

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 1, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our opposition to using seismic air guns to search for oil and gas in the Atlantic Ocean -- especially off the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. We appreciate the decision to not make areas off the Atlantic coast available for offshore oil and gas leasing at this time, but we are concerned about the recent Record of Decision that would allow companies to utilize seismic testing, which is the first major step towards opening the Atlantic Ocean to offshore drilling in the near future. In addition, we believe that the technology used for this exploration is incredibly harmful to marine mammals and fisheries in the region. We urge you to reject this proposal and refrain from permitting seismic air gun testing off the coasts of our states.

Seismic air gun testing brings the Atlantic coast closer to the risky practice of deepwater drilling, which is the same practice that brought us the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico more than four years ago and that continues to plague that region. Expanding unnecessary drilling offshore simply puts too much at risk. While the seismic airgun testing proposed does not span the entire East Coast, an oil spill the size of the *Deepwater Horizon* would harm sea life, ecosystems, fisheries and coastal economies all along the Atlantic coast -- from Maine to Florida.

Our states possess abundant ocean resources and our beaches are major tourist attractions. The gross domestic product (GDP) from all of our states' living resources combined -- which includes fishing, hatcheries, aquaculture, seafood processing and seafood markets -- is valued at close to \$900 million, and the GDP from ocean-based tourism and recreation in the region totals over \$6 billion. In addition, there are about 250,000 jobs in the fishing, tourism and recreation sectors in our states that are directly dependent on the resources threatened by seismic air guns. All of this would be threatened by seismic air gun testing and the offshore drilling that could take place off our coasts as a result.

Furthermore, the type of seismic air gun testing used to search for oil and gas is incredibly harmful to the marine environment and could injure or kill thousands of marine mammals and fish. Seismic air guns fire intense blasts of compressed air every 10 - 12 seconds, 24 hours a day, for weeks, months, or even years at a time. These air gun blasts -- almost as loud as explosives -- can be heard for many hundreds of miles in the ocean, which can drive whales to abandon their habitats, go silent, and cease foraging over vast areas. At shorter distances, the sound can cause permanent hearing loss, injury, and even death for marine mammals and fish. According to the Department's own estimates, the use of seismic airgun testing in the

Atlantic would injure about 138,000 marine mammals and disrupt marine mammal feeding, calving, breeding, and other vital activities more than 13.6 million times. These impacts would include unacceptable levels of injuries and disturbances to critically endangered species, like the North Atlantic right whale, of which there are only about 450 individuals left.

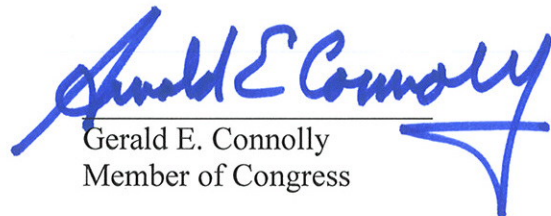
We are concerned that the EIS did not rely on the best available science in proposing actions to mitigate anticipated harm to marine life, so while the plan includes mitigation strategies, the measures are not enough. We also believe the EIS underestimated the potential effects on fish stocks and associated commercial fishing impacts. In addition, we do not believe this proposal should proceed at this time given the expectation of new acoustic guidelines that are set to come out later this year or early in 2015. As such, we urge you to consider reopening the environmental review of seismic testing in the Atlantic.

The time and resources that your administration is allocating to seismic air gun testing and expanding offshore drilling could be better used on clean energy technologies, like offshore wind energy, that will allow us to faster achieve U.S. energy independence. Simply put, the cost of the proposed action is far too great to risk. We cannot put our ocean environment, beaches, marine resources, and coastal economies at risk. Again, we urge you to reconsider this proposal and refrain from permitting seismic air gun testing off the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

Sincerely,



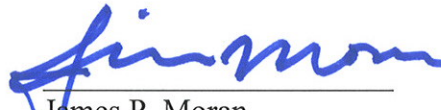
David E. Price
Member of Congress



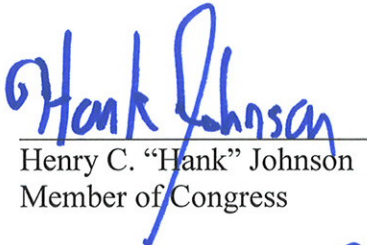
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



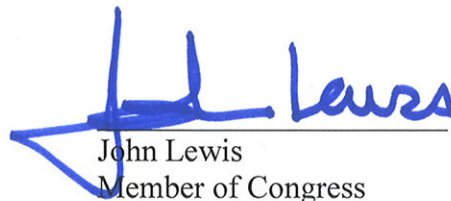
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



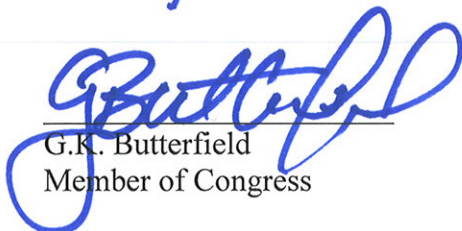
James P. Moran
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress



John Lewis
Member of Congress



G.K. Butterfield
Member of Congress