 were, at all relevant times, reported to the MMS on MMS-2014 forms via their respective Unit Agreement Numbers.
31. The Invitations for Offer ("IFO") that preceded execution of the six (6) leases specifically established that "successful offerors will take custody of the royalty oil at
offshore delivery points, and will be responsible for all movement of royalty oil downstream of these points." Offshore delivery points will be referred to hereafter as "custody transfer points."
32. The custody transfer points contemplated in the IFOs were identified as being one and the same as the oil platform where the product was first brought to surface (a/k/a "FMP" point, Facility Measurement Point or Federal Metering Point).
33. Both the IFO and the Leases in Shell No. 1 and Shell No. 2 specifically provided that the Lessee was required to provide a marketable product at the custody transfer point at no cost to the United States Government, unless it was moved beyond the boundaries of an adjacent lease. The relevant language of the leases is:

> When paid in amount, such royalties shall be delivered at pipeline connections or in tanks provided by the lessee. Such deliveries shall be made at reasonable times and intervals and, at the Lessor's option, shall be effected either (i) on or immediately adjacent to the leased area, without cost to the lessor, or (ii) at a more convenient point closer to shore or on shore, in which event the lessee shall be entitled to reimbursement for the reasonable cost of transporting the royalty substance to such delivery point. [emphasis added]
34. In this case, with respect to both Shell 1 and Shell 2, the custody transfer point(s)/FMPs were located within the respective Leases or on an adjacent lease. Accordingly, Defendants could not have moved the marketable product from the leased area or adjacent lease. Thus, there is no possibility for Defendants to take legitimate transportation deductions under the leases in Shell 1 and Shell 2.
35. Nevertheless, with respect to Shell 1, from April 2004 through August 2005, Defendants falsely deducted $\$ 2,549,015.04$ in transportation costs. With respect to Shell

2, from October 2001 through December 2005, Defendants falsely deducted \$940,623.55 as transportation costs.
36. Defendants falsely claimed the following deductions with respect to Shell 1:

## Month

April 2004
May 2004
June 2004
July 2004
August 2004
September 2004
October 2004
November 2004
December 2004
January 2005
February 2005
March 2005
April 2005
May 2005
June 2005
July 2005
August 2005
October 2005
November 2005
December 2005

## Amount Deducted

\$ 26,425.71
\$172,160.37
\$239,197.28
\$275,347.65
\$223,353.34
\$119,329.04
\$ 66,944.76
\$221,312.04
\$311,392.57
\$129,667.38
\$111,713.12
\$120,375.42
\$120,528.90
\$138,304.88
\$115,875.68
\$ 60,522.41
\$ 96,564.49
\$ 94,248.12
\$ 114,786.25
\$116,624.32

## TOTAL: \$2,914,234.10

37. Defendants falsely claimed the following deductions with respect to Shell 2:

## Month

October 2001
November 2001
December 2001
January 2002
February 2002
March 2002
April 2002
May 2002
June 2002
July 2002
August 2002

## Amount Deducted

\$21,382.69
\$19,654.25
\$17,742.90
\$18,398.88
\$16,915.21
\$17,418.52
\$17,115.51
\$17,335.39
\$16,733.48
\$17,146.04
\$16,622.85

