

## No offshore seismic testing

Nov 14, 2016

With the presidency about to change hands and environmental policies in limbo, South Carolina's leaders need to deliver an unequivocal message to the White House: No seismic surveying off our coast.

Sounding for oil with sonic booms, which enable undersea mapping, potentially threatens all manner of sea life for miles around. That's why the government of Belize recently suspended a seismic survey that potentially endangered the longest barrier reef in the Northern Hemisphere.

Unfortunately, some South Carolina politicians, including Gov. Nikki Haley and elected officials representing inland districts, got caught up in the "drill, baby, drill" rhetoric of a few years ago and have supported offshore drilling. It's time they pay attention to the sobering reality of offshore seismic testing and drilling, and listen to the "no seismic testing" chorus from every community along South Carolina's coast.

In June, Reps. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., and Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., were the only South Carolina representatives to sign a letter in which 60 lawmakers urged President Barack Obama to suspend offshore exploration completely. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., hasn't changed his pro-drilling stance, but he has backed off the issue in light of his constituents' wishes.

The likelihood of harming marine life and the ultimate possibility of oil spills should be of concern to all across South Carolina. Tourism is a mainstay of the state's economy, and risking its vitality

because of pie-in-the-sky promises of oil, jobs and money is foolish. Standing up to Big Oil with its deep pockets and armies of lobbyists will require the state's leadership to be on board.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) contends there's nothing to reinforce the notion that seismic surveying harms sea creatures and says claims to the contrary are "wildly exaggerated and not supported by the evidence." But environmentalists cite research indicating that carpet bombing the water column with sonic booms can harm marine mammals, sea turtles, fish and other sea life. The blasts, according to Oceana, make fish flee. Catch rates of cod and haddock were reduced 40-80 percent in the wake of seismic surveys, Oceana says.

In March, the Obama administration suspended all drilling off the South Carolina coast, as well as the rest of the Eastern Seaboard, but that hasn't stopped the BOEM from processing permits for exploration companies who want to send sonic booms into the depths to search for oil and gas deposits.

The drilling ban extends through 2022, but the Trump administration could upend that — unless President Obama makes the ban permanent, something a coalition of lawmakers up and down the coast are calling for. More than 1,000 elected officials along the Atlantic Coast, in addition to environmentalists and some 400,000 commercial fishermen, have called on the president to suspend seismic surveys.

Bolstering local objections is the fact that South Carolina has no known oil or gas deposits offshore. Wells drilled off Georgia and Florida in 1978 came up dry. The entire outer continental shelf, extending from state waters three miles off the coast to international waters 200 miles offshore, is estimated to contain 3.3 billion to 4.6 billion barrels of oil and some 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. To put those figures in perspective, the United States consumed about 7 billion barrels in 2015 alone.

So far, just one outfit with a new method of surveying that doesn't involve sending shocks through the water column has been issued a permit. NEOS GeoSolutions Inc. wants to use non-invasive airborne magnetic imaging to get an idea of what is buried under the ocean floor. That

survey, extending from Virginia to Georgia, should be completed by June. Seven other permits for seismic surveys off South Carolina are pending.

Even if this new technology is effective in determining whether or not oil or gas is off South Carolina's shore, it is an empty exercise. Why test if you're not going to drill, and South Carolina is the wrong place for drilling. Coastal tourism should not be in jeopardy due to potential oil spills.

And the state's natural shoreline should not be marred by giant oil pipes and ugly infrastructure to support drilling. State leaders must get over their dreams of big oil and riches and recognize that South Carolina's riches are in its natural beauty.

[http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/editorials/no-offshore-seismic-testing/article\\_e1b3278-a03b-11e6-b1db-6f9e7a0dccef.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=email&utm\\_campaign=user-share](http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/editorials/no-offshore-seismic-testing/article_e1b3278-a03b-11e6-b1db-6f9e7a0dccef.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share)