

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0904

February 1, 2018

Dr. Walter Cruickshank
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Acting Director
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Dr. Cruickshank,

I am writing to respectfully request expanded opportunities for public input on the Draft Proposed Program (DPP) for the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024 and on scoping for the required Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It is my hope that the March 9 deadline to submit comments can be extended an additional 60 days and that more public meetings can be scheduled in the coastal communities that will be affected by expanded drilling.

The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) provides for a 60-day comment period following the release of the DPP. The recently released DPP includes Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lands for nearly the entire U.S., encompassing more than 90 percent of total OCS acreage – the largest number of potential offshore lease sales ever proposed. Given the large scope of the DPP, a 60-day extension of the comment period is needed to allow for more public hearings in coastal areas and to give the public sufficient time to draft comments on the proposed changes.

Section 18 of OCSLA provides for the development of an oil and gas leasing program that considers “economic, social, and environmental values” of the resources of the OCS and the potential impacts of oil and gas exploration on the marine, coastal and human environments. Upon consideration of the comments received during the Request for Information comment period last year, this DPP identified a preliminary list of OCS planning areas and schedule for proposed lease sales during the 2019-2024 period. I am very concerned that this DPP includes the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, which were rightly excluded from the 2017-2022 program.

The previous 2017-2022 program was developed over three years, and incorporated millions of comments from the public, scientists, industry, business owners, and other stakeholders. The exclusion of the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico was a reflection of the significant economic, social, and environmental risks posed by oil and gas development in those areas, as well as strong community opposition. Local and regional concerns with offshore oil and gas activities have only grown since the 2017-2022 program was finalized, with more than 150 East and West Coast municipalities formally opposing offshore drilling activities off their shores, including seismic airgun surveys.

The opportunity for the public to provide input on the DPP is critical, given the new, large scope of the DPP and its potential impacts on coastal communities and economies. The 23 currently announced public meetings are not adequate in duration, location, or format to meet the public input requirements. More meetings are needed in coastal communities, like my district in Northeast Florida, to meet with stakeholders who will be most directly impacted by the proposed expanded drilling and exploration activities. Accordingly, I would request that BOEM consider holding public meetings in the First Coast, which could be ground zero for new seismic testing and drilling activity, if the current proposal is finalized.

I respectfully request a full and fair opportunity for the most directly impacted stakeholders to provide feedback on the DPP and on scoping for the Programmatic EIS through an extension of the comment period deadline to May 8, meetings in coastal communities throughout Florida, and the opportunity to offer formal, oral testimony.

Sincerely,



John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress