

June 8, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing regarding potential geological and geophysical (G&G) activities in the Atlantic Ocean, including seismic airgun blasting. The process for providing permits for Atlantic G&G is currently underway, led by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). We strongly urge your Administration to refrain from permitting this harmful seismic blasting to avoid negative impacts on ocean wildlife, including marine mammals and fish.

On March 15, the Department of the Interior removed the proposed Atlantic lease sale from the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Program. Notwithstanding this action, however, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has indicated that it will proceed with the seismic permitting process, reviewing applications by industry to shoot tens of thousands of miles of seismic line during the first year of activity alone. With the Atlantic Ocean withdrawn from the Proposed Program, seismic airgun blasting is unnecessary and should not proceed.

Seismic airgun blasting for oil and natural gas is an extremely disruptive activity in the ocean. A significant body of peer-reviewed science demonstrates that seismic airgun blasting can cause the catch rates of some commercial fish species to plummet, displace fish over large areas, and broadly disrupt the feeding and breeding behaviors of whales and other marine life. Last year, a group of 75 marine scientists sharply criticized the Administration's 2014 decision, to introduce seismic surveys to the Atlantic and cautioned that impacts on the region's fish and marine mammal populations would be "significant, long-lasting, and widespread."

Although a wide range of marine species will be negatively impacted by seismic airgun blasting such as commercial fish species, the North Atlantic right whale, one of the most endangered whales on the planet, is particularly vulnerable. With approximately 500 individuals remaining, seismic airgun blasting could accelerate the species' further decline.

Conducting seismic airgun blasting in the near future would be unwise for another reason. New technology that substitutes the explosive blasts released by seismic airguns with a lower-intensity "hum" is in development and is expected to be ready for commercial use before 2020. With no Atlantic lease sales included in the upcoming five-year plan, it would be worthwhile to wait for the availability of new technology, and then re-evaluate the cost-benefit analysis of energy resource exploration in the Atlantic Ocean.

In addition, it is important to note that most seismic data are proprietary and are not shared with

the public, local leaders, or federal elected officials. The conditions for data disclosure are extremely restrictive, if disclosure is allowed at all. In fact, those who share seismic data in an unsanctioned manner risk significant penalties. It will therefore be impossible for coastal citizens to weigh the profitability of offshore oil and gas deposits against their coastal livelihoods. The absence of the information needed to perform such a crucial cost-benefit analysis further necessitates delaying the permitting for seismic airgun blasting for oil and gas reserves in the Atlantic Ocean.

Opposition to seismic airgun blasting among coastal communities is widespread and growing. Of the 112 local resolutions passed to oppose offshore oil and gas development, 95 of these specifically oppose seismic airgun blasting. Coastal communities recognize that seismic airgun blasting is a grave threat to their way of life, including economies based heavily on fishing and tourism. Coastal opposition includes actions by the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the bodies responsible for managing many of the fisheries in the proposed area for seismic blasting. These Councils, which include industry representatives, have formally amended their policies to request protection for fisheries and fish habitats from energy exploration and development activities for the species and areas managed by the Councils.

Although the Atlantic Ocean has been precluded from oil and natural gas production for now, exploration in the form of seismic airgun blasting continues to threaten productive fisheries, and marine organisms and ecosystems. We ask that you protect this important and productive area from unnecessary, long-lasting harm and halt consideration of all G&G oil and gas permits.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mark Sanford
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly
Rep. Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Rep. Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Rep. Corrine Brown
Rep. G. K. Butterfield
Rep. Lois Capps
Rep. Michael E. Capuano
Rep. John Carney
Rep. Matthew Cartwright
Rep. David N. Cicilline
Rep. Katherine M. Clark
Rep. Yvette D. Clarke
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Rep. Chaka Fattah
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Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman
Rep. Frederica S. Wilson