## Casset5006ewe08

September 2002
October 2002
November 2002
December 2002
January 2003
February 2003
March 2003
April 2003
May 2003
June 2003
July 2003
August 2003
September 2003
October 2003
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January 2004
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October 2005
November 2005
December 2005
\$12,984.36
\$14,240.34
\$15,759.65
\$18,185.82
\$15,844.03
\$14,115.59
\$15,682.16
\$14,691.96
\$14,951.70
\$14,373.80
\$ 9,610.06
\$15,957.31
\$16,513.76
\$16,728.06
\$16,320.55
\$16,429.66
\$29,337.58
\$31,526.80
\$32,761.99
\$32,411.96
\$35,004.46
\$35,835.54
\$34,002.83
\$34,056.01
\$24,779.68
\$30,744.76
\$26,715.13
\$27,007.02
\$19,047.76
\$16,717.05
\$17,631.86
\$16,894.31
\$17,711.03
\$10,397.26
\$ 8,718.06
\$ 7,915.26
\$ $-0-$
\$ -0 -
\$ 3,077.15
\$ 9,475.52
TOTAL: $\quad \underline{940,623.55}$
38. Accordingly, at all times material hereto, Defendants acted in direct derogation of the IFOs, the terms of the leases in Shell 1 and Shell 2, and statutory mandate and
knowingly, or with deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information and/or reckless disregard, reported royalties less deductions for costs of transportation when a) Defendants were contractually and legally forbidden from deducting those costs, and b) Defendants did not actually transport MMS oil across an adjacent lease.
39. By falsely reporting the above referenced deductions, Defendants explicitly violated the applicable federal royalty regulations.
40. At all times material hereto, Defendants made these false statements via monthly submittals of the Form MMS-2014.
41. The end result of Defendants false reporting is that Defendants were significantly overpaid for services they did not perform and the United States Government suffered damages in excess of $\$ \mathbf{3 , 8 5 4}, \mathbf{8 5 7} .65$.
42. All wrongful actions complained of herein were performed "knowingly," as that term is defined by Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(b).

## C. The Discovery of Defendants' False Claims and Actions taken by Relators

43. In the course of performing an audit/review, Relator Randall L. Little discovered that Defendants were deducting costs of transporting oil that was never actually moved from the FMP or across an adjacent lease.
44. Relator Little personally reviewed documents and records and personally discovered that Defendants had substantially underpaid their federal oil royalties because Defendants took unauthorized and unlawful deductions for the costs of transportation, all as set forth above.
45. Relators Little and Arnold discussed Little's findings and via telephone conversations and email correspondence, presented the false claims made by Defendants to Lonnie Kimball, supervisor to Mr. Arnold, who is located in Houston, Texas.
46. With Mr. Kimball's acquiescence, Relator Little corresponded via email with Pam Williams of the Shell Exploration \& Production Company in Houston, Texas. Therein, Relator Little specifically asked Ms. Williams to explain why Defendants were deducting transportation costs when there was no authority to do so.
47. Additionally, with Mr. Kimball's agreement, Relators drafted an "Issue Letter" to be sent to Defendants after it had been signed by Mr. Kimball. ${ }^{2}$ Relators specifically understood that Mr. Kimball anticipated signing the Issue Letter.
48. Relator Little then went on sick leave on December 16, 2005, as he was scheduled for, and in fact had, open heart surgery.
49. While Relator Little was on sick leave, Relator Arnold learned that personnel from Defendants arranged for and held a meeting with Mr. Kimball on January 11, 2006.
50. In suspiciously close proximity to the January 11, 2006 meeting, Mr. Kimball verbally retracted his initial decision to pursue the false claims made by Defendants.
51. On January 26, 2006, Mr. Kimball retracted his decision to pursue Defendants' false claims in an email directed to Pam Williams and Cindy Nguyen, Company Coordinator - Shell Residency and to Relators, wherein Mr. Kimball set forth, in relevant part:
> "1. MRM will not take any action on the email message below from Randy Little dated 12/13/2005 because MRM,
[^1]OMM, and Shell are currently discussing issues related to the MARS/URSA TLP audit currently under way by the MRM Residency team. MRM and OMM are using the Auger decision as a basis for the MARS/URSA TLP equipment. Some of the TLP cost in Randy's properties may be allowed as a transportation.
2. The work being done by Joel Arnold's team is a desk review and not an audit."3
52. An audit/review of available records clearly shows that Defendants overcharged the United States Government in the amount of at least $\mathbf{\$ 3 , 8 5 4}, \mathbf{8 5 7} .65$, subject to further audit.
53. To the best of Relators' knowledge, neither the MMS nor any other federal agency has taken any action against Defendants concerning the issues that are the subject matter of this action.

