



The Times

March 22, 2015

Editorial: Oil drilling off Atlantic coast is dangerous for N.J., neighboring states

It was only five years ago when the United States was rocked by the country's worst oil spill, the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

For many, the fallout of the BP oil spill of 2010 is still fresh in their minds. They remember that more than 200 million gallons of crude oil spewed into the gulf and tainted 16,000 miles of coastline along Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

So it is not surprising that when the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management held a meeting last week in Atlantic City to hear comments on a proposal to open the Atlantic Ocean from Virginia to Georgia to offshore drilling for oil and natural gas, environmentalists and lawmakers from New Jersey voiced a resounding "NO."

And well they should.

Even though the drilling would not take place off the coast of New Jersey, the fear is that drilling along the southern coast could have a devastating impact on beaches and marine life here.

There is a lot at stake for New Jersey. Shore towns account for a large share of the state's \$42 billion tourism industry. Last year, tourism directly supported 316,000 jobs in New Jersey and indirectly sustained nearly 508,000 other jobs, according to the state's Division of Travel and Tourism.

And New Jersey fishermen reeled in about 133 million pounds of seafood worth more than \$195 million in 2011, the U.S. government said.

To put all that in jeopardy just to extract a limited amount of oil is foolish. The area being considered off the Atlantic Coast is believed to contain about 3 billion barrels of oil that would amount to 10 years' worth of the country's oil consumption, environmental groups say.

"Drilling off the Atlantic Coast is the wrong approach that puts our New Jersey beaches at risk," said Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-6th Dist.), whose district includes part of the Jersey Shore. "We've seen that oil spills don't respect state borders. An oil spill anywhere along the Atlantic Coast would cause severe environmental damages to fisheries, popular beaches and wildlife. The fact remains that opening up the Atlantic Ocean for fossil fuel development is unnecessary, poses a serious threat to our coastal communities, and is the wrong approach."

Half of New Jersey's congressional delegation joined Pallone in opposing the drilling.

And New Jersey is not alone in expressing its concerns. Coastal communities in the Southern states where the offshore drilling would take place have adopted resolutions against drilling.

Despite the outpouring of opposition, the powerful oil lobby has the big bucks to exert a powerful influence on any drilling decision.

That decision is expected to be made by the end of 2016. Let's hope the Obama administration heeds the strong argument the environmentalists and beach lovers are making and deep sixes the drilling proposal.