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Heed coastal consensus on drilling

The votes keep coming in on offshore drilling, and the message is uniformly the same: not along South Carolina's coast. The state's leadership and its congressional delegation should be paying heed. This is not an industry the state should be courting.

So far, eight town and city councils have added their voices to the mounting coastal opposition to opening offshore waters to drilling for oil and natural gas. Those local elected officials recognize that bringing the oil industry offshore has a downside to the quality of life and the tourism industry that sustains it.

Most recently, Sullivan's Island and the city of Charleston joined the swelling coastal chorus. Their resolutions cited the potential hazards to wildlife from seismic testing for oil and natural gas, and the hazards to the coastal region from oil spills from offshore wells and other components of the industrial infrastructure that accompany them.

The resolution by Sullivan's Island concluded: "The Town feels it would be more economically and ecologically responsible to pursue non-polluting sources of renewable energy through solar, wind, and biomass energy production projects that pose less risk to our coastal environment and economic health before using uncertain methods of seismic blasting for offshore oil and gas exploration."

Charleston City Council was nearly divided on the issue, approving its resolution by a 7-5 margin. By contrast, most of the local governments that have voted against offshore drilling have been unanimous in their opposition.

Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, James Island, Hilton Head Island, Beaufort and Port Royal have joined 31 other communities along the Atlantic who oppose opening the coast to offshore drilling. Edisto Beach opposes seismic exploration of the ocean for fuel.

Meanwhile, some coastal representatives in the Carolinas show surprising support for offshore drilling — surprising in view of the opposition increasingly voiced by their constituents.

In Manteo, N.C., for example, more than 650 people showed up at a public hearing mostly to speak out against the Obama administration's proposal to allow offshore drilling along the Outer Banks. In comments cited by The Associated Press, Rep. Walter Jones, Jr. R-N.C., hedged on the issue, saying the decision should be made in state and that more public hearings were needed.

Only Rep. G.K. Butterfield, D-N.C., wholly opposed the plan, citing the threat to "the economic and ecological productivity" of the coast.

In South Carolina, First District Rep. Mark Sanford who has opposed drilling now says he supports exploration. Rep. Tim Rice, R-S.C., also supports it.

It's time for drilling advocates among the state's leaders to reassess their support for offshore drilling, recognizing that those towns and cities that would be most affected strongly oppose it.