## III. CLAIM FOR RELIEF

## VIOLATION OF THE FALSE CLAIMS ACT, TITLE 31 U.S.C. $\$ 3729$, et seq.

54. Relator incorporates by reference the entirety of the allegations contained in

Paragraphs 1 through 53 above, as though fully set forth herein.
55. By engaging in the actions specified in Paragraphs 1 through 53 above, Defendants have knowingly presented, or caused to be presented, to an officer or employee of the United States Government numerous false and/or fraudulent claims for payment and/or approval, in violation of Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(a)(1).
56. By engaging in the actions specified in Paragraphs 1 through 53 above,

Defendants have knowingly made, used, or caused to be made or used, a false record or

[^2]statement to get a false or fraudulent claim paid and/or approved by the Government in violation of Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(a)(2).
57. By engaging in the actions specified in Paragraphs 1 through 53 above, Defendants have knowingly made, used, or caused to be made or used false records or statements to convert, conceal, avoid, or decrease an obligation to pay or transmit money for payment of royalties to the United States Government, in violation of Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(a)(7).
58. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' actions, the United States Government has not been paid full and appropriate royalties due and owing for the production of oil and other petroleum based chemicals from the Royalty Properties, the exact amount of which will be proved at trial.
59. Accordingly, the United States is entitled to judgment against Defendants for the full amount of unpaid and/or underpaid royalties, plus treble damages and penalties as provided for under the law.

## IV. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Relators RANDALL L. LITTLE and JOEL F. ARNOLD, on behalf of the United States, request (a) that the United States Government recover from Defendants all royalties which the Government should have received had Defendants discharged their duty to properly pay all royalties; (b) that the damages described in (a) be trebled as provided for by Title 31 U.S.C. §3729(a); (c) that a civil penalty of no less than $\$ 5,000.00$ and no more than $\$ 10,000.00$ be assessed against Defendants for each false statement submitted to the United States Government; (d) that the Court award the Relator all amounts as are permitted under Title 31 U.S.C. §3730(d), including an
appropriate share of any sums recovered and benefits obtained in this action, now or in the future, along with Relators' reasonable expenses, attorney fees, and costs incurred herein plus pre- and post-judgment interest; and (e) that the Court grant any additional relief which is just and proper.

## RELATOR DEMANDS A TRIAL BY JURY ON ALL ISSUES SO TRIABLE

Respectfully submitted this 15th day of February, 2006.

PIERCE COUCH HENDRICKSON


Chris Condren, OBA 001841
Elizabeth R. Sharrock, OBA 16934
P.O. Box 26350

1109 N. Francis
Oklahoma City, OK 73126
4052351611 (phone)
4052350872 (fax)
Attorneys for Relators

##  CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS

RANDALL L. LITTLE and JOEL F. ARNOLD,
Bringing this Action On Behalf of the United States Government,
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff
(EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)

## DEFENDANTS

ROYAL DUTCH SHELL, P.L.C.,
SHELL EXPLORATION \& PRODUCTION Co., et al.
County of Residence of First Listed Defendant
(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)

NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE LAND INVOLVED.
(c) Attorney's (Fimi Name, Address, and Telephone Number)

Pierce Couch Hendrickson Baysinger \& Green,L.L.P.
 1109 N. Francis, Oklahoma City, OK 73126 (405) 235-1611
II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an " X " in One Box Only)

| $\square_{1}$ | U.S. Government <br> Plaintiff | Federal Question <br> (U.S. Government Not a Party) |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| $\square_{2}$ | U.S. Goverument <br> Defendant | $\square_{4}$ | | Diversity |
| :---: |
| (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III) |

III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES(Place an " X " in One Box for Plaintiff (For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant)


Foreign Country

V. ORIGIN



## VI. CAUSE OF ACTION

Brief description of cause:
Kecovery of ralse Claims Made by Detendants

| VII. REQUESTED IN | $\square$ |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| COMPLAINT: | CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION | DEMAND $\$$ | CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint: |

VIII. RELATED CASE(S)

IF ANY (See instructions): JUDGE
DOCKET NUMBER



[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ Title 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ An "Issue Letter" is an industry identifier for the document that is sent to a Lessee who appears to be reporting royalties out of compliance with applicable regulations and lease terms. Although Mr. Arnold once had authority to sign Issue Letters, that authority was taken away from him in the recent past. Mr. Kimball had authority to sign Issue Letters drafted by Relators.

[^2]:    ${ }^{3}$ The reference to "desk review," when taken in context, appears to be an attempt to downplay the fraud discovered by Relators, as well as to demonstrate to Defendants that MMS would not follow through on the discovery of the false claims.

