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Heed mayors on seismic testing

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First District Rep. Mark Sanford speaks to attendees at a meeting of the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in Mount Pleasant last year. (AP Photo/Bruce Smith)

The Obama administration heard the voices of coastal residents when it reversed course on a plan to permit drilling for oil and gas off the Atlantic shore.

Federal officials should now heed the growing opposition to seismic testing that would determine whether those resources actually exist off the coast.

Fifteen South Carolina mayors recently stated their objections to seismic testing in letters to the President Barack Obama, citing the potential risk to marine life and the likelihood that positive results would renew efforts for offshore drilling.

They join the 55 congressmen, including 1st District Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., and 6th District Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., who have petitioned the president for a ban on seismic testing.

A large contingent of marine biologists also have opposed plans for seismic tests as a hazard to marine life. The tests use loud blasts of compressed air fired repeatedly for weeks at the time.

In the successful campaign to halt offshore drilling, 23 local jurisdictions in South Carolina formally opposed the decision by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to lift the Atlantic drilling moratorium.

Elected officials cited the hazards to the local tourist economy and the danger to marine life.

The mayors cite similar reasons in their letters to the president on seismic testing, and complain that the testing data would not be available for public review.

Each letter emphasizes the threat that the oil industry would pose to the coastal economy, including tourism and fisheries, which support some 79,000 jobs and \$7 billion in economic activity each year.

Charleston Mayor John Tecklenburg said the risk to marine mammals, fish and other ocean life should force a halt to the testing plan.

“So why support seismic testing and the associated risks at this time when oil and gas drilling is not allowed?” Mr. Tecklenburg wrote. “Ultimately this proprietary seismic data may pave the way for future oil and gas development.”

That’s certainly what the oil industry has in mind. The administration’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management should reject the seismic testing proposal, for the same good reasons it reversed course on offshore drilling.

Coastal residents don’t want it and residents of the deep can do without it as well.

The mayors speak convincingly for both.

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